

# FLASHPOINTS: THE 2015 ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA



Issue Ten: 17 Mar 2015

Days to Presidential Poll: 11

Days to Governor and House of Representatives Poll: 25



2Face, Oritsefemi and Chidinma

**Popular Nigerian music stars 2Face, Oritsefemi and Chidinma have come together to speak out against violence in Nigeria's 2015 elections. In the public service announcement developed with BBC Media Action, the stars pledge is that "It's our future. No violence. Just vote."**

The vibrant, competitive media sector in the country has helped to engage voters, promote peaceful elections, and provide platforms for the public to question leaders on most pressing issues. SDN has been working closely with local radio stations in Rivers State on programming, debate content and announcements.

## Rivers State Violence

Tensions in Rivers State have escalated in the run up to the elections, which is notorious for clashes between the two main cult groups - the Icelanders and the Greenlanders - engaged in a battle of supremacy over who controls Port Harcourt, the state capital, and its environs.

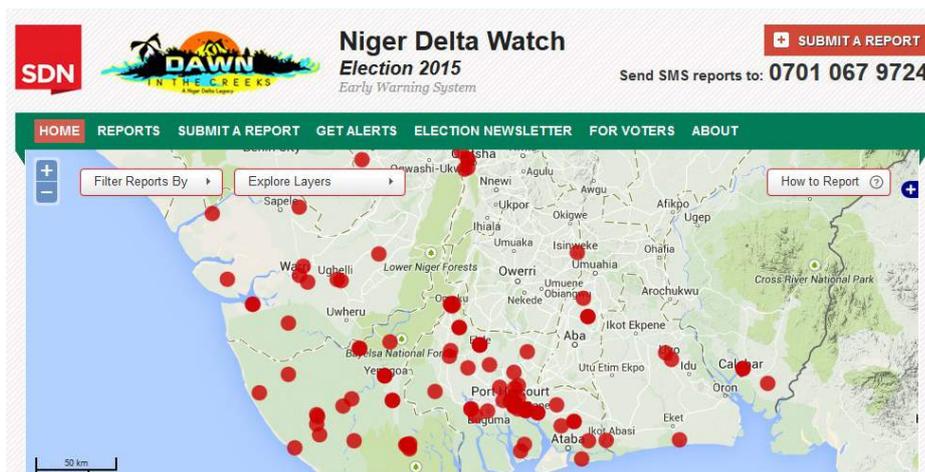
It is believed that the reoccurrence of violent cult clashes is driven by politicians that depend on some to do their dirty jobs, rewarding them with immunity and cash rewards.

While it is not clear if the proliferation of weapons in the region is a direct consequence, it is clear that the two factors combined will be deadly. Last weekend alone there were at least 12 deaths confirmed from cult clashes in Port Harcourt.

Many members are recruited to the cult gangs from secondary schools, so a peace pledge from prominent musicians will hopefully connect with the youth and show them that violence does not pay.

SDN have developed the Niger Delta Watch platform which documents reports of electoral violence. To explore the reports from across the Niger Delta in more detail, visit

[www.nigerdeltawatch.org](http://www.nigerdeltawatch.org)



## Rivers Gubernatorial Candidates Set to Engage in Debate

After adjustments to political developments in Nigeria, and specifically in Rivers state, The Rivers Debate 2015 has been scheduled to hold by 06:00pm on Monday, 23 March 2015. The Rivers debate, which will set the precedent in the race for the seat of governor in the state, is an initiative of Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN), the Rivers Entrepreneurs and Investors Forum (REIF), and talkback news and current affairs radio station NigeriaInfo 92.3 Port Harcourt.

The initiative was borne out of the organizers' desire to raise the standard for individuals and political parties vying to direct the ship of governance in the state. In the elections of 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011, citizen-aspirant/candidate engagement deviated from critical issues and dwelt on parochial considerations and sentiments and attacks on opponents' character and private lives. Vote soliciting at best was at open air rallies where the candidates only spoke and never entertained questions from prospective voters.

Sixteen years on, the experience has not improved. Political analysts are almost unanimous that never in an election season in Nigeria have politicians strayed from issues as they are doing in the 2015 election season.

Their opinion draws from frightening evidence of attacks on rivals at rallies and in the media. In many instances the personal attacks have graduated to violent attacks that have led to incapacitation and deaths.

The situation is particularly worse in Rivers State, where in almost two years the major political parties and candidates have deployed undemocratic strategies, including hiring armed thugs to disrupt opponent's public events and attack their supporters. Almost 40 politically motivated deaths have been recorded in the state by National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) since December 2014.

(Right) Citizens were able to engage with aspirants at the previous live radio roundtable organized by SDN

### A Platform for Issues

As a result, a significant number of potential voters are undecided on where to swing their votes. These disappointed

citizens would require a focused and controlled forum to quiz the various candidates' on their plans for critical sectors on the bases of which they might pick a candidate to give their votes.



These concerns therefore informed the organizers' decision to put together a debate where the candidates will engage each other to articulate their plans and how they intend to achieve them. In the past civil society organizations have focused more on Presidential Debates. This season, debates for governorship candidates have been given equal priority and the Rivers Debate 2015 is much anticipated.

The debate will bring the gubernatorial candidates of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressives Congress

(APC) and Labour Party (LP) in an intellectual discussion with focus on the Economy, Security, and Open Governance - sectors that are critical to the development of the state.

It will take the candidates away from situations where personal attacks happen freely, and engage their problem-solving ability. The debate will be broadcast live on a national television- Channels TV and on NigerialInfo 92.3.

While the event will afford yet-to-decide members of the electorate the chance to see

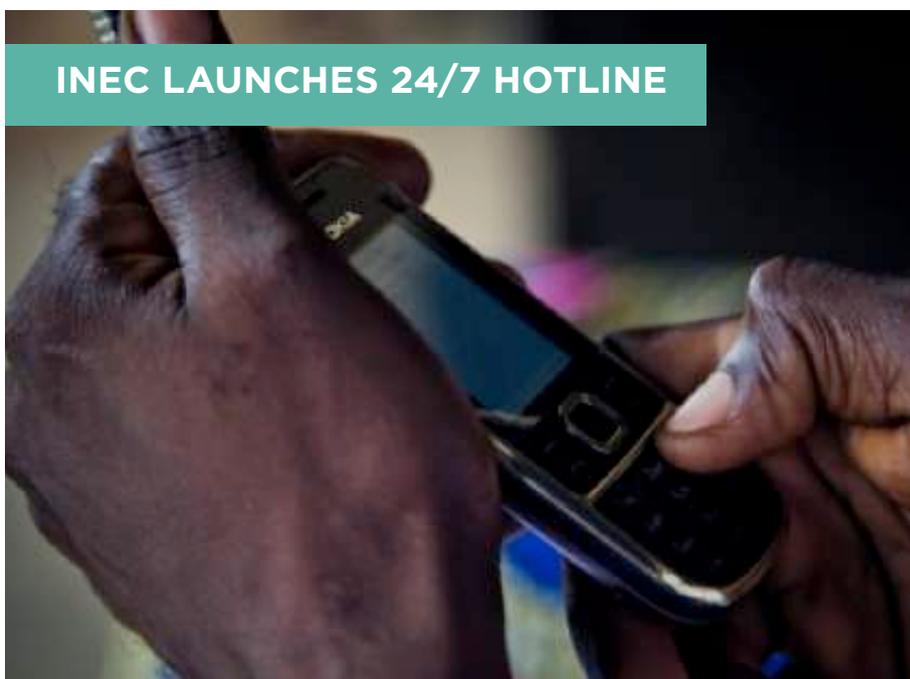
the candidates explain how they intend to improve citizens' welfare and determine a preferred candidate, the records of the commitments made by the candidates will form post-election accountability engagements that the organizers will carry out as follow-up to the debate.

**In a welcomed move, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has launched an open-all-hours service to advise citizens on all voting-related queries.**

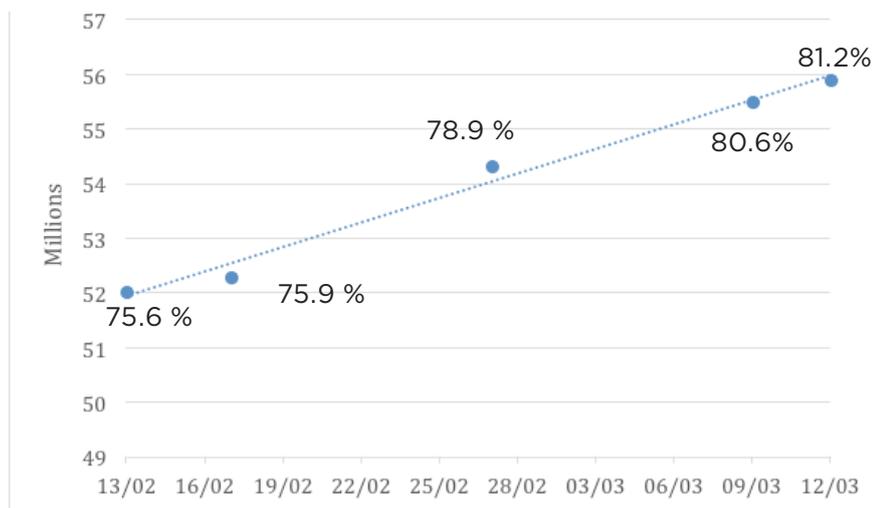
Whether individuals have lost their Permanent Voter's Card (PVC), or are having difficulty locating their collection centre, the all new '7411' National Directory Service aims to answer thousands of different frequently asked questions.

Calls cost N12/minute, as approved by the NCC.

However, when called at the time of writing - from both Glo (the 'official directory partner in accurate information' and MTN networks - the service could not be reached. Hopefully this is a momentary glitch and INEC can make up for the lack of education and sensitisation of voters, as many prospective voters encountered recently are still in the dark regarding the most basic procedures.



**PVC Distribution Update**



- **55,904,272** or **81.22** percent distributed
- **12,929,204** Permanent Voter's Cards (PVCs) yet to be collected
- **68,833,476** PVCs produced for people on the national register of voters
- **22 March** is the new PVC collection deadline, 6 days before the election

**(left)** PVC distribution since the original date set for the presidential election (14th Feb) has remained linear following the postponement



**IN FOCUS: ELECTIONS AND MEDIA INTEGRITY IN THE 2015 ELECTIONS**

AFP

**Amid the preparations for conducting free and fair elections in March, the media – the Fourth Estate of the Realm – is one critical stakeholder whose behaviour must not be ignored.**

Indeed, analysis of media coverage in past Nigerian elections has been damning. The Commonwealth Observer Group said in its report on the 2007 elections that “significant state ownership of the broadcast media negatively impacted on and influenced the coverage in favour of incumbents’ parties”

Similarly, in the 2011 elections coverage of most state-owned media appeared to favour incumbent parties and censor criticism of the government, according to EU observation mission. 80% of the Nigerian Television Authority’s (NTA) coverage allocated to political actors was devoted to PDP, and rejected General Buhari’s (CPC) campaign ad because it contained messages they deemed ‘offensive to the government’

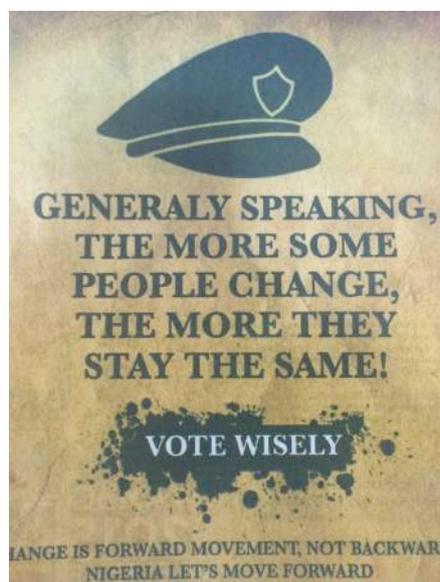
The overall role of media in election coverage is an issue that has generated debate and controversy internationally. It is therefore beyond the scope of this article to try and define it, but we can discuss the power of the media and outline how it is vulnerable to exploitation in the electoral process in Nigeria.

**Informing Citizens**

Front and foremost, the media is a public forum for ideas and discussion. It is the primary avenue for the public to know what is going on with a view to better understanding.

Democracy requires the active participation of citizens. It is therefore the duty of the media to provide accurate information and objective reporting and analysis to educate and engage citizens in the business of governance, who can in turn move the public debate forwards through their informed participation.

**(Below)** Defamatory adverts with little basis appear in National print press daily



**Setting the Agenda**

But being the gatekeeper to the content of the public debate does not ascribe the media the power to determine what we actually think, but it can determine what we are thinking about.

The capability lies in the presentation content and style of reporting – such as repeated coverage and sensationalised tone – which raises the importance of an issue in the public mind-set. This endows influence over what issues society regards as being important at any point in time.

**Marriage with Politics**

What the media reports can therefore set the agenda for political campaigns. Coverage of the ebola pandemic naturally led to scrutiny of national healthcare provisions, just as declining oil price and currency devaluation has steered discussions towards proposals to diversify the economy.

In addition, they have the choice to include or omit coverage of party political events, statements made at press conferences, or messages from candidates during campaigns.

**‘Brown Envelope’ Press**

Unfortunately however, the typical journalist in Nigeria is not driven by the aforementioned duties.

Professional journalists are paid low salaries by their employers, with payment withheld for many months not a rarity.

According to writer and novelist, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, bosses justify non-payment of salaries by saying "I've given you a platform to make money. Use it."

Adaobi is referring here to the practice of 'brown envelope' journalism, whereby press briefings and political events are followed by handing out of envelopes stuffed with cash to journalists.

This may be viewed as an extension of the national culture of 'the dash', which Peter Enahoro describes as "the sweetly quaint custom of expressing gratitude in anticipation of services about to be rendered."

We therefore cannot expect the average Nigerian journalist to be fair in the presentation of facts. If not, even the work of the most tenacious investigative reporters get pushed to the sidelines.

### 'Jukebox Journalism'

The global phenomenon of corporate media is reliant on commercial partners for financial sustainability, and has often been accused of suppressing stories that may compromise the lucrative arrangement.

In Nigeria the most regular funding for advertisements comes from political parties. With up to one-third of total pages devoted to campaign adverts it becomes clear that influence may be enough to keep damaging stories off the front page of established newspapers.

### Access to Journalists

Those involved in the political power struggle in Nigeria are usually the rich and privileged. With media coverage reliant on payments, many politicians with financial weight - either with seemingly unlimited campaign funding or the backing of their personal private ventures - have had undue access to the mass media.

These same people on account of their prominence have tended to abuse their free access with unmetered production of campaign adverts and contradictory statements, thereby confusing the electorate.



### Harassment

While the lack of financial support to journalists is creating opportunities for 'jukebox journalism', the lack of legal and security support further endangers the integrity of the profession.

When the media becomes the target of reprisal from powerful groups and individuals who benefit from the silence of a muzzled press, journalists need to be protected by laws that guarantee their rights and to unify to monitor, protest and raise public outrage against the attacks on journalists.

This practice pushes even the most tenacious investigative reporters to the side-lines.

### The Fourth Estate

The media is the responsive organ that can help build peace and social consensus, without which democracy is threatened. Instead, in Nigeria the media has been observed as fanning the flames of discord by taking sides, reinforcing prejudices, and muddling facts with half-truths.

Elections will come and go but Nigeria will remain - remain as what? The fundamental parts that constitute a functioning democracy must be strengthened otherwise it is all just a superficial display to satisfy observers.

**Fanatics are picturesque, mankind would rather see gestures than listen to reasons.**

While elections in themselves are only one element of democracy, they create the basis for democratic governance by ensuring that leaders have credible and accepted mandates to govern. When people have the opportunity to participate freely in public life and choose their leaders through a free and open process, they are less likely to feel a need to resort to violence to resolve their differences or to make their voices heard.

**"I'VE GIVEN YOU A PLATFORM TO MAKE MONEY. USE IT."**



## SENATOR IMPLICATED IN EKITI RIGGING TAPE CLEARED AS MINISTER

**Former Nigerian Ambassador to Ghana and Minister of State for Defence, Musiliu Obanikoro, has been confirmed minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria despite allegations of involvement in election rigging.**

In the tape, Obanikoro is alleged to be ordering for military control of voting and lays out the specific tactics to be employed to make sure that the People's Democratic Party (PDP) won the Ekiti Governorship election in June 2014.

Some senators vehemently opposed the confirmation, including Bukola Saraki, Olugbenga Ashafa, Babajide Omoworare, George Akume, Olubunmi Adetunmbi, Ali Ndume, and Ganiyu Solomon.

The reason they gave was that Obanikoro was implicated in "very sensitive issues that touch on national interest," and is tangled in court cases.

Senate President David Mark, who presided over the plenary, strongly resisted all appeals and arguments made by the opposition lawmakers against

Obanikoro's confirmation. He said he had not been served, and cannot act on a newspaper report.

As a statement of intent, the lawmakers rejected the ruling by walking out of the chamber.

Leader of the caucus, George Akume, told press, "The alleged action, is a breach of the constitution. In a civilised world, his name should not have come up for screening in the first place. Hence, we are all opposed to him."

### Breach of Senate

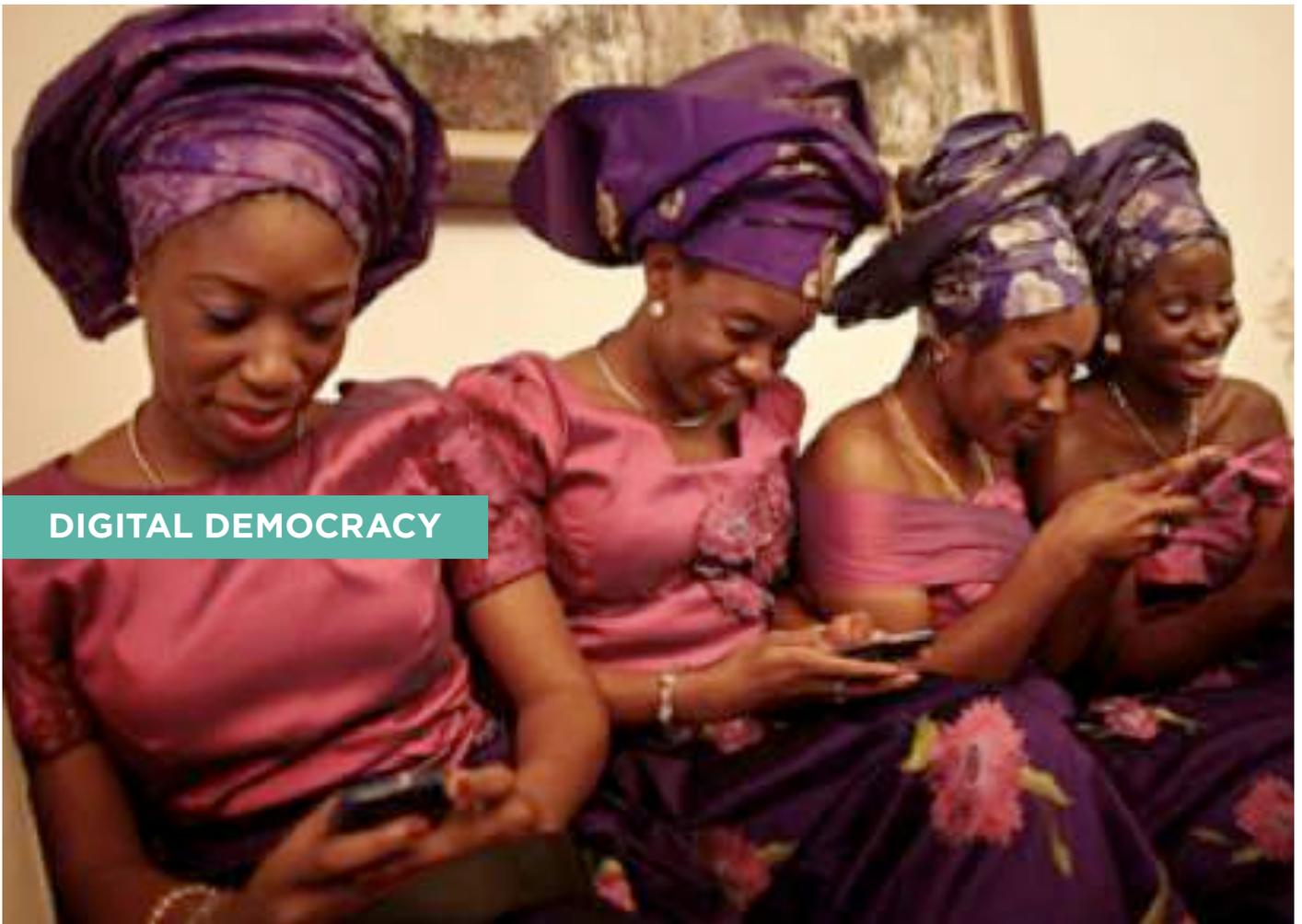
Akume argued that the Senate President had altered the rules of the Senate, which states that any nominee rejected by at least two senators from his state of origin should not be cleared.

"The three senators from Lagos opposed the nomination of Obanikoro but the Senate President and his PDP colleagues decided to take the advantage of their numbers to override what is supposed to be basically a very straight forward issue," he said.

"We wonder whether we want to grow democracy in this country or whether we want to destroy it. Rule of the senate forbids it not to act on any issue in court but the Senate leadership had ignored this.

"Nigerians are being deceived by the behaviour of the senate. They do not want to listen to us and this is highly unfortunate and we are very disappointed in the action of our leadership."

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## DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

**Digital democracy is a long way off for even the most established democracies, but people are starting to notice and test the potential for new technologies to improve the political process in Nigeria.**

The internet can play a vital role in the electoral process because of its interactivity, relatively low costs of entry and freedom from state control.

The internet population of Nigeria is roughly 70.3 million, or around 38% penetration of the country. While still relatively low - in the United Kingdom 86% of the population are online - the rate of internet access is increasing rapidly in Nigeria. The number of active internet users has more than doubled from 31 million in 2009, and growth between January 2014 - 2015 was at 26 percent.

### Social Media

One area of serious potential is in social media. As of a count in January 2015, there are 13.6 million active social media accounts in Nigeria.

“Elections may not be won on social media but perceptions are shaped here,” says Japeth. J. Omojuwa, political commentator and social media expert. On elections he argues that “The die is cast and social media is Nigeria’s new battleground.”

The space for dialogue and discussion is promising, but the potential for discrimination and unregulated misinformation is worrying.

“What degree of responsibility or norms will be in demand from a platform of delivery that is based on social media and algorithms? The so-called algorithm accountability,” asks Dap Olorunyomi, the Editor-in-Chief of Premium Times.

“With the advent of the citizen journalists as news gatherers, how do we take care of critical concerns about sourcing, authenticity and, above all, fairness?”

“What happens to verification in the wake of the now relaxed editing standards that come with digital first via social media and twitter in particular?” he asked.

Furthermore, the number of active social media accounts is equivalent to roughly 7% of the total population. Many of these will be below 18 years of age, and therefore not currently able to participate by voting.

**“THE DIE IS CAST AND SOCIAL MEDIA IS NIGERIA’S NEW BATTLE GROUND.”**

# FOR ELECTION UPDATES AND TO REPORT YOUR PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS, STAY IN TOUCH WITH SDN

Across the 2015 elections cycle you can report incidents you observe in your area to SDN.

The SDN network is spread across every LGA across Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers State, and will aim to respond to verified reports of incidents within the shortest possible time. This initial response will be followed by a number of positive steps for resolution where appropriate.

SDN has experience working with communities on tackling election related violence. Our aim is to help communities voice their experiences with the election process, whether good or bad.

There are a number of ways you can send a report:

1. **ONLINE** at [www.nigerdeltawatch.org](http://www.nigerdeltawatch.org) under the 'Submit a Report' tab



2. **ANDROID** download the 'Ushahidi' app and search for the map 'Niger Delta Watch'



3. **TWITTER** to our twitter handle @SDNNigerDelta
4. **EMAIL** to [election2015@stakeholderdemocracy.org](mailto:election2015@stakeholderdemocracy.org)
5. **SMS** to 0701 067 9724

We will be circulating regular updates on elections and educational materials. Please keep in touch by following [www.stakeholderdemocracy.org](http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org)