SDN

Public perceptions of security dynamics and stabilisation interventions in the Niger Delta
October 2018–March 2019

Summary

This report presents the findings of the latest public perceptions survey (PPS), carried out by SDN in three Niger Delta states—Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers. The purpose of the PPS is to understand local-level concerns about security in the region, and priorities for addressing security-related issues. The PPS is conducted bi-annually, with each examining public perceptions relating to the previous six-month period. The survey for this report was conducted in May 2019. The particular focus of the period under review was the 2019 general elections, which were held in February and March 2019.

Key Messages

- In Bayelsa State, most respondents thought the security situation in their state had worsened over the last six months; in Rivers, most thought it had worsened or remained the same; while, in Delta State, the majority thought it had improved or remained the same.

- In Rivers State, as in Bayelsa State, the period covered saw gang-related killing and kidnapping. Some believe this has become the norm—indeed, cult groups remain the biggest security threat based on our findings in previous surveys. This indicates the continued widespread concern about cultism in the Niger Delta.

- Surveyed citizens continue to view creation of employment opportunities as the top priority for improving peace and security in the region, reflecting a belief that this will lower crime rates.

- Survey respondents were asked about their involvement in the 2019 general election. 58% said they voted (although other figures indicate that, overall, Rivers State saw a significantly lower turnout of voters in 2019 compared to 2015). Reasons given for not voting included fear of, or actual, violence on election days, intimidation of voters by the military, and election irregularities. Some respondents criticised the role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in supervising elections in the Niger Delta. They also raised concerns about vote-buying, a well-documented problem.

- Overall, most respondents rated the quality of the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections and the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections as poor. This included Rivers State, which experienced widespread challenges with violence and heavy military intervention, leading to the postponement of the elections in the state.

Contents

1. Introduction

For over 15 years, SDN has worked with communities and stakeholders in the Niger Delta, tackling issues related to the impact of the oil and gas sector on the region. During this time, we have investigated security issues in the region relating to political unrest—in particular, around elections, militancy (including attacks on the extractives sector), cultism, and kidnapping.

In 2017, we began monitoring the security situation in communities through administering a bi-annual public perception survey (PPS), in an attempt to raise awareness of the concerns and priorities of those living in the Niger Delta. This survey is the fourth of its kind.

The survey was conducted in Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers states in the Niger Delta, where most of SDN's work is focused. 300 responses (100 per state) were gathered in May 2019. Participants were asked questions relating to the security situation in their state over the past six months.

This survey period included the election and post-election period, as the 2019 Nigerian Presidential, Senatorial, House of Representatives, Gubernatorial and State House of Assembly elections were held in February and March 2019.* This period is often known for its heightened security issues, as opposing political parties try to capture Nigeria's major oil producing states. A particular concern was Rivers State, which has seen serious unrest in the past—and this election was no exception.

The following pages present the information collected through the survey.†

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* Bayelsa State held their Governorship election off-cycle in November 2019
† NB. This report presents the views of a sample of the public across the study area. Efforts were made to ensure respondents came from a variety of backgrounds, but the sample is not statistically representative. However, focus group discussions with key experts have been used to provide an additional level of confidence in the validity of the findings and, in this regard, the surveys provide a valuable indication into citizens' perceptions across the focal states. Further details are in the methodology.

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2. Contextual dynamics in the survey period

Two key sources of insecurity during the period under review were the Nigerian general elections, as well as ongoing problems with kidnapping and gang violence.

Election-related violence

Significant violence took place in the run-up to, and then during, the general election period. For example, in Rivers State, the APC's organising secretary in Ikwerre Local Government Area (LGA), Samuel Wanjoku, and another party member, Moses Ogu, were abducted by gunmen on 11 November 2018. Wanjoku was found dead six days later, although his colleague was later found alive.*

A similar incident occurred a few days later, with the killing of two people and wounding of many during an attack on a rally organised by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Ipo, Ikwerre LGA, Rivers State.† The Civil Society Situation Room (CSSR) reported that the worst incident of the election occurred in Abonnema, in Akuku-Toru LGA, where the army said seven people died in a shoot-out between an unidentified gang and Nigerian soldiers. Another account puts the death toll at 15.‡

These incidents are examples of the type of violence which took place during the elections. SDN ran a major elections observation mission covering these polls, and more research and analysis relating to them are available here.

Kidnapping and cult/gang violence

In December 2018, suspected kidnappers killed two people along the Onuebum-Otuogori Road in Ogbia LGA, § while other kidnappings continued to take place across the state.** Measured by the number of fatalities per incident in 2018, gang violence and communal conflict were the most lethal types of violence, according to the 2018 Niger Delta Annual Conflict Report, which reported at least two fatalities for every incident of gang violence and inter-communal conflict.†† According to one of our respondents from Buguma community in Asaritoru LGA:

> "*the killings in Rivers State are not done by cultists alone–FSARS [The Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad] also kill people and blame it on cultists.*"

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* Rivers communities live in fear as gunmen run riot in Ikwerre LGA, Vanguard, 27 November 2018

† International Crisis Group (ICC) [21 December 2018]. Nigeria's 2019 Elections: Six States to Watch https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/268-nigerias-2019-elections-six-states-watch

‡ Vanguard Nigeria (Feb. 25, 2019). Killings: US calls for end to violence in Rivers https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/02/killings-us-calls-for-end-to-violence-in-rivers/

§ Vanguard (December 16, 2018). Suspected kidnappers kill 2 in Bayelsa. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/12/suspected-kidnappers-kill-2-in-bayelsa/

** Vanguard (October 22, 2018). Police raid suspected kidnappers, seize 14, rescue 10 victims in Delta https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/10/police-raid-suspected-kidnappers-seize-14-rescue-10-victims-in-delta/

†† PIND (April 8, 2019). 2018: Gang Violence and Inter-Communal Conflict Top List of Violence in Niger Delta https://pindfoundation.org/2018-gang-violence-and-inter-communal-conflict-top-list-of-violence-in-niger-delta/

3. Findings

This section presents the findings of the fourth PPS. The data is based on responses from a total of 300 people, 100 selected from each state (50% female—see methodology for further information).

3.1 Perceptions of the current security situation

3.1.1 Changes to the security situation over the last six months

Participants were asked to describe the security situation in their state in March 2019 compared with six months previously. Fig.1 presents their answers.
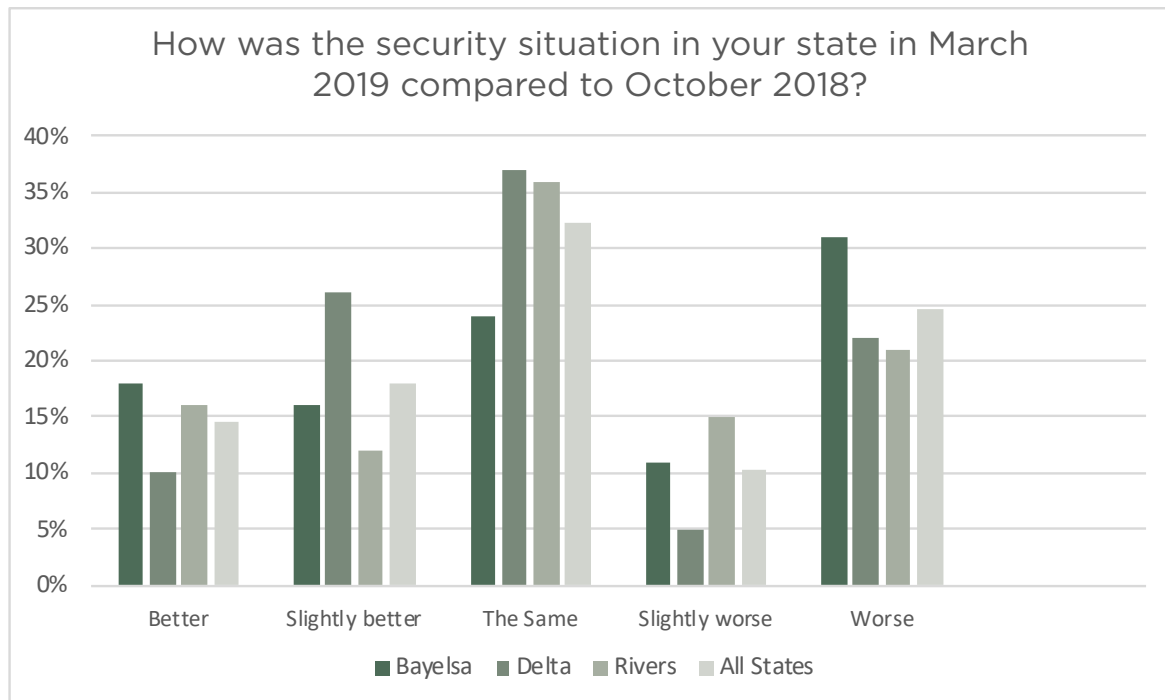

Fig. 1: Percentage of survey participants in each state selecting from available options on the perception of the security situation in their state

Most respondents thought the overall security situation in their state remained the same over the six-month period. However, in Bayelsa State, most respondents thought the situation had worsened. Yet, Bayelsa State also had the highest number of respondents out of all three states who thought the security situation improved over the six-month period—suggesting that security issues were concentrated in certain areas of the state during this period.

In the third PPS, which was conducted between April and September 2018, and preceded this survey period, a higher overall percentage of participants reported that the security situation during that period had got worse. This included 51% of respondents from Bayelsa State who at the time thought that the situation had got worse. One respondent's view from Sagbama, Bayelsa State, made this clear:

> *" The insecurity in Southern Ijaw is just too much, we need the government to provide policemen in this area. "*

Some of those who said the situation is worsening in Rivers State attributed this to the activities of cultists. One respondent from Tai, Rivers State, emphasised that:

> **"** *In our area, cultists are like the government. People fear, respect, and obey them. This is because we do not feel the presence of the government. As at now nothing is being done to stop the security situation by the appropriate authorities (Boro-Bara, Tai LGA).* **"**

3.1.2 Security in the last six months

Participants were asked to state which actors they believed were most likely to be involved in security threats in their state. Fig.2 below presents their answers.
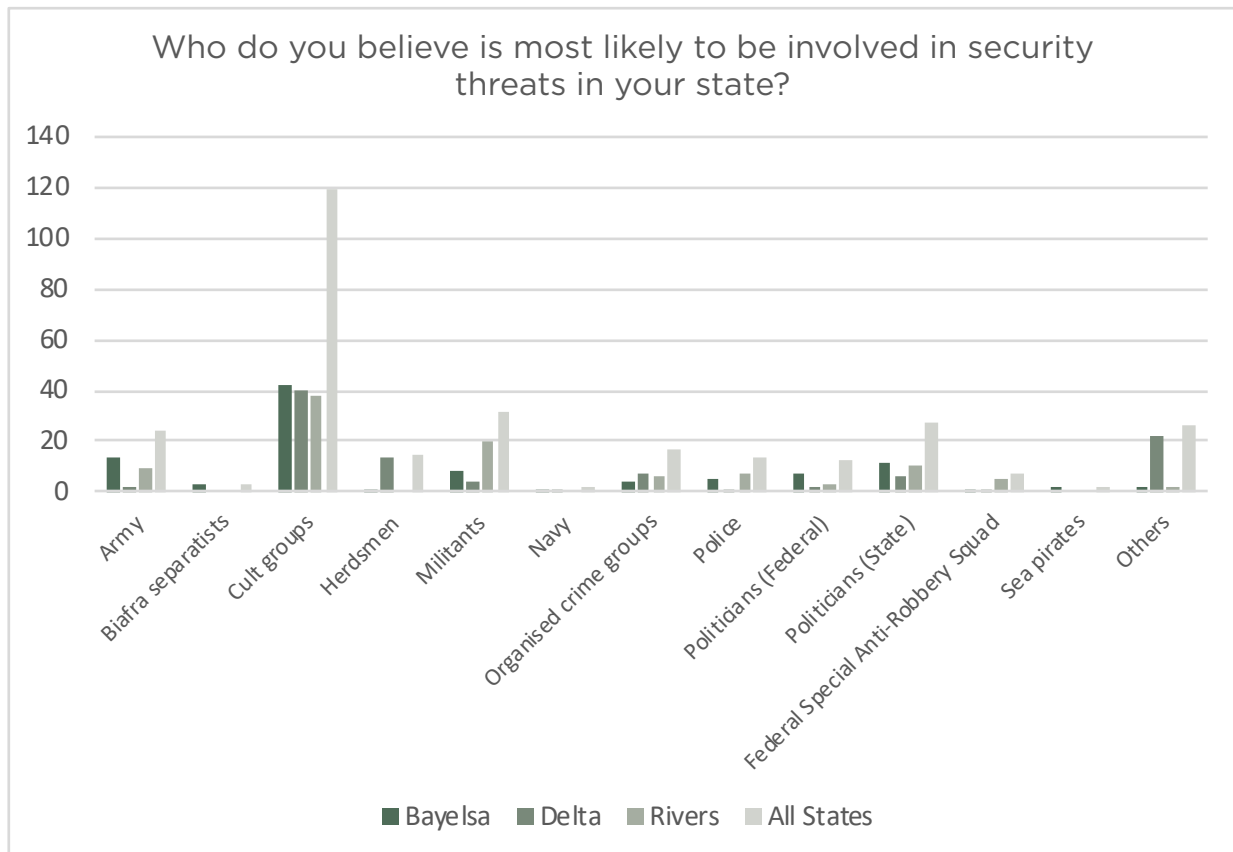
Who do you believe is most likely to be involved in security threats in your state?

Legend: Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, All States

Fig. 2: Percentage of survey participants who believe different actors were most likely to be involved in security threats between October 2018 – March 2019

The highest number of respondents said that cult groups were most likely to be involved in security threats. An example of a research response follows:

> **"** *Cult activities have increased. The line between regular criminals and cultists is thinning. In Akaba and Nobele communities, cult clashes are a daily occurrence. Cult groups are almost everywhere and appear to have immunity from the government.* **"**

Commenting on the role of cultists during the elections period, two participants during our validation exercise said that:

> **"**The finding is correct. Ughelli, Warri and Udu axis have steady cult-related incidents, they play political roles too. **"**

> **"**The hike in the level of cultism during elections can be explained because of the collaboration between the military and cultists. The youth were armed for the elections, hence the increase. There is always an upsurge in arms circulation during the time of elections. Security operatives in the region are very partisan and, therefore, they condone the possession and use of arms by youths. **"**

In addition to cultism, other actors considered most likely to be involved in security threats included militants in Rivers State, the army in Bayelsa State, and herder-farmer conflict in Delta State. State-level politicians also ranked relatively highly among responses, which is unsurprising given the 2019 election season.

In relation to issues surrounding herder-farmer conflict, a participant from Delta State said:

> **"**Abraka has a Sambisa forest inhabited by herdsmen. Patani and Obiaruku have steady threats by herdsmen. **"**

Others mentioned as likely to be involved in security threats included kidnappers and cyber criminals ('yahoo boys').

3.1.3 Security situation over the next 12 months

Participants were asked to comment on what they think will happen to the security situation in their state over the next 12 months. Their answers are presented below in Fig.3.
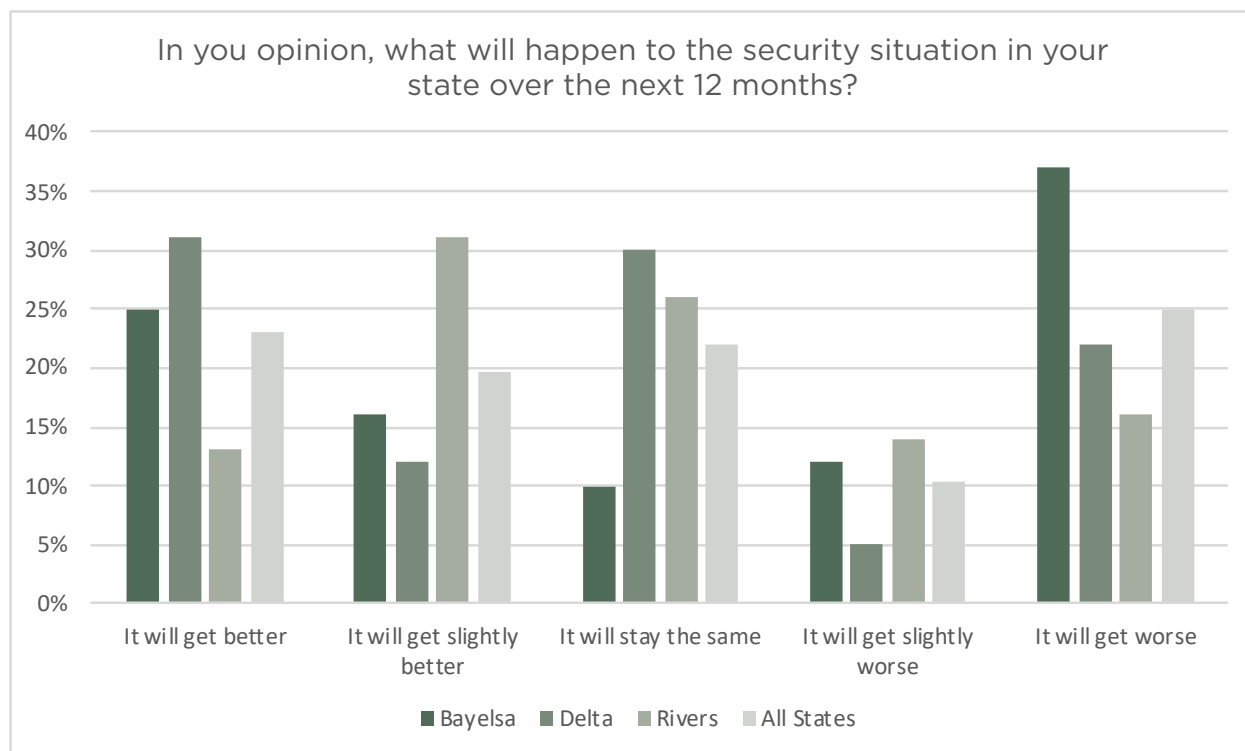

Fig. 3: Percentage of survey participants who thought the security situation in their state would get better, stay the same and get worse.

From Fig.3, we can clearly see that most people in Bayelsa State thought the security situation will get worse over the next 12-month period. In Delta State, most respondents thought the situation will get better or remain the same. Most respondents in Rivers State thought the situation will get slightly better.

Reasons given by respondents across all states about why the security situation would get worse included:

- A perception that cultists are sponsored by top government officials, which affords them impunity.

- A lack of cooperation between traditional rulers and the government.

- Lack of job opportunities, and increasing unemployment.

- The increasing numbers and sophistication of cult groups.

- Intra- and inter-communal crises.

- The worsening state of the economy.

- Corruption.

- The annual September festival, held in Delta State, which has been characterised by riots in the past.

In Bayelsa State, in particular, where respondents mostly thought the security situation will get worse, the following reasons were given:

- Unemployment, and the perception that the government is not running sufficient programmes to take young people off the streets.

- The Federal government's refusal to hold dialogue with society to address problems, such as environmental damage from the oil industry.

- The off-cycle governorship election scheduled for November 2019.

Reasons given by respondents across all states who said they thought the situation would remain the same included:

- The security situation having been the same over the years.

- A weak legal framework for punishing perpetrators.

- No visible effort, or policy or strategic plan, by the government to improve security.

Respondents gave the following reasons to explain why the security situation might improve:

- Hopes that young people will be meaningfully engaged to leave, or be discouraged from joining, cult groups.

- An increased feeling of calm and stability now that the elections are over in Delta and Rivers states.

- Hopes that security will improve if the government provides basic amenities.

- The belief that the government will tackle the issue of herder-farmer conflict.

- The transition to a new government in 2020 in Bayelsa State.

- The interest of the new Federal and State Governments in ending violence.

3.1.4 Actors responsible for security

Participants were asked to choose from a list of actors who they believed should be responsible for improving security in the Niger Delta. These results are presented in Fig.4.
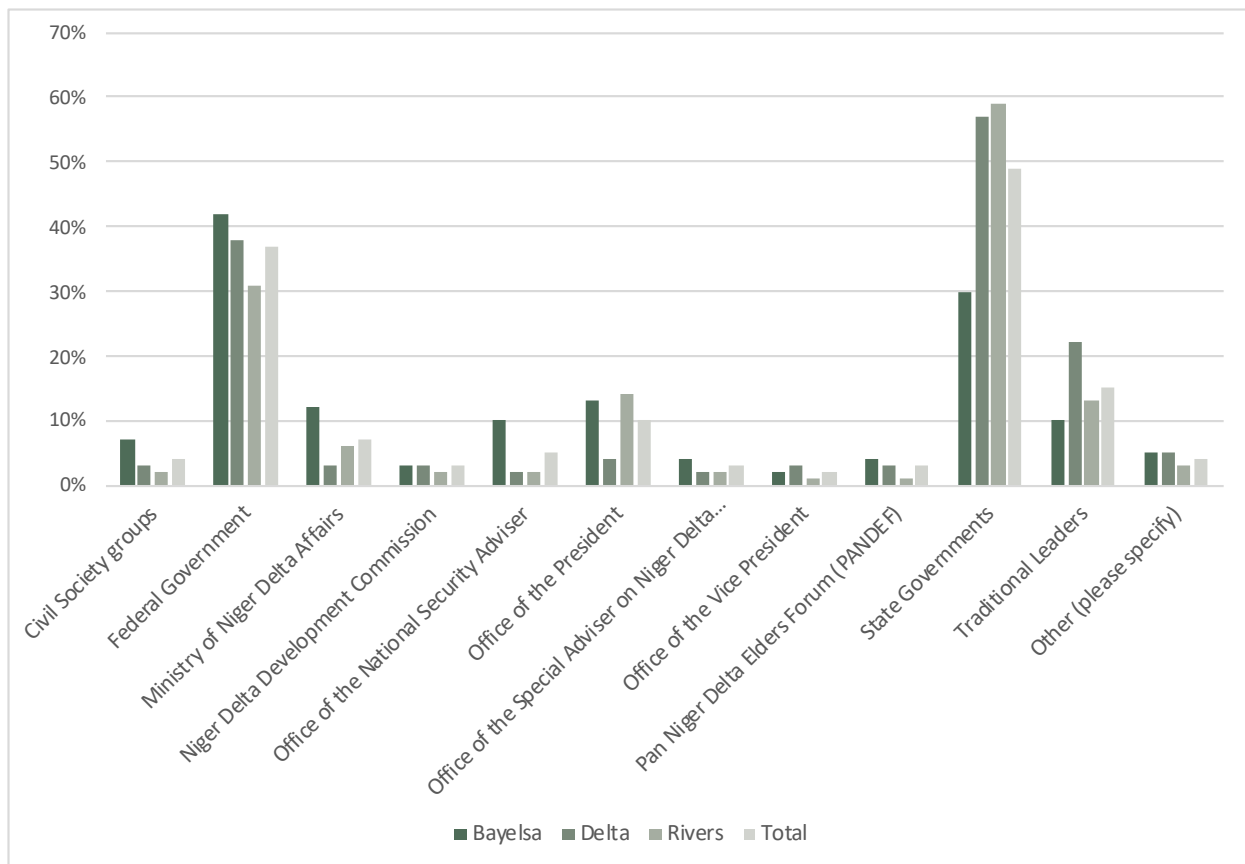

Fig.4: Percentage of survey participants selecting given options for who should be responsible for improving security in the Niger Delta

Overall, most respondents think that state government should be responsible for improving security in the region. This response was much lower in Bayelsa State compared to the average across the three states, where most respondents said the Federal Government should be responsible for improving security.

Around 15% of all respondents said traditional rulers should be responsible, arguing that their influence makes it easier to identify and punish perpetrators of crime. This response was particularly prominent in Delta State, where 22% of respondents chose this option.

3.1.5 Federal Government initiatives to improve regional security

Survey participants were provided with a list of Federal Government initiatives, all of which aim to improve security in the Niger Delta, and were asked to select all of those that they were aware of. Their responses are presented in Fig.5.
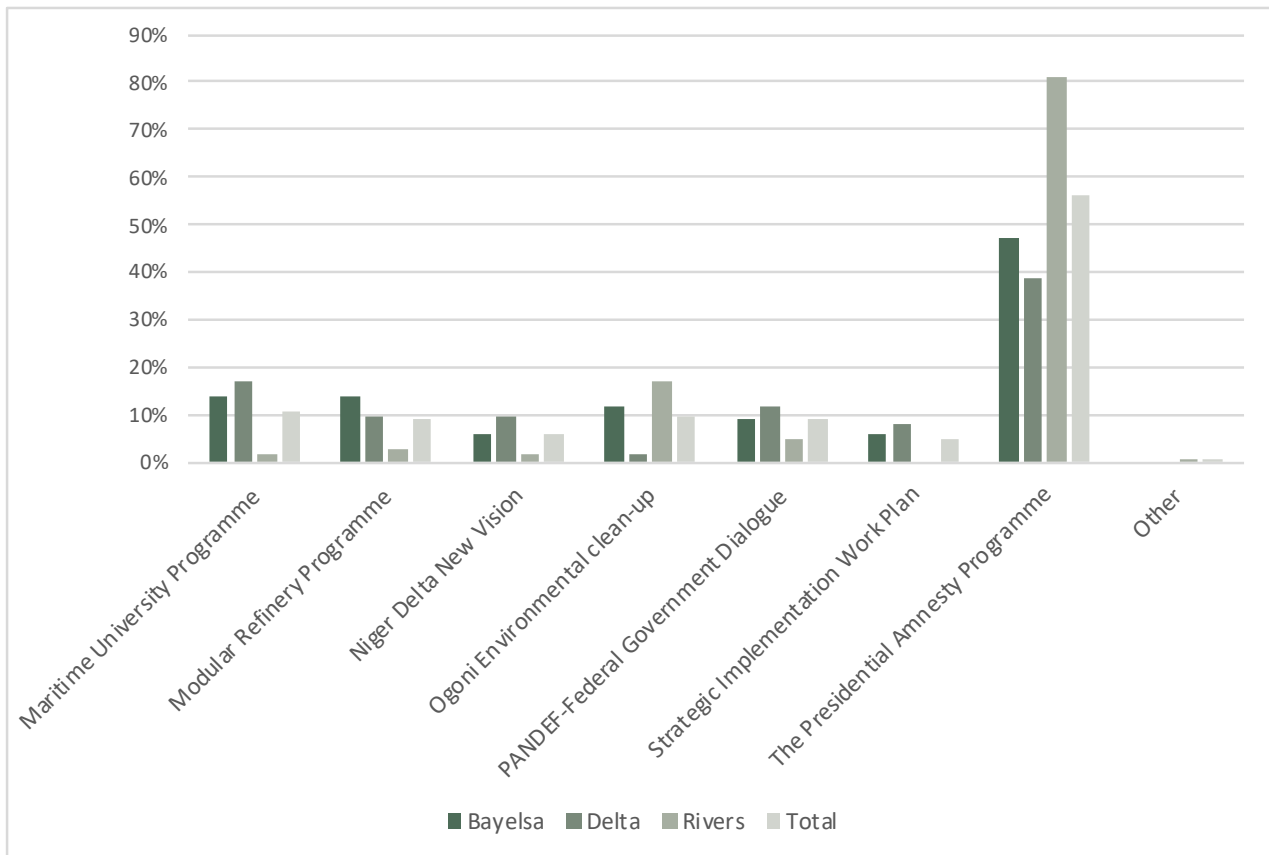

Fig.5: Percentage of survey participants aware of Federal Government initiatives to improve security and stabilisation in the Niger Delta

In all states, the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) was the most well-known initiative by the Federal Government for improving security and stabilisation. Awareness of the PAP in Rivers State was particularly high, at 81% (25% higher than the average across the three states). 26% of all respondents indicated no knowledge of any of the initiatives on the list.

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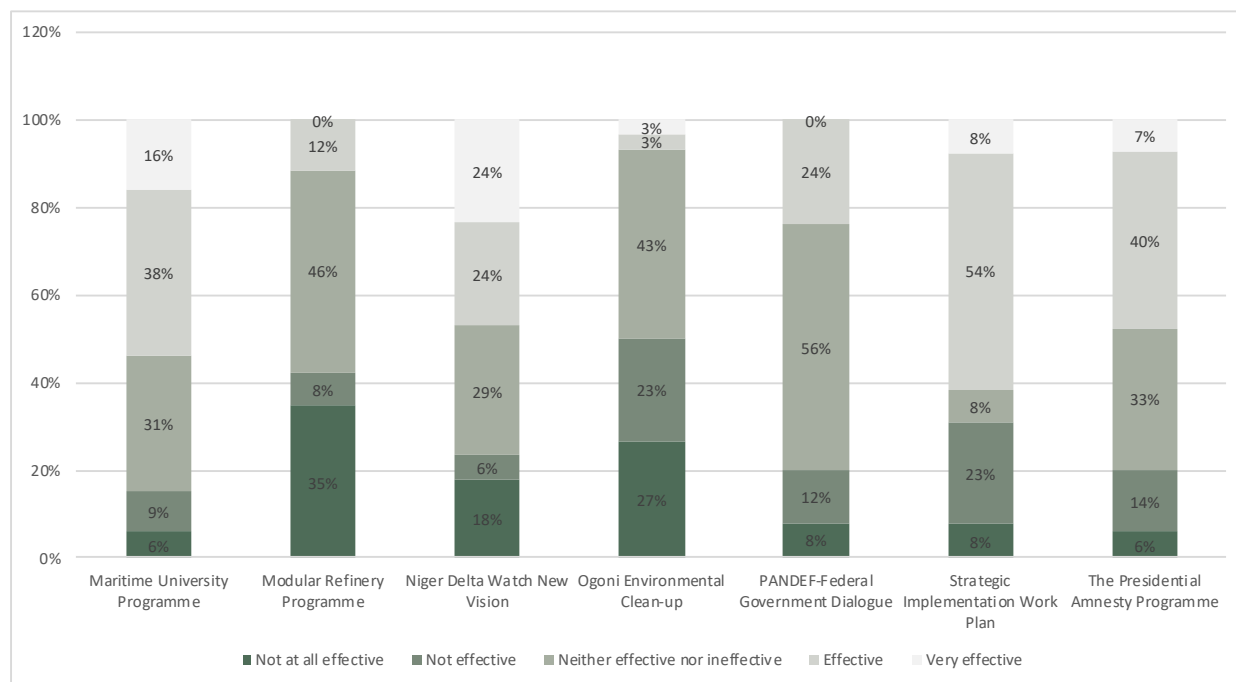
How effective are these initiatives?

Fig. 6: Perception of effectiveness of various initiatives to improve security and stabilisation in the Niger Delta (rated only by respondents who were aware of each initiative)

Fig.6 shows how effective respondents rated each of the initiatives they had heard of. Note that these percentages relate to different sample sizes—for example, only 14 people had heard of the Strategic Implementation Work Plan (SIWP), compared to 167 who had heard of the PAP, so the fact that 40% of respondents (67 people) thought the PAP was effective is likely to be a more significant finding than 54% of respondents (only 7 people) thinking the SIWP is effective.

One participant's response describes the challenge of the PAP:

> " *In Delta State, the PAP is popular because of reduction in sea piracy. PAP has brought peace and understanding to Delta State. PAP came at a time it was really needed. The number of beneficiaries are increasing. However, PAP is a drainpipe because citizens may have seen that some people have been settled through the PAP, so they want to be a part of it. The Federal Government is living in fear because if the flow is cut off, it might further jeopardise security in the region.* "

Another respondent, in Bayelsa State, claimed that the PAP was ineffective and had increased insecurity.

As in previous surveys, participants appeared to have little or no awareness of Federal Government plans for the region, such as the Niger Delta New Vision, or the SIWP. Indeed, only 4% of respondents across the states had heard of the SIWP. Regarding this, a participant expressed that:

> " *SIWP is not a project, it is a process of ensuring that projects are executed. There is need to build the skills of communities to engage the platform.* "

Nonetheless, most of those who had heard of the SIWP, the PAP, or the Maritime University Programme thought they are effective programmes. In contrast, half of respondents rated the Ogoni Environmental Clean-up programme as ineffective, with only 6% of respondents thinking this programme is effective.

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3.1.6 Priority interventions for improving regional security

Respondents identified security issues in the Niger Delta which they said deserve immediate attention. These included:

- Political-related issues: the fight between the Rivers State Governor and the Minister of Transportation (which is another issue that is threatening the peace of the State).

- Oil-related issues: the artisanal oil industry and the burning of illegal refined crude oil by the military.

- General insecurity issues: armed robbery, kidnappings, arms proliferation, cultism, cyber-crime ('yahoo' boys).

- Youth-related issues: youth restiveness, inter- and intra-communal violence.

- Allegations of extra-judicial killing by the FSARS.

Participants were also asked to choose from a list of options that they thought should be the main government priority to improve security and stabilisation in the Niger Delta. Their answers are presented in Fig.7.
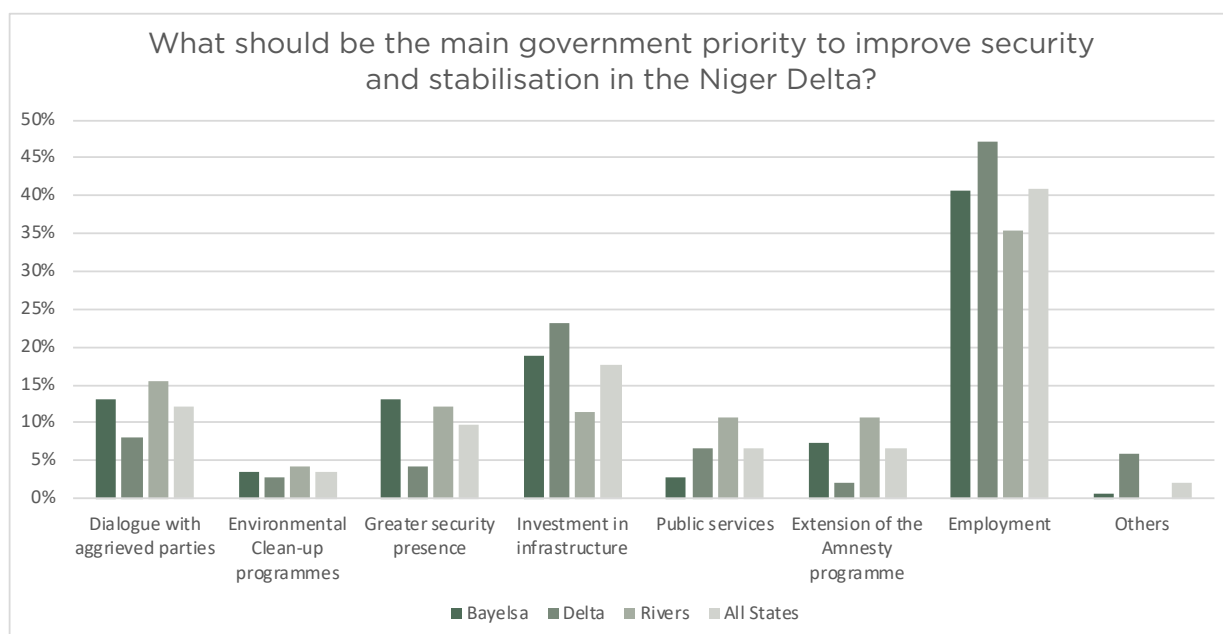

Fig.7: Percentage of survey participants by main priority for improving security and stabilisation in the Niger Delta.

The highest number of respondents across all states said employment was their top priority. These findings are consistent with those of previous surveys.

This finding was elaborated upon in respondents' comments:

> " *Employment and investment are key. With it, crimes will reduce massively, paid employment keeps one busy. The youth are kept unemployed in order to be a pool to be drawn from.* "

> " *Let the government give us jobs. If we do not have jobs, nobody should blame us for finding a way to keep ourselves busy.* "

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3.2 The 2019 Nigerian elections

3.2.1 Election quality

How would you assess the overall quality of the Nigerian presidential and National Assembly elections on 23 February 2019 in your state?
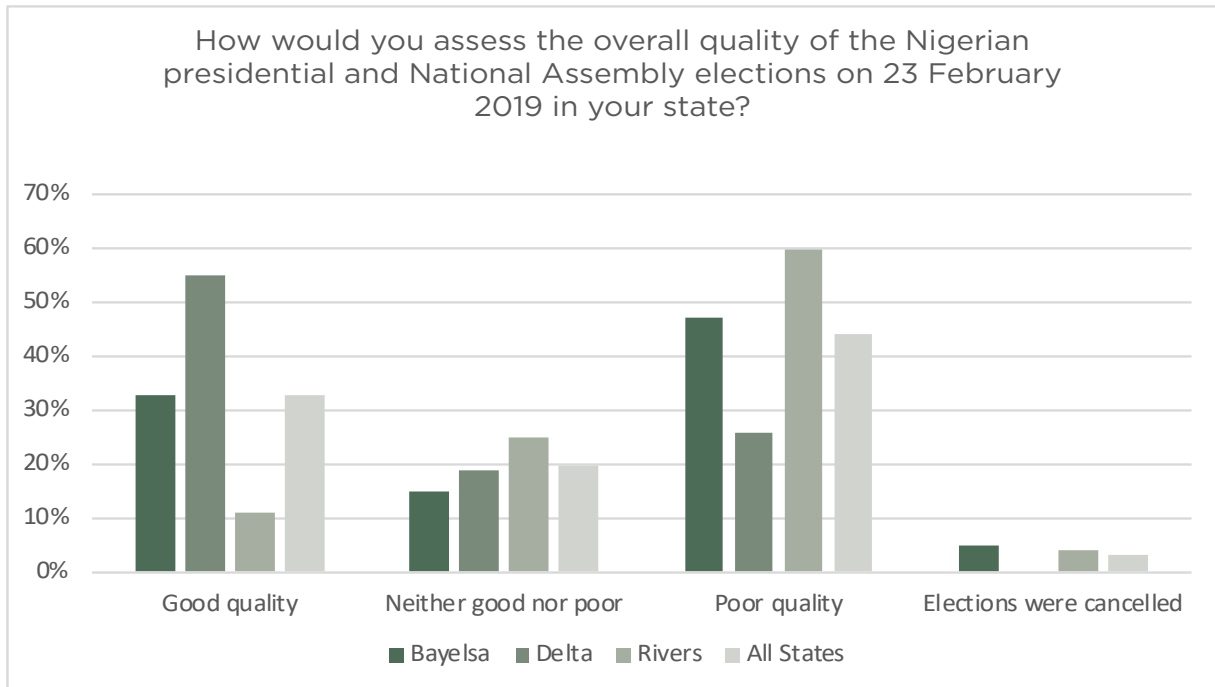
Fig 8: Assessment of the quality of the February 23 2019

How would you assess the overall quality of the Nigerian Governorship and State House of Assembly elections on 09 March 2019 in your state?

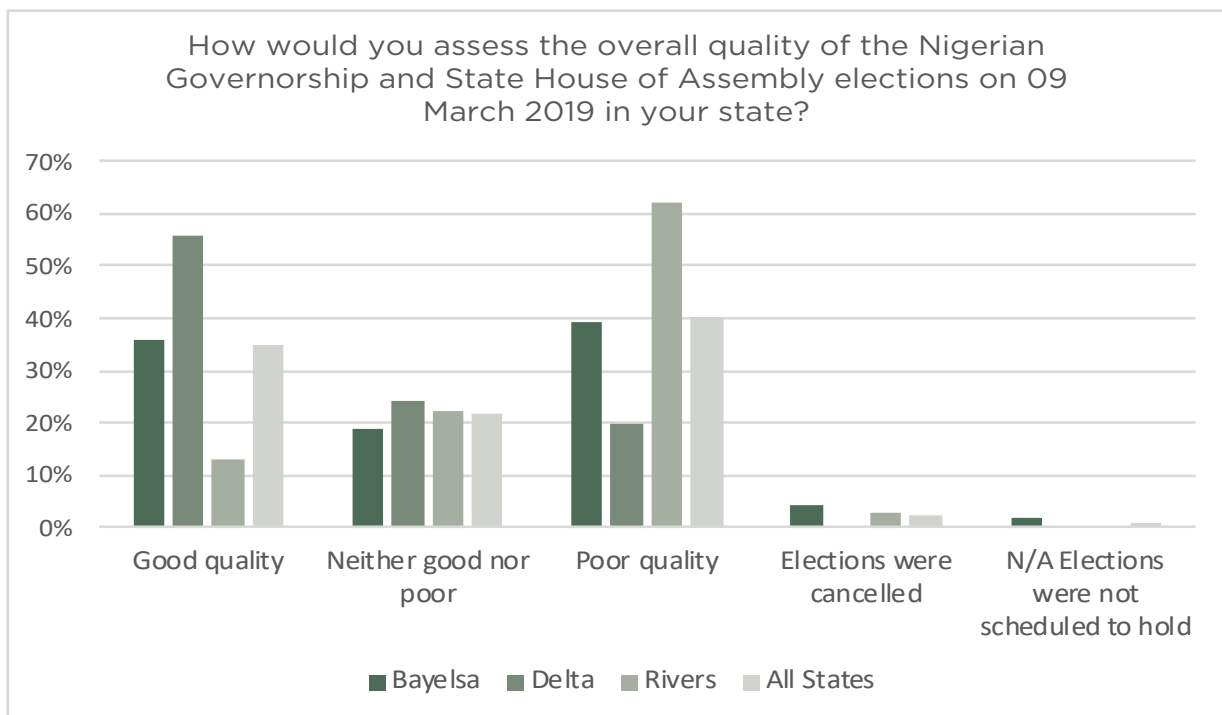Fig 9: Assessment of the quality of the March 09 2019 elections.

NB: in Bayelsa State this refers to the State House of Assembly elections only.

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Overall, the highest number of respondents in both Bayelsa State and Rivers State thought that the quality of the 2019 elections was poor, across all the polls. At least 60% of respondents in Rivers State, in particular, rated the elections as poor quality. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the major violence and disruption that the elections saw in this state, including local cancellations and re-runs, and the alleged interference of the military.*

Conversely, in Delta State, the majority of respondents thought that both sets of elections were of good quality. To affirm this point, one participant highlighted that:

> "*Much focus was on the gubernatorial elections not the presidential elections, Delta State witnessed few killings compared to other states.*"

Others responded differently though:

> "*Peaceful election/good quality election is a relative term. Some voters were bought over, even [with] food.*"

Speaking about the poor quality of elections experienced in Rivers and Bayelsa states, one respondent said:

> "*Good quality is an attribute that should be very far away from the 2019 general election. As an ad-hoc staff, a lot of anomalies were noticed including the involvement of the military personnel in the Rivers State elections.*"

These responses reflect the view of international election observers, who were not convinced of the credibility of the elections—especially in relation to intimidation of voters and violence in certain areas.**
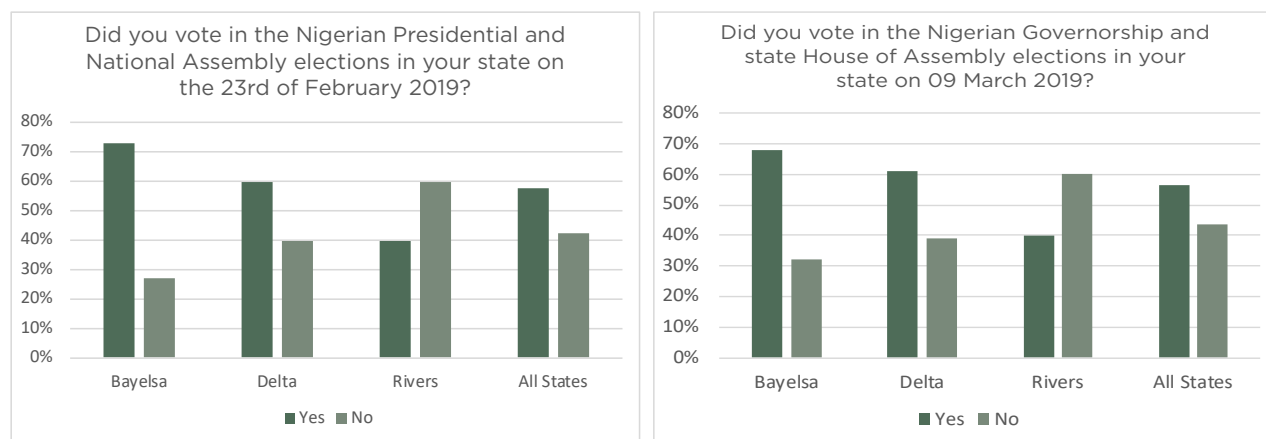
3.2.2 Voting

Fig 10: Distribution of respondents that voted in the Presidential National Assembly elections and the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections in 2019 (excluding Bayelsa State Governorship election which is off-cycle)

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* Nigeria Delta Watch 2019, March 2019 'A Citizen-led Election Observation Project. Available at https://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Niger-Delta-Watch-13.pdf
** "International Observers React to Nigeria's Presidential Election". Available at https://www.placng.org/situation_room/sr/international-observers-react-to-nigerias-presidential-election/

Turnout among respondents for both the Presidential and House of Representatives elections and the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections was highest in Bayelsa State.

The highest number of respondents who said they did not vote (60%) was in Rivers State, with the same figure for each set of elections.

This tallies with overall turnout in Rivers State, which saw a decrease in the level of votes cast in the 2019 elections compared to 2015. The state saw a high number of violent incidents prior to the polls, the intimidation of voters, and the use of the military during the elections, all of which led to major disruption.

An example of the type of incident which took place was the shooting of a senior university lecturer in March 2019 by the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (FSARS) Rivers State command at the INEC collation centre in Bori, Khana LGA.[†] He died six days after the shooting.

The survey asked respondents who did not vote to explain why. Reasons given included:

- Fear of violence on polling days.

- Actual violence on polling days.

- A perception that the outcome of the election was not going to make any difference.

- Not having a Permanent Voter's Card, either because they were not able to collect it before the deadline, it had been lost, or it had been signed for and collected by another person.

- Not having been able to complete a transfer of registration from elsewhere.

In terms of fear of violence, a respondent from Delta State disclosed that:

> *I was getting ready to go and vote when I heard the sound of gunshots at the polling unit and I decided not to vote so as to save my life.*

One respondent from Ogbunabali in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, said that:

> *There is no election in Nigeria; only selection. INEC is wasting its time and money conducting elections in Nigeria.*

In Igbomaturu, Bayelsa State, one participant stated the following:

> *I'm tired of anything elections in our country, my vote will not make any difference, I have decided not to participate in any elections.*

[†] Nigeria Delta Watch 2019, March 2019 'A Citizen-led Election Observation Project. Available at https://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Niger-Delta-Watch-13.pdf

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Asked to suggest measures to help improve transparency, security, and fairness in future elections, participants provided the following responses:

- Electronic/digital voting.

- Educating the electorate on how to vote.

- The use of national identity cards to vote.

- Upgrading card readers.

- Making INEC truly independent.

- Increasing the security presence and punishment of security personnel who abuse their power during election days.

- Creating a mechanism to monitor vote buying and ballot box snatching.

- Putting measures in place to ensure the safety of voters on election days.

- Enacting laws that to arrest and prosecute corrupt politicians.

- Punishment of election offenders.

4. Methodology

This research encompassed three states in the Niger Delta: Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta. A survey was administered by the SDN research team in various locations, including communities and towns, split between rural and urban areas. Multistage sampling was used—including purposive (to ensure gender balance) and convenience sampling, with the research team approaching respondents on the street, in their homes, and at public locations.

The survey was administered over four days in May 2019. There were 300 respondents in total—100 drawn from 20 LGAs across nine senatorial districts in the three states of coverage. The LGAs selected were Akuku Toru, Asari-Toru, Etche, Ogu/Bolo, Obio/Akpor, Port Harcourt, Tai, Oyigbo, Ogbia, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw, Yenagoa, Udu, Ughelli North, Ethiope West, Warri South, Patani, Bomadi, Ndokwa East, and Ukwuani.

Respondents included people from a range of backgrounds, including apprentices, homemakers, NGO/local association workers, public servants, private sector workers, students, traders, the self-employed, and the unemployed.

After the initial survey, a focus group discussion was held with a validation team to discuss the findings. Participants were drawn from different levels of government, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, the private sector, community leadership groups (including vigilante representatives), and members of the general public. The results were then analysed by SDN.

The table shows the respondents involved in the survey.

State	No. of Respondents	Gender	
		Men	Women
Bayelsa	100	50	50
Delta	100	50	50
Rivers	100	50	50
Age			
18-24	67		
25-34	77		
35-49	111		
50 and above	45		

Table 1: Number of respondents by state, gender, and age.

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January 2020

SDN supports those affected by the extractives industry and weak governance. We work with communities and engage with governments, companies and other stakeholders to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to a healthy environment. Our work currently focuses on the Niger Delta.

Email: **info@stakeholderdemocracy.org**
Website: **www.stakeholderdemocracy.org**
Twitter: **@SDNNigerDelta**

Port Harcourt, Nigeria
13A Location Road
Off Tombia Extension Oroazi,
G.R.A. Phase 3, Rivers State
T: +234 (0) 703 1593 783

London, United Kingdom
The Green house
244 -254 Cambridge Heath Road
E2 9DA
T: +44 (0) 203 559 6662