SDN ELECTION OBSERVATIONS
PRESIDENTIAL & NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS
RIVERS STATE
SUMMARY OF KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCERNS

Citizens in Rivers State turned out to vote peacefully and with patience.

Press and observers were also relatively free to carry out their monitoring duties.

However, SDN is concerned about insecurity in the state and a breakdown of trust between the three major actors - the leading two parties and INEC. This has been caused by:

1. The failure of INEC to distribute election materials on time.
2. Incidents of violence, intimidation and ballot box snatching.
3. Limited interventions by security services.
4. Indications ward results might not reflect unit level announcements.

These electoral process irregularities leave INEC's handling of the presidential election in Rivers State open to criticism from citizens, political parties, politicians and impartial observers.

The failure of INEC to acknowledge locations where elections were disrupted and the recording of implausible results for those areas suggests that a breakdown in confidence in INEC is inevitable. It also creates a basis for aggrieved parties to reject the result and may lead to mistrust of INEC's processes during the Gubernatorial elections on 11 April.

OVERVIEW OF RIVERS STATE ELECTIONS OBSERVATIONS

Although a number of irregularities, interruptions, security and protocol issues were picked up by election observers (see below) the main concern in Rivers State is in the integrity of some local INEC officials in the collation of results at the ward and state levels and in a failure of INEC staff at the polling unit level to follow the laws of the Electoral Act that guarantee transparency and openness of the electoral process.

Our observations show that for the most part, the presidential elections in Rivers State were not conducted according to the stipulations of the Electoral Act. It was observed that in several polling units where elections were concluded, Presiding Officers did not announce the number of accredited voters before voting commenced. In some instances, like in PHALGA Ward 6 Units 3, 10, 11, 12, 16 and 17, polling officials refused to divulge the accreditation figures to observers even upon request.

At the state level Rivers state only reported one ward as disrupted (Tai Ward 6) although the number of registered voters for the election that failed to vote suggests that a larger number of units were not recorded as having elections or were disrupted in the process.

In Ahoada East and parts of Port Harcourt there seems to have been a modest turnout with final results at some variance but not dramatically different from observations.
In Bodo and Gokana there were large relatively enthusiastic turnouts but potential distortions in final figures showing extremely high voter turnouts.

In disrupted areas where there was a failure due to security, ballot snatching or INEC protocol concerns final results show extremely high voter turnouts (90%+) that were implausible based on citizen observations.
The most curious examples of potential irregularities are:

• Recording a 98% turnout in the hotly disputed local government of Emohua where all 84,188 voters recorded as accredited were recorded as casting votes

• Ogu Bolo LGA also recorded a perfect conversion of accredited voters 32,732 into votes cast while Omuma LGA did not record a single rejected ballot

• Khana LGA where contacts reported problems similar to Gokana recorded a turnout of 94% against registered voters

RECOMMENDATIONS

SDN recognizes the pressure that INEC is coming under in Rivers State but it is vitally important that the concerns that have been raised in the state are seen to be addressed before the Governorship elections on April 11.

INEC’s initial announcement that it will investigate complaints in Rivers is welcome along with the swift follow up but its purview was limited by a number of practical constraints. The Committee’s response, “we do not believe the allegations are substantial enough to require cancellation and rescheduling of Elections in Rivers” could be seen as a de facto acceptance of irregularities and therefore it is critical that INEC finds a way to respond to the substantial grievances in Rivers state in time to build confidence around the Governorship elections on April 11 - a few days time.

Our key recommendations are

1. It is vitally important that the concerns that have been raised in the state are seen to be addressed by INEC before the Governorship elections on April 11.

2. INEC should as soon as possible share freely the detailed unit level results for the state, something which it claims it will do in any case nationally, and accept reports with evidence of any major disparities in official results.

3. INEC should share information on the performance of card readers in the state and provide detail of electronic accreditation numbers vs reported results.

4. INEC should provide a clear report on why polling opened late across most or all of the state, why there was such an extensive failure in the use of card readers, and what remedial steps are being put in place to address this.

Stakes are high in Rivers State and therefore follow-up on all observed irregularities and an official acceptance that there may have been problems is a very important part of the electoral process to ease tensions between competing actors before the Governorship elections on 11 April.
SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS AND REPORTS RECEIVED

Reports of late arrival of INEC staff, late/missing elections materials, and poor performance of electronic card readers:

Across the majority of rural Rivers state and some urban areas election material were not distributed in a timely manner. With many polling unit’s not starting accreditation until after 9.30 am and in some LGAs such as Eleme materials were still being distributed at 1030am.

Election officials and materials arrived in Finima community (Bonny LGA Ward 5) at 9:52am and accreditation did not start until 10:30am.

In PHALGA Ward 6 (Marine Base), SDN observers reported that accreditation did not start up until 11:30am – 11:45am in most of the Polling Units.

In Asari-Toru LG, polling officials arrive around 10:00am without Card Reader - which arrived around 1:00pm, which was when accreditation started.

In Degema Ward 14, SDN observers reported that there was a mix up of card readers among the polling units, thus, no voter got accredited electronically. Polling officials resorted to manual accreditation after 11:10am.

Reports of results sheets irregularities:

Observers noted disputes that led to a cessation of election activity in units across several wards in Eleme Local Government over objections of not proceeding without seeing the results sheets for the units.

Widespread clamour by supporters of the APC that the result sheets being used by polling officials in several parts of the State were fake. Governor Amaechi himself refused to get accredited because the Presiding Officer in his Polling Unit in Ubima was not able to provide the result sheet upon request. Similar demands by APC supporters across the state ensued.

The allegation of results sheets being diverted is serious, particularly in light of some results that do not seem credible.

Reports of incidents of ballot box snatching:

Our network of observers witnessed ballot boxes being snatched in a number of locations in Rivers State. Some examples include:

- Election materials were taken away by unknown persons at Mgbueto (Emohua LGA).
- The ballot box for Ward 7, Unit 7 - Tengite Benibo - in Bugama West was taken away forcefully by unidentified persons.
- In ONELGA - Egi I Ward 10, Town Hall Erema IV Unit 9, after accreditation, unknown gunmen came to take away the card reader and voting materials so that voters could not cast their ballots.
- In Mogho Ward 10, unidentified armed men fired shots into the air to disperse voters and polling officers and took the materials away. One observer reported that the police were involved in the raid
- In Tai Local Government observers interviewed INEC ad hoc staff who had been abducted along with all materials for Ward 3 (Korokoro) and at the time police were still attempting to recover their colleagues.

There was also confirmed reports of illegal thumb printing in various locations. SDN observers reported that there was massive thumb printing of unused ballot papers in Bodo Ward 1 and 3.
**Reports of intimidation of voters:**

Allegations of voter intimidation were recorded in many communities of Rivers State. In Tombia, Voters complained that insecurity in the area has resulted in a number of people being unable to cast votes for their preferred party. This happened despite the presence of soldiers.

In Kpite (Tai LGA) Fighting, stealing of result sheet and threatening of voters was reported in the Town Square - Unit 6, Ban-Ogoi Ward 10, and Tai LGA.

In Erema voting was disrupted by armed thugs, officials told voters to leave and go to the civic centre - another voting unit - and cast their vote.

**Reports of electoral violence:**

There were several reports of electoral related deaths on Election Day in Rivers State. In Ogale Town hall, ward 3, (Eleme LGA) there was one person confirmed killed amid disagreements over results sheets.

In Kpite (Tai LGA), there were 2 confirmed deaths and many reported injured while running away. Voting was cancelled for the day.

**Reports of interventions by state security services:**

SDN’s observers travelled throughout Rivers state during the election and it was noticeable that the military and police generally upheld their duty to allow citizens to vote. However there were examples where they appeared to be both partisan and disruptive.

In Eleme soldiers and police were observed providing escorts to a party agent (a former local government chairman) who ranged across the local government area and was seen actively managing the collation of results.

In Gokana, Mogho, police shot in the air dispersing otherwise peaceful voters.

**Indications final results might not reflect unit level announcements:**

Ward level results seen so far have accreditation turnouts that range from under 20% to over 95% of all registered voters for a whole ward. While some significant variation is to be expected some of these results do not seem credible and in a number of places are at gross variance with observed turnouts.

The most curious examples of potential irregularities are:

- Recording a 98% turnout in the hotly disputed local government of Emohua where all 84,188 voters recorded as accredited were recorded as casting votes
- Ogu Bolo LGA also recorded a perfect conversion of accredited voters 32,732 into votes cast while Omuma LGA did not record a single rejected ballot
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The Electoral Act stipulates that:

Election irregularities at the polling unit level:

1. At every polling unit, the Presiding Officer must announce the total number of accredited voters before voting starts.

2. After voting he/she must sort and count all the used ballot papers in his Unit in the presence of the party agents, observers and voters.

3. He/she must then input these figures into the result sheet, sign it and ensure that the available and willing party agents sign too.

4. The Presiding Officer must then give a copy to each party agent and paste the result at a conspicuous place in the Polling Unit.

5. The original copy of the result sheet is then taken to the Ward collation centre, where it is added to that from other polling units.

6. The collated figures from the ward is then sent to either the local government collation centre, state constituency collation centre, federal constituency collation centre, or the senatorial district collation centre depending on the type of election.

Our observations show that for the most part, the presidential elections in Rivers State were not conducted according to these stipulations. It was observed that in several polling units where elections were concluded, Presiding Officers did not announce the number of accredited voters before voting commenced. In some instances, like in PHALGA Ward 6 Units 3, 10, 11, 12, 16 and 17, polling officials refused to divulge the accreditation figures to observers even upon request.

More worrying was the trend of Presiding Officials writing election results on a piece of paper and not on the stipulated election result sheet provided by INEC. Observers reported the occurrence of this in several polling units across the State. For example, in Obio-Akpo Ward 6 Unit 5, SDN’s observer reported that the election result figures were written on a plain sheet and the polling officials promise to fill the results sheets later when it becomes available. This happened in spite of protest from the APC party agents.

Less than 30% of observers reported that result sheets were posted at the polling units where they observed. Thus, voters and election monitors from most polling units in Rivers State couldn't visually verify the announced results - an important requirement for an election to be seen as credible free and fair.
Irregularities at the Ward and Local Government Collation level:

SDN had a limited view of what happened at these levels due to a combination of security concerns and actions by election officials at gross variance with stipulated procedures. There were obviously significant variations across the state where not all areas would have been as disturbing as the picture built up by our core teams. In summary our team’s findings are as follows:

Ward Collation irregularities:

Access to the ward collation centres in the State was restricted to INEC staff, security officials, party agents and accredited observers. Voters are not allowed in to monitor the collation. In most parts, main opposition party reps were not present during Ward collation. This was either because they decided to boycott the process or in few cases security agents “screened” them from gaining access. This meant that results collated from these wards were potentially open to manipulation without independent verification.

Gokana LGA (Bodo and Mogho Wards) – Observers did not observe ward collation as mass thumb printing was taking place in Bodo Ward 1 by election officials and in Mogho voting was disrupted by police arriving and dispersing voters.

Eleme LGA (Onne, Ogale, Aleto) — After growing objections over the absence of results sheets accreditation and election activity ceased in the majority of polling units observed by 2pm with only one unit seen active at 3pm. Shortly after 3pm Ward Collation officers were seen being given their materials and brief by the Eleme Electoral Officer. Repeated visits to 4 designated collation centres between 4pm and 6 found no sign of collation officers or unit level staff, some of whom were only sighted returning unused material to the INEC State office.

Ahoada East – Collation not observed.

Port Harcourt LGA (Ward 3,4,6) – Ward Collation could not be observed due to late running and security concerns.

Local Government Collation irregularities:

SDN only observed Local Government collation in Eleme and Port Harcourt LGA directly but saw some ward level results at state level collation.

Eleme - Local Government collation was visited from 8am Sunday and at this stage unit level and ward level results were being completed simultaneously. Units which were seen to have been disrupted on Saturday were noted as returning turnouts of around 95%. Collation for Onne ward was being completed by a youth who sought reference from the PDP agent present on whether an observer could take notes from his results. Results had the appearance of being manufactured with turnouts being recorded in round numbers and perfect correlations between accredited voters and votes cast frequently seen.

Port Harcourt LGA – Ward collation was still being completed at the time of visiting from 12pm Sunday and was being conducted at the Local Government Collation centre. While collation activity seemed relatively normal the results being recorded were less so – in wards observed by SDN with turnouts of around 30-40% turnouts were being recorded over 95% of registered voters with perfect turnouts and no rejected ballots].
State level results observations:

State level results reflected the delays at lower levels with no significant activity until Sunday afternoon. These results provided some overview insight into the results which were not observed at lower levels in the results chain. Of note are the following:

Eleme – Despite observed disruption and late opening [all units after 1030am] and early closing in the observed wards Eleme returned an 84% turnout [using accreditation numbers]

Gokana – In Bodo where SDN teams observed in two wards turnouts were recorded as 98 and 99% of all registered voters while in Mogho which had been disrupted a turnout of 140% was recorded with 5,583 voters accredited against 3,979 registered voters – while 3,719 votes were recorded as cast (93% of registered voters). Turnout across the LGA was reported as 89% Ahoada East – Turnout (accreditation) for the LGA was 40% which is higher than that noted in the units observed but by far the closest correlation seen between activity in the field and final results.

Port Harcourt LGA – Overall the LGA recorded a mid-range 70% turnout. This masked ward level variations where turnouts were recorded in broad bands:

• 4 wards around 20%
• 5 wards between 30-40%
• 5 wards over 95% turnout

The 5 wards with turnout over 95% made up more than three quarters of the votes “cast” in that local government area.