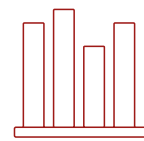
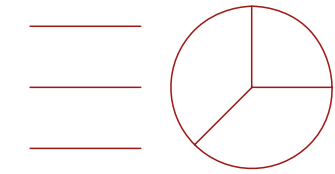


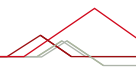


Niger Delta WATCH 2019

**A civil society report
on the conduct of the
Nigerian elections**



NIGERIA CIVIL SOCIETY
SITUATIONROOM





July 2019

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.

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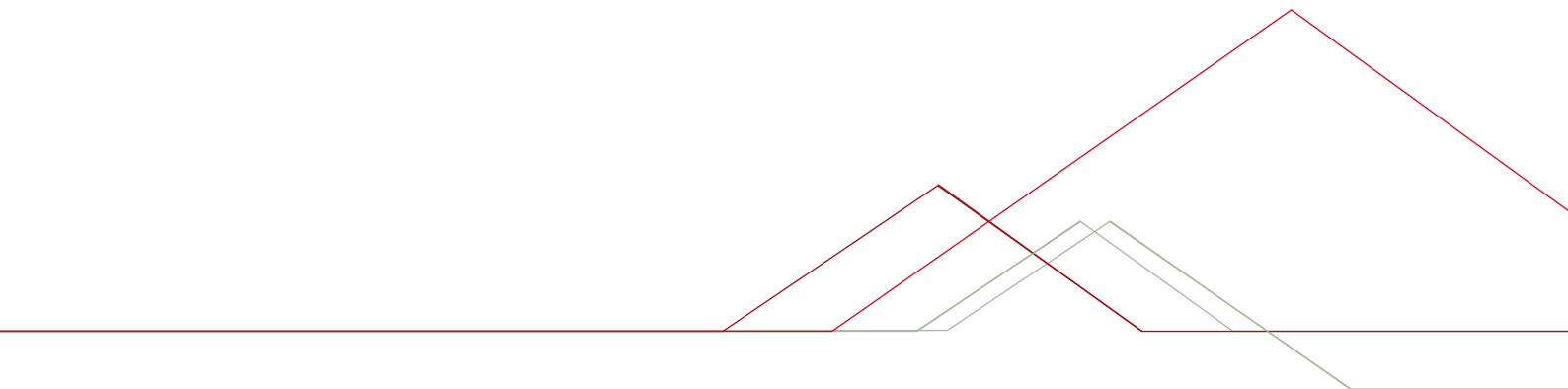
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The *Niger Delta Watch 2019* team would particularly like to extend their thanks to the election observers and analysts, operating under a coordinating organisation in each state, who took part in this work. The project would not have been possible without their willingness to observe, investigate and follow up on the incidents and issues discussed in this report, in an extremely challenging environment. We are proud to have collaborated with them. The four coordinating organisations who participated were:

Akwa Ibom State: Policy Alert
Bayelsa State: Bayelsa Non-Governmental Organizations Forum
Delta State: Global Peace Development
Rivers State: Support Initiative for Sustainable Development

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Executive summary

In early 2019, Nigeria held its sixth cycle of elections since its restoration of democracy in 1999. This included two main sets of elections: Presidential and National Assembly polls, in February (after a week-long postponement, announced during the middle of the night before they were due to take place), and Governorship and State House of Assembly elections, in March. Although incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari was ultimately re-elected by a significant margin, in the Niger Delta, the elections were marked by fraud, violence, and major disruption to voting processes. More than 100 people died through the election season, a damning indictment of the limited progress made in embedding peaceful politics in Nigeria.

These problems were documented in nearly 700 incident reports submitted by citizen election observers as part of *Niger Delta Watch 2019*, an independent civil society election observation project. Active between late November 2018 and April 2019, the project's observers identified the following key issues:

- Violence, targeting voters, security personnel, and both temporary personnel and staff from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in particular. The latter also came under pressure to alter results, with interference by uniformed and military personnel in vote collation. Two 'ad hoc' personnel were killed in Rivers state in clashes around collation. There were clashes between armed gangs—including cult groups, which are commonly understood to be in the pay of politicians—throughout the election period.
- The blatant destruction and theft of voting materials. This included vehicles transporting materials being set on fire, as well as voting cards being taken from polling stations to other locations for fraudulent thumb printing.
- Vote buying, which was characterised by donations of cash, food and other gifts such as livestock on campaign tours. This tended to target more vulnerable groups such as women and children.
- Logistical issues faced by INEC, particularly concerning the distribution of voting materials to polling units. This contributed to a lack of trust in INEC's ability to organise the elections, especially after the last-minute postponement of the Presidential election. This caused major difficulties for voters, many of whom could not afford or were unable to return to vote the following week.
- The late opening of voting and technical failures on election days, such as with card readers. This resulted in significant numbers of polling stations resorting to manual accreditation.
- Threats and allegations during campaigning between political opponents, hostile rhetoric, and the intimidation of party candidates and their supporters.
- The use of a number of tactics to confuse voters online, including the dissemination of outright fake news about political parties and their candidates on social media.

How the elections unfolded in the Niger Delta:

Early campaigning in the Niger Delta was quieter than had been expected in the initiative's target states of Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, and Akwa Ibom States. Across the region, political party activity appeared to be less intense, and less well-resourced, than in the 2011 and 2015 election cycles. There were concerns over the redeployment of security personnel to the region in November, as well as frequent changes to senior

police officials in Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom States. The situation in Rivers State was bad from the start, with military raids in November and ongoing cult violence in December. Concerns over the potential for violence in Bayelsa State did not materialise until later.

In January, there was an increase in party campaigning, and reports of vote-buying became more frequent. As the elections drew closer, the major story in Rivers was the ongoing saga of the All Progressives Congress (APC) primary process. An internal dispute over candidate selection ended up in court, and ultimately saw the APC unable to field any candidates for the Rivers elections. However, claims from both major parties continued regarding alleged plans to use the police to intimidate candidates and their supporters.

The month prior to the Presidential election saw violence in all four states, including cult clashes in Bayelsa State and an attack on INEC officials in Akwa Ibom State. There was a marked increase in violence in Delta State during this period, although, with exceptions, Bayelsa State was less violent than people had feared. In a tragic incident in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, a campaign rally for President Buhari on 13 February led to at least 15 reported deaths after a stampede broke out as the President left the venue being used.

Major disruption then affected the Presidential elections scheduled for 16 February, when they were cancelled during the middle of the night before polling. INEC took the decision after nationwide delays in the distribution of election and voting materials. The postponement generated a lot of frustration among voters—although, fortunately, little violence—but generated suspicions that it was part of a plot to reduce turnout, with allegations to this effect receiving widespread attention. The last minute nature of the postponement maximised chaos and also the financial impact both for individual voters and political parties. Those areas with the greatest travel costs for voters returning ‘home’ to their registered areas faced the greatest impact, while it was generally assumed candidates in government were best placed to overcome the costs of a repeated exercise.

During the rescheduled elections, which took place a week later, on 23 February, problems were reported across the Niger Delta. Polls opened late, key materials were missing or delayed, and there was confusion about a last minute extension to voting hours. Some areas experienced problems with card readers, with officials reverting to manual accreditation despite claims this would not be allowed to happen. Although violence was perhaps not as widespread as potentially feared, there were still serious issues in all four states covered by this initiative, including clashes between armed youth and security forces. The results collation process was deeply flawed. Many votes were cancelled due to outright interference by the military, while logistical problems meant vote counting in some areas started in one place but ended in another, raising serious doubts about final tallies. Voter turnout in the Presidential election in all four states was markedly lower than in 2015 with Rivers recording a drop from 1.6 million to circa 600,000, which was considered to be mainly a result of the combination of violence, interference from the military, and the postponement of the initial elections.

The Governorship elections on the weekend of 9-10 March were extremely challenging. Rivers State in particular faced serious problems, with high levels of violence. This led to a decision by INEC to suspend collation of the elections in the state (and a subsequent delay of almost a month for all voting to be completed). A notable improvement on the Presidential polls was in logistics, with the significantly better distribution of materials and voting start times.

Aftermath and reflection: where next?

The 2019 elections in the Niger Delta saw major disruption and violence, as outlined above. More than 100 people died, vote buying and selling was rampant, and the government agency responsible for organising the polls literally came under attack. Partly as a result of this, but also because of a lack of preparation, officials struggled to deal with logistical challenges and hence administer the polls effectively, while political parties and security agencies repeatedly intervened directly in electoral processes. The post-election period saw accusations of foul play, results being challenged in court, and misleading campaigning on social media aimed at discrediting the winners.

This is unacceptable. SDN condemns the actions of all those involved in violence and the manipulation of the elections. Nigerians deserve more from their government and their politicians, and these polls were seen, including by SDN, as an opportunity to address problems that have made polls in the region markedly more violent and disruptive than the national norm. However, if the polls in a majority of states were not as difficult as they have sometimes been, this should not obscure the gross violations that took place in the Niger Delta and other states. This was not a fair or credible democratic exercise.

Discussions with stakeholder groups after the elections highlighted the disparities between those involved. There is work needed for various actors to acknowledge their roles in problems, and support steps for improvement. Just 25% of community representatives surveyed by SDN rated the elections as “good quality”, and although over one third rated the elections as better than 2015, two-thirds rated the elections as “about the same” as the previous polls—but these saw major electoral fraud, violence, and disenfranchisement, so care should be taken in interpreting this.

In contrast, 90% of the security forces rated the elections as being of good or very good quality, and every single INEC respondent rated the polls as of “good quality” or “very good quality”. Again, 75% of security agencies and INEC staff respondents rated the elections as better or much better than the 2015 polls. Some of these responses highlight the problems with what groups of key actors can acknowledge in the relatively public discussions our focus groups amounted to, and they reflect some of the defensive lines taken publicly since the polls.

What the disparities do indicate is the need for specific measures to address specific challenges with Nigeria’s democratic processes—most obviously, how to support INEC to discharge its mandate effectively, and ensure accountability for those involved in disruption—and we have made recommendations on these below. But they alone will not deliver long-term peace and development in the Niger Delta, which has seen major conflict in the past and continues to face high levels of everyday political and other violence.

The immediate concern is for local stability; the aftermath of elections has historically been a dangerous time in the region, with weapons and cash circulating in the wake of attempts to influence voting.

In the medium-term, there are fears that agitator groups in the region may target Nigeria’s huge oil industry, which pumps around two million barrels of crude a day from the Niger Delta, and that any resulting conflict increases insecurity and leads to loss of life. Cycles of violence have followed previous elections, with groups such as the Niger Delta Avengers aiming to draw attention to their grievances, and to force their inclusion at high-level discussions on the area.

However, despite the trouble during the recent elections, insecurity in the Niger Delta is not at the levels it peaked at a decade ago. The returning President should take the opportunity to build on this, taking practical steps to address key concerns in

the region. As well as implementing the election-specific recommendations below, President Buhari's next administration should take action on the following six areas related to the Niger Delta. The Government should:

- First, organise a meaningful dialogue with groups in the Niger Delta representing local interests on their priorities for the region. The agenda for the first meeting should include the development of a plan to engage on and track agreed development and security targets for the Niger Delta.
- Second, enact a coordinated development plan for the Niger Delta. A major initiative collating existing work relating to this already exists, the Strategic Implementation Work Plan (SIWP). The Government should commit to ratifying the adoption of the SIWP by the Federal Executive Council, and to updating and making public a plan for its first 12 months.
- Third, ensure the success of environmental clean-up and restoration projects. The Government must make progress on key initiatives designed to address some of the devastating environmental damage caused by the oil and gas industry. The first of these should be the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP), a symbolic project in Ogoniland which must overcome severe delays and a number of credibility challenges. The Government must ensure a robust plan to monitor its quality and ensure its effectiveness, and publish a timetable and release funding for its activities.
- Fourth, find the means to prevent further environmental damage. President Buhari recently declined to provide assent to a Bill extending the powers of the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA). This would have been an important milestone in enforcing environmental protection in the Niger Delta. The National Assembly should work with the President to ensure the Bill can be passed, maintaining its provisions to strengthen NOSDRA's remit to prevent and respond to oil spill pollution.
- Fifth, finalise the timetable for petroleum sector reform. The Government should develop and commit to a timetable for the passage of the various parts of the Petroleum Industry Bill. The Bill is a long-overdue piece of legislation, first drafted more than 15 years ago, intended to reform the oil and gas sector. The timetable should plan for the passage of the Bill within 12 months, and contain concrete commitments to include meaningful input from civil society representatives from the Niger Delta in the final bill.
- Sixth, reform one of the key institutions responsible for socioeconomic development in the Niger Delta, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Clear early signs of reform at the Commission would show strategic commitment to the region, and ensure better use of the largest Federal fund impacting the Niger Delta. With new appointments due there is an opportunity to appoint reformers not aspiring for political office.

The situation in the Niger Delta is complex, and requires a comprehensive response to protect and promote the rights of those living there and to avoid instability. However, acting on the priorities above would help reduce the immediate risk of agitation. This, in turn, would create a more stable environment in which politicians and officials could implement longer-term initiatives. Elections might then become more about voters passing judgement on government.

Civil society groups stand ready to support the implementation of this work, and SDN itself is engaging with political leaders on these six points. The new Government should make plain its commitment to resolving the long-running crisis in the Niger Delta.

Recommendations

To address the specific election-related challenges above, we propose the following recommendations to strengthen democratic institutions and processes in Nigeria.

To improve the conduct of campaigning, political parties and their candidates need to:

- Make clear commitments to developing detailed, legitimate political platforms, and then act on them by campaigning based on securing popular support.
- End the sponsorship of gangs and armed groups as a primary means of securing votes.
- End the use of inflammatory language towards opponents and institutions (such as INEC) tasked with conducting and securing elections.
- In conjunction with INEC, commit to training and regulating the conduct of party agents so that they engage responsibly with voting and collation during polls, and refrain from harassing voters and competitors.

To reduce interference in the results chain, INEC needs to:

- Act on long-awaited promises to publish and release online breakdowns of results from elections to all political offices.
- Conduct and publish a thorough review of the challenges it faced during the elections, and identify a strategy to address these. This should specifically include reviewing the logistical plans for the preparation and distribution of election materials, the use of card readers, and ensuring the free movement of staff and material on election day itself. The strategy should include a clear plan to secure stakeholder support for changes in its approach.
- Develop, communicate and implement a reinforced strategy to protect vote counting and collation processes, including preventive measures to deal with interference and the denial of access by accredited observers to polling units and collation centres.
- Establish a clear plan for the roll-out of the electronic publication and transmission of results, including publicly on the internet.

To increase confidence in their impartiality and commitment to democracy, the security services need to:

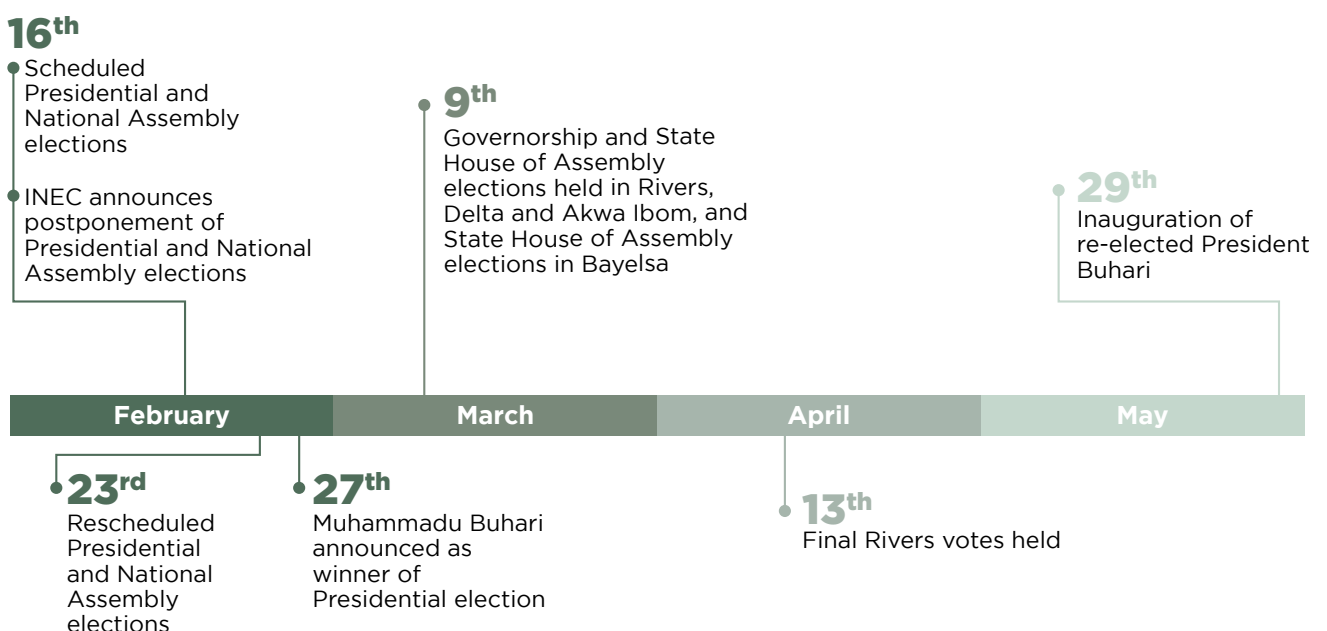
- Fully and openly support any independent reviews of partisan behaviour by security personnel, and interference in voting and collation processes.
- Commit to ensuring all personnel and their units are readily identifiable with clear, visible IDs during election duty and accountable to deployment instructions agreed with INEC.
- Enforce regulations that prevent personnel from accompanying or acting in collaboration with political actors on and adjacent to election days. This should include a safe mechanism for interference to be reported by security personnel, and clear provisions for how such reports will be acted on, both immediately and after the event.
- In conjunction with INEC, prosecute electoral violence offenders, starting with those who have assaulted or sponsored attacks on INEC officials.

- In conjunction with INEC, develop a programme for the prevention, identification and prosecution of vote buying and selling during election periods.

To strengthen the legislative and regulatory foundations of democracy in Nigeria, the National Assembly and Presidency need to:

- Pass the *Electoral Act 2018* as a first step to addressing legal and regulatory needs to support electoral processes.
- Deepen civilian oversight of the military to prevent attempts to influence electoral processes.
- Ensure that further legislative amendments agreed with INEC are passed into law no later than 18 months before the next election (that is, in August 2021), and that funds are made available to INEC in a sufficient time to develop and implement its election planning.
- Work with INEC and other stakeholders to limit the abuse of laws for the creation of political parties.
- Amend on the appointment of INEC National and State Commissioners to limit, as far as possible, the scope for political bias. Presently, these are all appointed by the President, with the only external consultation being a Senate confirmation.
- Demand greater commitment from social media companies to combat online voter manipulation in Nigeria, in line with their efforts in Europe and the US. A clear example is the Facebook Ad Library. The US Ad Library has a complete list of political adverts paid for by political actors. At the time of writing, no such library exists in Nigeria.
- Establish an inquiry to systematically understand how social media was used in the elections across Nigeria, and based on this information update electoral codes and data protection laws to set clear rules about what can and cannot be done on social media during election periods.

Timeline of the Nigerian elections



Abbreviations and acronyms

AAC	African Action Congress
ACLED	Armed Conflict, Location and Event Data Project
ACDEG	African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance
APC	All Progressive Congress
APDA	Advanced People’s Democratic Alliance
CSSR	Civil Society Situation Room
DRI	Democracy Reporting International
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
LGA	Local Government Area
PDP	People’s Democratic Party
PU	Polling Unit
PVC	Permanent Voters Card
SDN	Stakeholder Democracy Network

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1. Introduction

Niger Delta Watch 2019 was a citizen-led election observation project. It reported on the 2019 Nigerian Presidential and Governorship elections in four Niger Delta states: Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, and Akwa Ibom States.

The context for this work is the trouble that previous elections in Nigeria have experienced, often in the form of electoral fraud and violence. These problems have been acute in the Niger Delta, which also has very complex politics linked to its status as the source of Nigeria's oil wealth.

However, Nigeria's 2015 election cycle was a key milestone. It saw an incumbent President relinquish power via the ballot box for the first time since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999.

This project aimed to help address concerns about violence and interference in previous polls and risks in the 2019 polls, by generating accurate information on the election campaign as it unfolded in the Niger Delta.

To do this, *Niger Delta Watch 2019* trained nearly 100 citizen Election Observers, Social Media Analysts and Data Analysts in how to safely and accurately report on election activity. From November 2018 to March 2019, they submitted nearly 700 individual incident reports and other analysis on events related to a number of risk areas identified as relevant to the Niger Delta.* Although this initiative may have been smaller than other observation missions, it was able to deliver coverage before and then throughout the election period, enabling the assessment of longer-term patterns and risks. These were discussed in 15 weekly reports, published for the benefit of the Nigerian Government, Nigerian electoral agencies, journalists, researchers, civil society organisations, and others working to support democracy in Nigeria.

This 16th report provides an overall assessment of the 2019 Nigerian election cycle in the Niger Delta. Its analysis is divided into four main sections. First, it describes some overall patterns in incidents which took place from November 2018 to April 2019. Second, it discusses four sets of challenges during the election weekends themselves, focusing on each of the project's target states. Third, it analyses the technical quality of election day processes, looking at specific incidents in the context of Nigerian and regional regulations and standards. Fourth, it summarises insights on how social media was used to influence the information environment during the project's reporting period.

The report also includes summary analysis of survey data on how different groups involved perceived the overall quality of the elections.

*More details on how reporting was produced are included in the methodology.

2. Methodology

This report was produced by the *Niger Delta Watch 2019* team. It is based on:

- The project's bespoke database of nearly 700 election incident reports, submitted by around 80 citizen observers, and SDN staff who participated in observation during specific election weekends.
- Analysis from a State Coordinator in each target state, who represented a civil society organisation coordinating local observers.
- Media reports.
- Data from surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions held as part of the project.

The project's citizen observers were active from late November 2018 to March 2019, with some continuing to report in April 2019, in order to cover the final stages of the Rivers State elections. Prior to this, they took part in a bespoke training workshop in Port Harcourt on how to safely and accurately report on election-related incidents. This specifically included sessions on gender-related aspects of election issues. The incidents reported on for this project related to five broad risk areas identified as being relevant to the elections in the Niger Delta: electoral preparations, procedures and standards, fraud and corruption, intimidation of voters and civil society, political party and campaign misconduct, and violence.

All observers reported operationally to a State Coordinator (representing an NGO appointed in each state with specific knowledge of local electoral issues) as well as to SDN, which helped to monitor and review their activity. In Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta states, observers submitted incident reports principally via a secure online portal. These were 'cleaned' and coded according to an internal quality control process developed for the project. Akwa Ibom State had a smaller pool of observers, who submitted incident reports directly to their State Coordinator. Where possible, the information included in these reports was verified via other sources, including in the media, police, and other civil society organisations, as well as the local networks of each State Coordinator and their organisation.

Having participated in the broader observation training, a number of social media and data analysts were provided with additional training to support project activities. The data analysts were provided with an overview of how to use the data analytics platform to examine incident data, while the social media analysts were provided with an overview of how social media can be used to manipulate public perceptions via inflammatory speech, disinformation campaigns, and targeted ads.

Niger Delta Watch 2019 was clearly not in a position to capture every incident that took place during the election cycle. However, we consider that the data collected provides an independent picture of the conduct of the election, especially given local observers' reach into rural and other areas—which can be more physically difficult to access for traditional observation initiatives—and that observers were able to begin their work well in advance of formal polling.

As well as this overall assessment, the data generated contributed to 15 weekly reports. These are available from www.stakeholderdemocracy.org.

Niger Delta Watch 2019 was informed by SDN's 15 years' engagement with the Niger Delta, including extensive research and programming on elections-related issues in the region.

3. The 2019 Nigerian elections

This section of the report provides an incident-based analysis of the 2019 Nigerian elections in the Niger Delta. It is divided into three main sections. First, it provides an overview of the outcome and results of the Presidential and Governorship elections in the Niger Delta. Second, it highlights key periods of activity during the election period, by looking at trends in the incident data reported by *Niger Delta Watch 2019*. Third, it provides insight into four key challenges of the election period, broken down by state, which were significant across the region: pre-election intimidation, the disruption and diversion of election materials, violence against INEC staff and security personnel, and the disruption of collation.

3.1 Overview and results

This section summarises the outcome of the 2019 Nigerian elections.

3.1.1 Results: Presidential elections

Incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari, of the All Progressive Congress (APC), was declared the winner of the 2019 Nigerian Presidential election held on 23 February 2019. He won with approximately 15 million votes. His main opponent, People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Atiku Abubakar, received approximately 11 million votes.

President Buhari has a core block of support in northern Nigeria, while the PDP dominates most states in the south-south and south-east. Reflecting this, in 2019, Atiku won in all the Niger Delta states. However, this was with markedly lower turnouts than 2015, while there were pockets of support for Buhari in contentious local government Areas (LGAs). Turnout was clearly suppressed in some areas, including in Rivers state, where participation fell from 67% in 2015 (when it was criticised as being inflated) to 21% in 2019. The degree to which politics in Nigeria is a two-party race was reflected in the fact that nationally and locally the other competing parties scored around 1% of votes combined.

Rivers State turnout was nearly half that of Borno state (41%)—which is still regarded as an active conflict zone.¹ Although there were other states with turnouts around the Rivers level, the 2019 elections saw large numbers of voters either violently disenfranchised or discouraged from going to the polls. The overall turnout across southern Nigeria has been put at 27%, compared to 41% across northern Nigeria.²

3.1.2 Notable results: National Assembly

The PDP dominated in National Assembly seats in the Niger Delta, despite some inroads made by the APC in Delta and Bayelsa States. This was despite the notable challenge the APC faced in Rivers, where it lost all its National Assembly seats as a result of an internal dispute over its primary selection process. This had to be resolved in court, and ultimately led to APC candidates being ruled ineligible to contest the elections. None of the proxy candidates who stood for other parties in their place were successful.

* Observers were active from late November 2018 until mid-April 2019, for the final Rivers elections. Note that observer activity and data collection were dependent on a number of factors, including physical access to rural and difficult areas, mobile data access, and security concerns. The analysis in this section (and throughout the report) is based on SDN's interpretations of the overall data set, supplemented by analysis received from the project's state-level coordinators and other sources during the election cycle.

In Akwa Ibom State, a number of PDP representatives had defected to the APC prior to the elections. However, they all lost, including Senator Akpabio (former Governor). All the incumbents in Delta retained their seats (two PDP and one APC), while the APC gained a senate seat in Bayelsa State.

3.1.3 Results: Governorship

Table 1 presents the results of the Governorship elections in the four project states.

Table 1: Governorship election results

State	Winner	Main opponent
Akwa Ibom	Udom Emmanuel (PDP)	Nsima Ekere (APC)
Bayelsa	<i>This election is 'off-cycle' and is scheduled to take place in November 2019</i>	
Delta	Ifeanyi Okowa (PDP)	Great Ogboru (APC)
Rivers	Nyesom Wike (PDP)	Biokamabo Awara (AAC)

3.2 Trends in incident data

This section highlights some key aspects of the data collected as part of *Niger Delta Watch 2019*.*

3.2.1 Election incidents in numbers

From 15 November 2018 to 31 March 2019, our reporting identified the following:

- 116 cases of bribery.
- 159 violent incidents.
- 103 fatalities.
- 38 incidents of destruction, manipulation or theft of campaign materials (such as billboards and posters).
- 36 cases of detention, intimidation or disappearance of party candidates or supporters.
- 35 cases involving detention, intimidation or disappearance of voters or civil society members.
- 31 incidents involving delays or irregularities in voting preparations or processes.
- 29 riots or protests.
- 16 incidents of destruction, manipulation or theft of voting materials or systems.
- 12 incidents involving campaign misconduct or irregularities.

*Observers were active from late November 2018 until mid-April 2019, for the final Rivers elections. Note that observer activity and data collection were dependent on a number of factors, including physical access to rural and difficult areas, mobile data access, and security concerns. The analysis in this section (and throughout the report) is based on SDN's interpretations of the overall data set, supplemented by analysis received from the project's state-level coordinators and other sources during the election cycle.

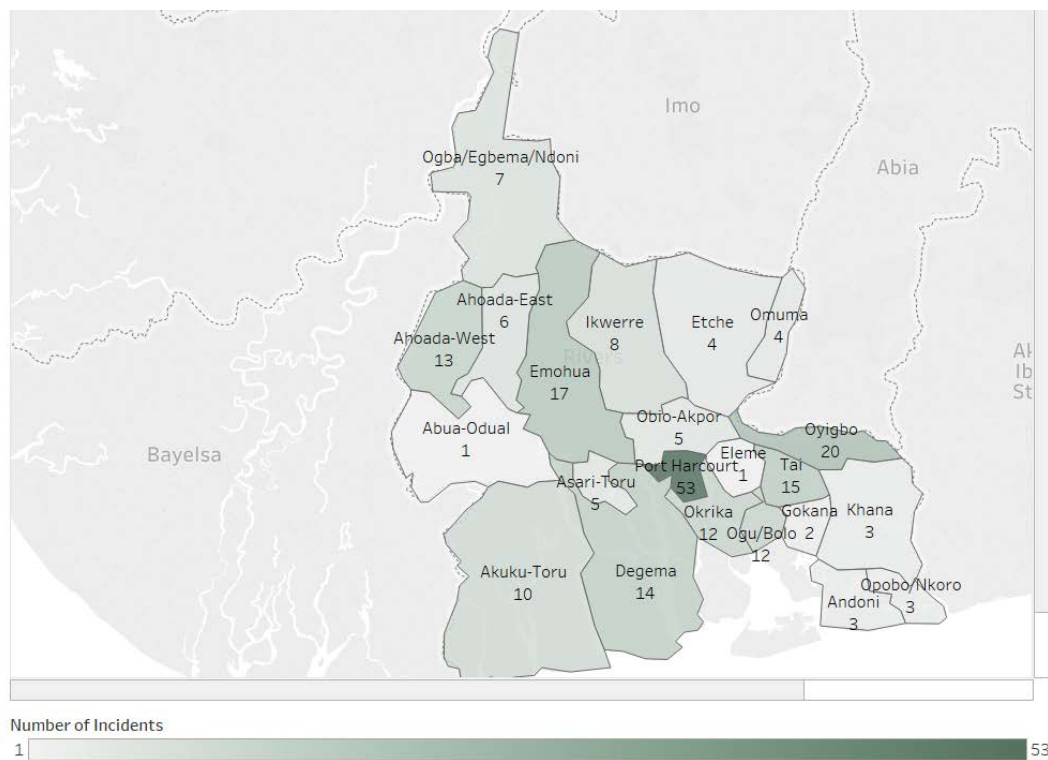
A number of these incidents had a major impact. In the Presidential elections, six local governments in Rivers state were unable to complete their elections, with many more wards impacted—leading to cancellations affecting more than 900,000 voters who were disenfranchised in these areas. In addition, collation in Rivers state was suspended during the state-level elections after interference by uniformed personnel. This was a first nationally, and will have repercussions for confidence in the security services and the ability to hold elections without interference in Nigeria.

3.2.2 Incidents by area

Figures 1-4 show all incidents reported by *Niger Delta Watch* 2019 by local government area (LGA), between 15 November 2018 and 31 March 2019, across the four project states.* Overall, we received the most reports from Port Harcourt (54 reports), Nembe (46), and Uyo (34).

3.2.2.1 Rivers State

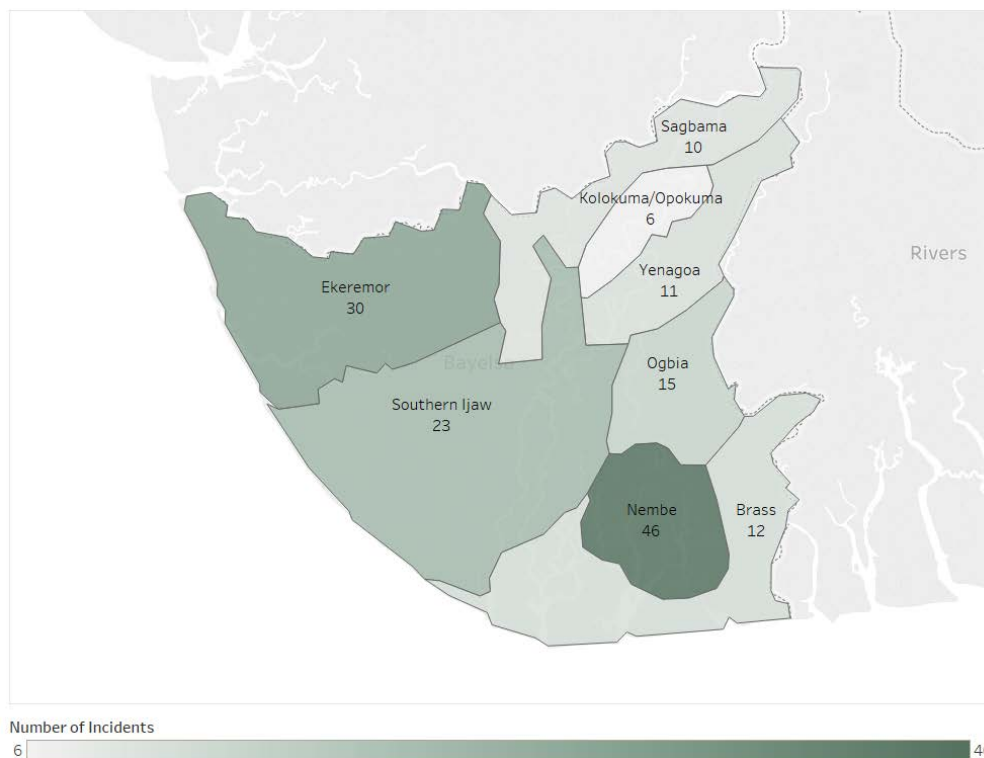
Figure 1: Incidents reported by *Niger Delta Watch* 2019 by LGA, Rivers State



*Note that this data is absolute, and so a higher number of incidents in a particular area does not necessarily mean the elections were worse there. For example, Port Harcourt is one of the most densely populated LGAs in the region, as well as Obio Akpor, which was a focal point for tension, even if it did not see a high number of incidents. Port Harcourt and Uyo are also the capitals of Rivers and Akwa Ibom States, and to an extent these numbers reflect the degree of political tensions and clashes in these states as a whole. Protests over the actions of the major two parties, election officials, and security, were largely focused on these two centres, although both cities were actually quieter on the election weekends themselves.

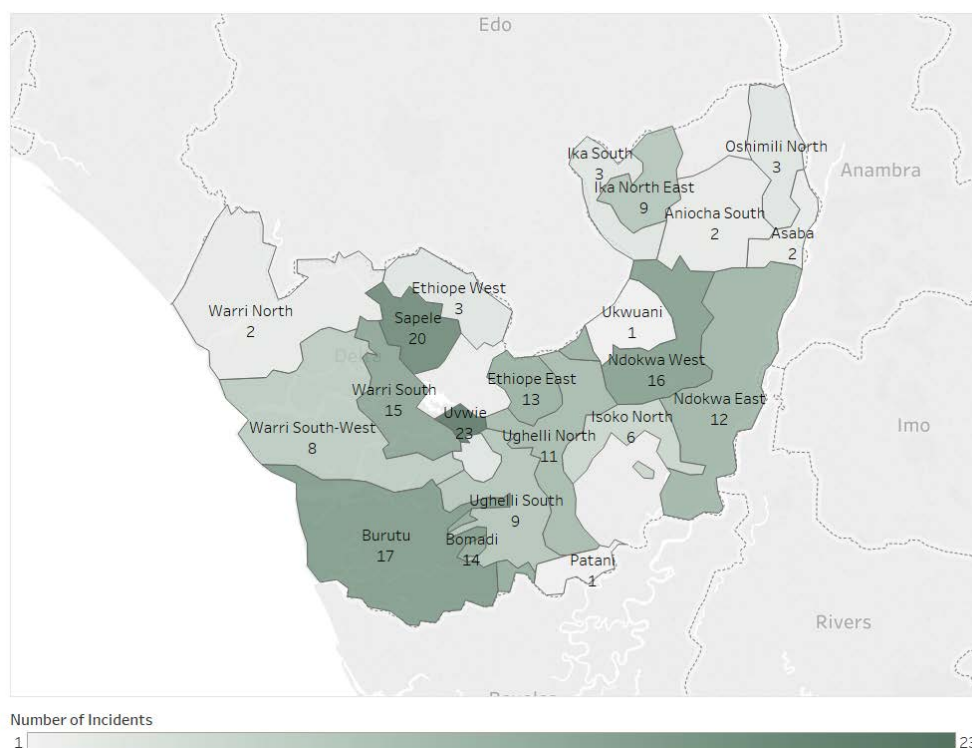
3.2.2.2 Bayelsa State

Figure 2: Incidents reported by Niger Delta Watch 2019 by LGA, Bayelsa State



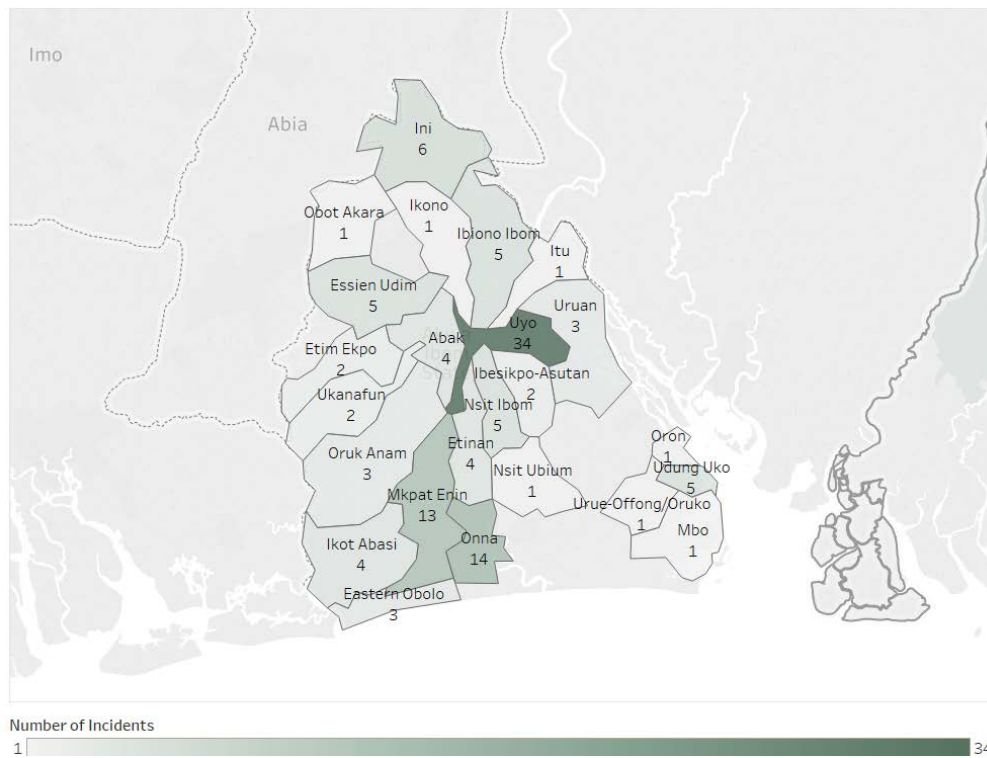
3.2.2.3 Delta State

Figure 3: Incidents reported by Niger Delta Watch 2019 by LGA, Delta State



3.2.2.4 Akwa Ibom State

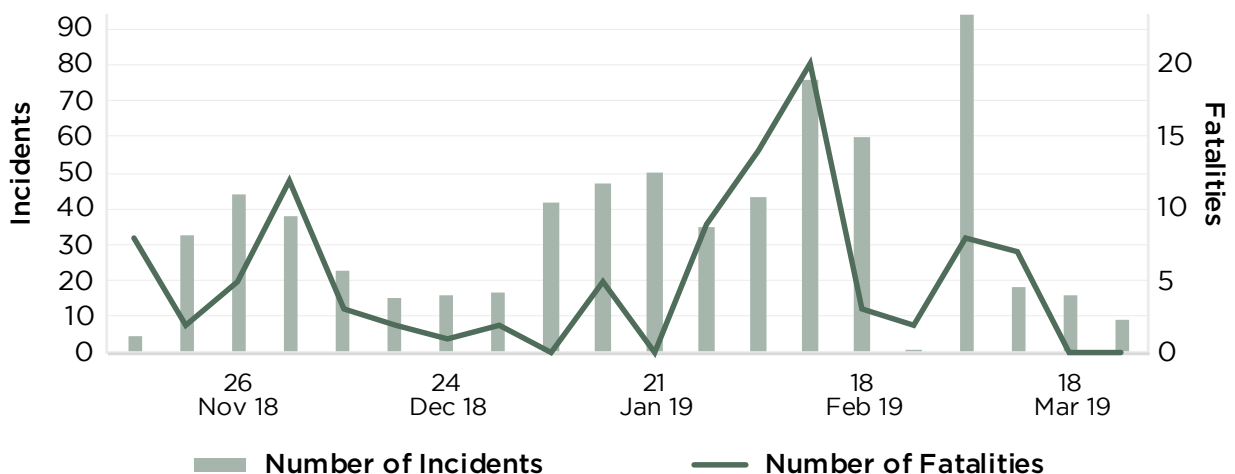
Figure 4: Incidents reported by Niger Delta Watch 2019 by LGA, Akwa Ibom State



3.2.3 Incidents and fatalities

Figure 5 shows the total number of incidents and fatalities reported across all four states throughout the reporting period. This reflects the pattern repeatedly reported by Niger Delta Watch 2019 observers and state coordinators. They noted significant fear of violence and manipulation, but in the context of a relatively low level of activity before the elections. Potential sponsors of interference were reported to be holding back resources for the main polling weekends, and investing less in early disruption and conventional campaigning. The later spikes in activity relate to the approach of the weekends on which the actual elections were held, in line with the narrative that politicians were ‘saving’ their funds for direct intervention later.

Figure 5: Incidents and fatalities reported by Niger Delta Watch 2019



The two biggest peaks in the number of incidents were around the Presidential and Governorship election weekends, on 23 February and 9 March. During these periods we received numerous reports of vote buying, violence against civilians, the intimidation of voters, and delays or irregularities in voting preparations. These weekends also saw reports of interference with collation, which is the process of totalling vote counts from different polling units.

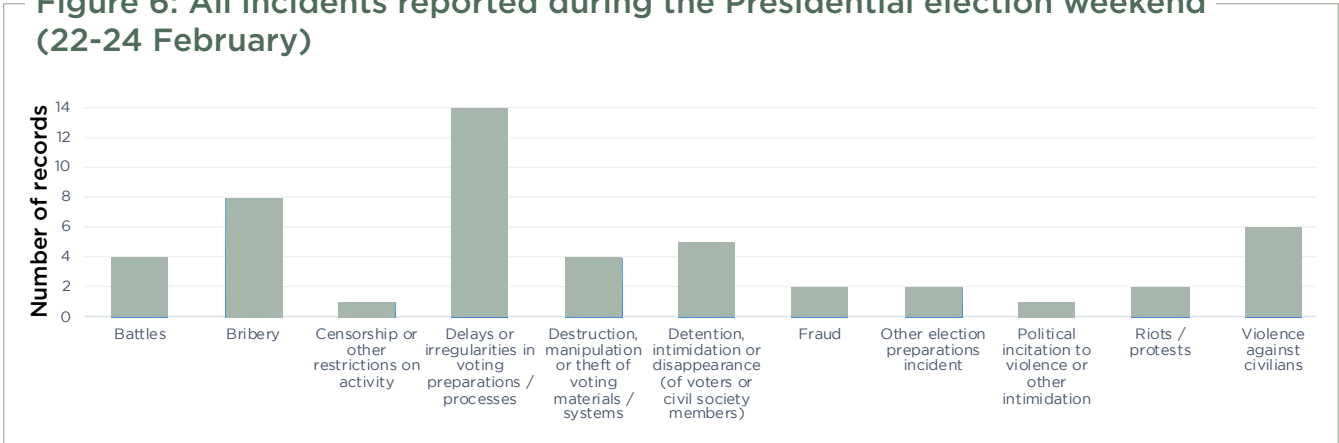
The main incident that led to the increase in fatalities in the weeks immediately preceding the general election was an APC campaign rally for President Buhari on 12 February in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, during which 15 people were reported killed in a stampede as Buhari left the Adokiye Amiesimaka stadium after delivering his speech. Fatalities dropped after the Presidential election, and then increased again around the period of the Governorship elections on 9 March.

Rivers State had the biggest spike in fatalities across the states (and, reports indicate, the highest number of fatalities nationwide for the weekend of the Presidential election), including a number of people killed in Abonnema, in Akuku Toru LGA. This has been put at anywhere between the official figure of six killed, including two security personnel, and 30 killed, according to community sources, amid allegations of bodies being dumped in creeks in the area.³

3.2.4 The Presidential and Governorship election weekends

Figures 6 and 7 in the following section show the types of incidents that were reported over the two main election weekends. Figure 6 presents *Niger Delta Watch 2019* data collected over the Presidential election period (the weekend of 22-24 February 2019), disaggregated by reporting sub-category.

Figure 6: All incidents reported during the Presidential election weekend (22-24 February)



The most common type of incident during the Presidential election was delays or irregularities in voting preparations or processes. These included local delays in the distribution of election materials by INEC and the security services, card reader failures, and issues over privacy of voting booths, as well as voting ending later than scheduled. Other incidents had a wider impact, such as the diversion of election materials (leading to cancellation or rigging), or the prevention of access to collation centres by the military and police.

The most severe disruption was in Rivers State, where six local governments saw voting or results cancelled outright, and wards cancelled in most other LGAs in the state. Akwa Ibom State followed, with serious disruption to election processes in the senatorial district of former Governor Godswill Akpabio during the Presidential and National Assembly polls, leading to a major dispute, discussed later.

Figure 7: All incidents reported by *Niger Delta Watch 2019* during the Governorship election weekend (8-10 March)

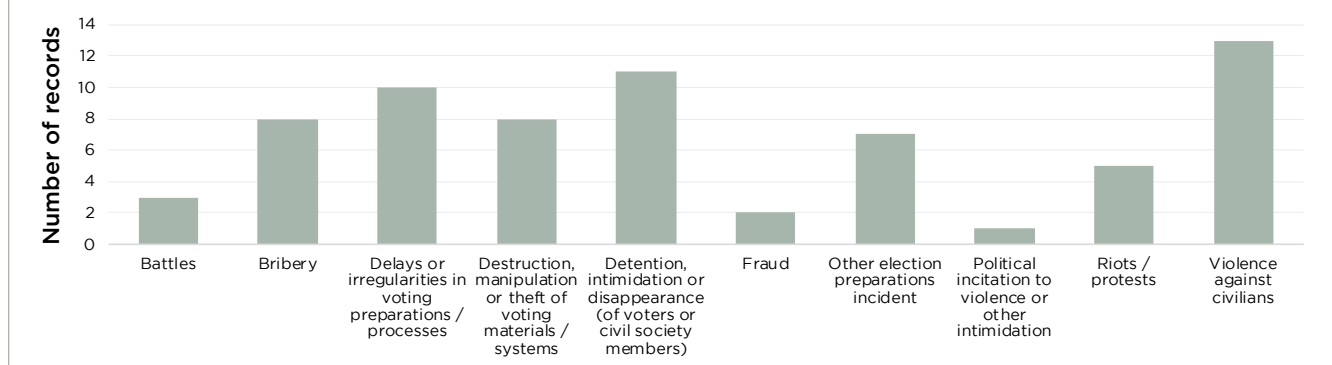


Figure 7 presents the data collected over the Governorship election period. While also involving incidents related to electoral processes (for example, there were several reports from Akwa Ibom State of the police aiding political thugs in ballot box snatching), this period saw notably more incidents of violence and voter intimidation compared with the Presidential election period.

There was violence between the APC and PDP, as well as from the military against civilians and party members, and multiple fatalities were reported over the Governorship election period. Uniformed personnel were again also involved in the intimidation of voters at the polls, which was a particular problem, and led to the suspension of vote counting for these elections in Rivers State.

3.2.5 Key incident risk areas

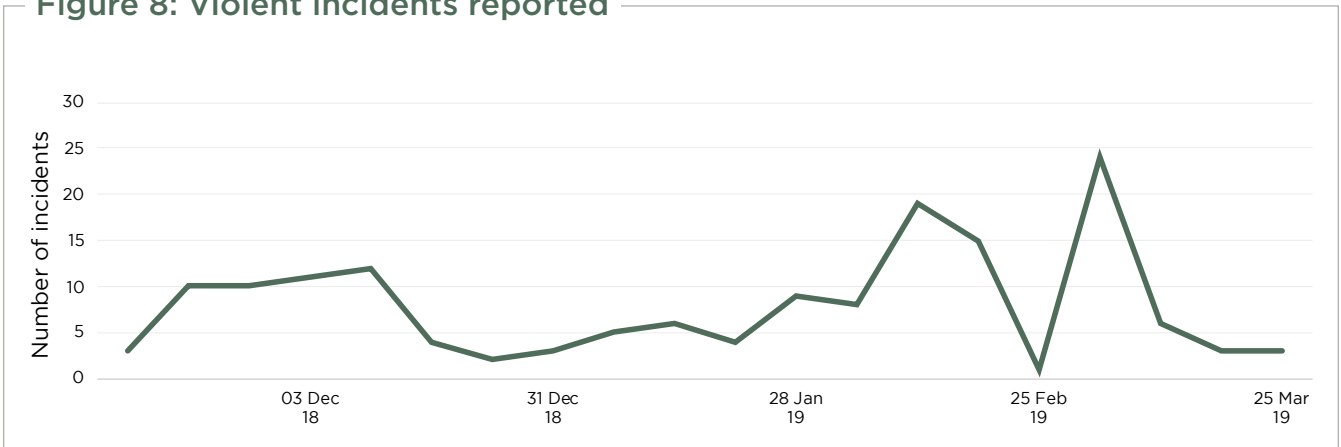
Figures 8-12 show incidents reported over the duration of the project, by the five main risk areas relevant to the Niger Delta which were identified for this project. These were electoral preparations, procedures and standards; fraud and corruption; intimidation of voters and civil society; political party and campaign misconduct; and violence.

3.2.5.1 Violence

Violence is frequent in the Niger Delta, and election patterns are not necessarily easy to distinguish from generalised insecurity. However, there were three spikes in reports of violent incidents based on *Niger Delta Watch 2019* incident data: the first, in December; the second, around the Presidential election; and the third, around the Governorship election.

Battles between cult groups, believed to be affiliated to opposing political actors, were common in the pre-election phase, while on the election weekends there were many incidents of armed thugs targeting civilians and INEC staff. Various party members were also targeted in the build up to, and immediately before, the elections. The number of reports of violence recorded by our observers was higher during the Governorship election compared to the Presidential election. This reflects different factors. For example, there were reduced gross numbers of reports during the Presidential poll by observers in some areas for reasons that ranged from individual incidents having a large impact (such as elections never beginning in Bonny, in the Rivers State Presidential elections) through to outright cancellations suppressing reports of further incidents.

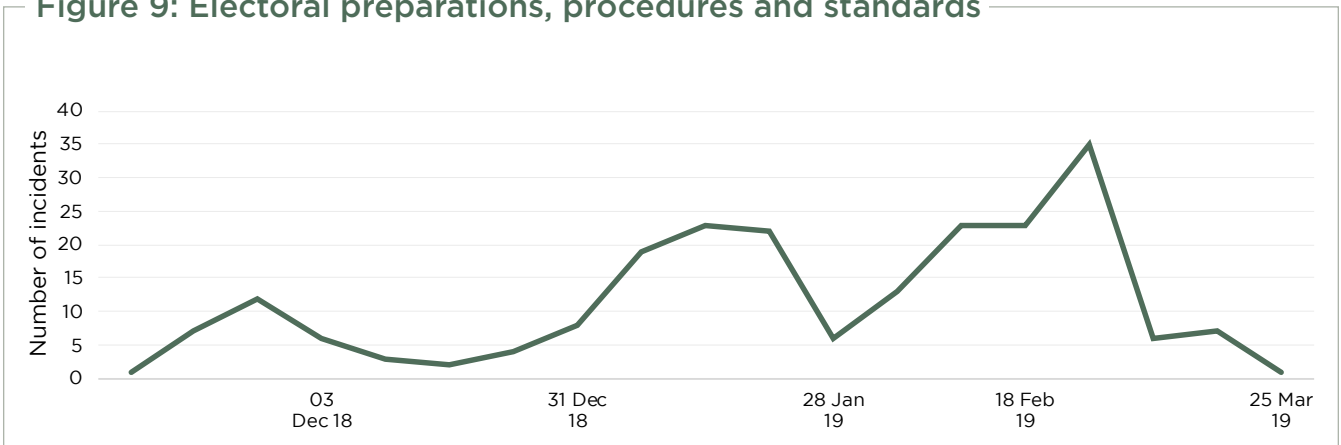
Figure 8: Violent incidents reported



3.2.5.2 Electoral preparations, procedures, and standards

Between the Presidential and Governorship election period, violence decreased, but the number of incidents related to electoral preparations, procedures, and standards increased. This increase relates to a period characterised by political candidates making various accusations towards each other, often covered by the media and with protests in state capitals. For example, ahead of the Governorship elections, the PDP accused the APC of importing political thugs into Akwa Ibom State. More generally, candidates claimed throughout the cycle that their opponents were planning to disrupt the elections. The spike in March in the graph below coincides with the Governorship election day, which saw multiple delays to voting processes and the destruction or theft of voting materials.

Figure 9: Electoral preparations, procedures and standards



3.2.5.3 Voter and civil society intimidation

Incidents involving voter and civil society intimidation spiked over the election period. These often related to the military suppressing voter participation at polling stations. The military were also involved in denying access by election observers to results collation. This had an impact in all four states, but was particularly severe in Rivers and Akwa Ibom States. Some observers who attempted to track results were harassed and assaulted by security personnel. In Rivers State, denied access to collation during the Governorship poll was often in areas that were cancelled during the Presidential poll.

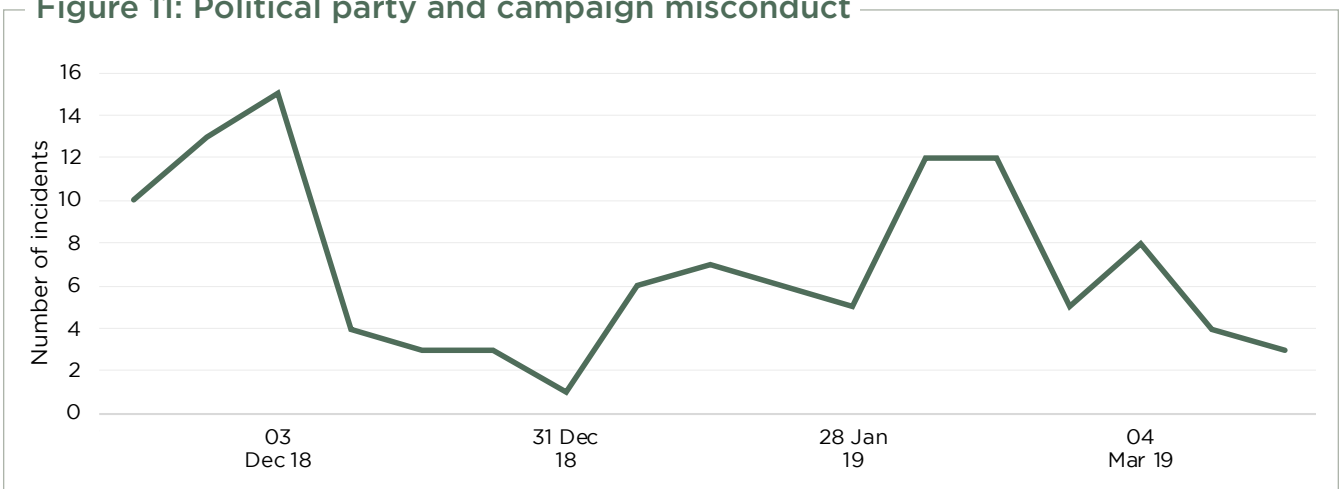
Figure 10: Voter and civil society intimidation



3.2.5.4 Political party and campaign misconduct

Incidents relating to this risk area included the widespread destruction of public campaign materials, particularly billboards—which affected all parties, sometimes in tit-for-tat exchanges, during campaigning. Other examples of campaign misconduct included a candidate reportedly openly encouraging his supporters to attack members of other parties campaigning in the area.

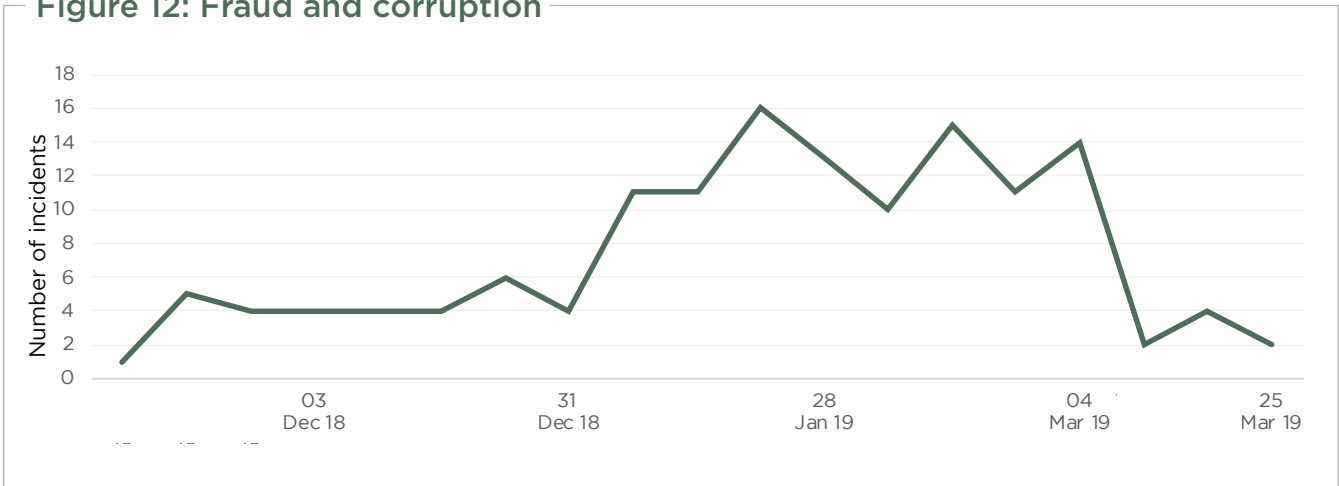
Figure 11: Political party and campaign misconduct



3.2.5.5 Fraud and corruption

Incidents of fraud and corruption remained relatively high from January onwards, as political parties carried out their campaigns. These were characterised by situations where candidates visited communities on the campaign trail and distributed money in exchange for votes. This clearly peaked during election weekends, with last-minute attempts to bribe the electorate or buy votes at polling stations. Gift-giving continued in the post-election period, with rewards for those who voted for particular parties.

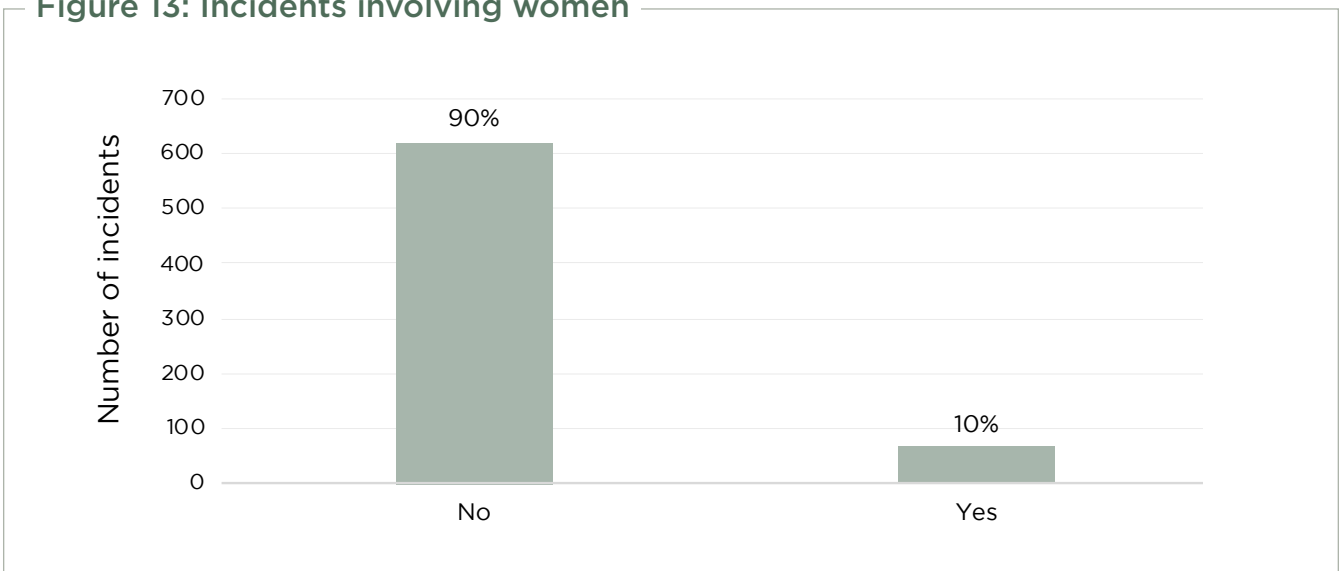
Figure 12: Fraud and corruption



3.2.6 Election incidents and gender

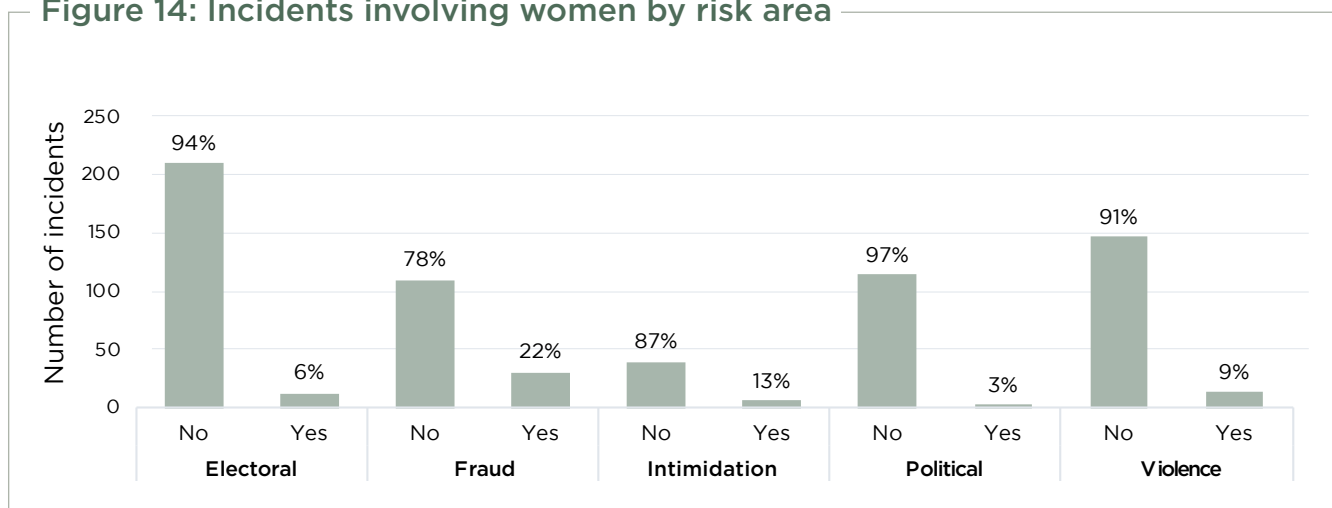
The *Niger Delta Watch 2019* team explicitly coded incidents that involved women. Figure 13 demonstrates that overall, 10% of incidents involved women.*

Figure 13: Incidents involving women



*Election observers were asked to note in their reporting where an incident had a specific gender angle, or involved women. These incidents were then explicitly coded in the project's database as 'involving women'. This means that other incidents did not necessarily not involve women, but that it was not possible to confirm definitively.

Figure 14: Incidents involving women by risk area



Once these incidents are disaggregated by the risk areas used for this project, the most notable feature is that in both absolute and relative terms, the highest number of incidents involving women relates to fraud and corruption.

Among the incidents recorded are concerns relating to bribery. Examples come from early January, when an APC candidate visited Tai in Rivers State on his campaign tour, during which he distributed cash to 100 widows and orphans. In a separate incident, which took place in Ndokwa West in Delta State towards the end of January, a PDP candidate donated cash and gifts to women and young people who attended his rally. Similar incidents were reported throughout the project and across its target states, reflecting similar observations from previous election cycles. The dynamic suggests that women may have been specifically targeted (along with other more vulnerable groups, including the elderly) by party candidates for donations of money and gifts.

Of all fatalities reported in our data, only five of these were women, potentially indicating that women were less targeted by violence. This might be expected, given the greater formal involvement of men in politics, and the tendency for men to be involved in gang violence in the region. However, this topic needs further research.

3.3 The elections by state

As part of this initiative, we identified four key challenges which had a particularly significant impact on the elections. This section discusses these challenges in each state, providing examples of specific incidents to illustrate the problems faced. The four areas are:

- **Pre-election intimidation**, such as ‘shows of force’, or the partisan arrest of politicians.
- **Disruption and diversion of election materials**, which was reported as being carried out by a mixture of armed groups, often accompanying politicians, and uniformed personnel.
- **Violence against INEC staff and security personnel**, which was seen throughout the region, but particularly in Rivers State.
- **The disruption of collation**, which was severe in Rivers and Akwa Ibom states.

3.3.1 Rivers State

3.3.1.1 Rivers State summary

Both the national and state elections in Rivers State were severely disrupted, though with different aspects dominating the weekends of the Presidential and Governorship elections. Over the Presidential election weekend, violence was severe in some LGAs, and the combined impact of this, and the outright disruption of collation, saw only 677,000 votes cast, from an electorate of over three million people. It also led to the state recording the highest reported fatalities, nationally, over the weekend, including two soldiers and two ad hoc INEC staff.

The election cycle in Rivers State saw military raids in November and cult violence in December, which continued over the Christmas period. Politically, the state was dominated by an ongoing court case relating to the APC's internal candidate selection process, which ultimately led to APC candidates being ruled ineligible to stand. This meant that Rivers State had the most obvious drop in campaign activity compared with previous years, as the PDP effectively fought the election there unopposed. However, in a tragic campaigning incident, days before the initially scheduled 16 February Presidential election, 15 civilians were reported killed in a stampede after a campaign rally for President Buhari in Port Harcourt on 13 February.

3.3.1.2 Pre-election intimidation

In Rivers State, high profile incidents included a raid on the house of former agitator Ateke Tom, and the arrest of PDP officials before the polls (for example, the arrest of Education Commissioner Dr Taminosisi Jaja immediately before the Governorship poll). In other incidents, shows of force by the security services in PDP strongholds were very likely factors in reducing turnout, due to voter fears of violence.

3.3.1.3 Disruption and diversion of election materials

In the national polls, reporting alternated between LGAs facing problems with initiating elections at all, and those where materials were being hijacked. There were serious incidents in the national polls in Ikwerre, Khana, where polls in two wards were cancelled, and Asari Toru, where wards representing approximately half of all LGAs were cancelled.

Overall, elections were cancelled or not held across six full local governments—Bonny, Emohua, Ikwerre, Akuku Toru, Ahoada West, and Ikwerre—while there was widespread disruption in Obio Akpor, and Asari Toru. Wards were impacted in almost all other local governments.

In the Governorship elections, there was again widespread disruption, but a smaller overall impact because only one local government was fully cancelled. Politicians and armed uniformed personnel reportedly intervened in Gokana, Asari Toru, Eleme, Emohua, and other local governments.

3.3.1.3 Violence against INEC staff and security personnel

Rivers was exceptional in its record of violence against officials. While observers do not have a tally of injured election officials, two ad hoc staff were killed while traveling to collation centres—the only deaths of officials nationally in the first weekend polls. Two soldiers were killed in the same weekend in Abonnema, while two more were injured in a clash. Accounts are contested but this was alleged to have involved the convoy of the Rivers State Governor.

3.3.1.4 Disruption of collation

Collation of results was severely disrupted in both elections in Rivers. In the national elections, collation was disrupted at the local government level and did not recover. Almost half the cancelled votes in Rivers were due to local government collation being disrupted, either directly by military personnel or by armed groups clashing with security services. The deaths of the two INEC ad-hoc staff as they travelled to collation centres underlined the severity of the security breakdown around collation.

INEC Electoral Officers for Ikwerre and Okrika LGAs reported publicly that military personnel had intervened and effectively shut down collation of results in their area in the national polls. The Electoral Officer for Emohua reported on the theft of results sheets and a lack of contact with a returning officer, in circumstances that seemed to make it impossible for the results that he was presenting to have been collated. In the Governorship elections, disruption of collation continued the same basic geographic pattern from the first weekend. However, attention from both major political parties was clearly now on 'flipping' results from those at polling units or dramatically increasing 'turnout' in their favour.

Military personnel were again reported preventing observers and party agents from gaining access to collation, with key personnel being escorted out of collation centres early in proceedings in some LGAs (such as in Asari Toru). Questions arose on the whereabouts of collation personnel when they had clearly left collation centres but had not arrived at the state collation office by the Sunday morning after polls. INEC staff later confirmed in post-election meetings that military personnel were screening those bringing results to the state office and redirecting them if they were not already 'approved'.

It was the combination of this screening and personnel inside the state office that led to the unprecedented suspension of results collation in the state.

The question of collated results was eventually concluded amid additional controversy and protests, after an INEC investigation and a resumption that produced results in favour of PDP across the board. While most results were consistent with the limited unit level results seen by observers, the disruption was at such a level that few conclusions could be drawn on the validity of the results chain.

Tracking the credibility of results was difficult to impossible, as observers were repeatedly excluded from collation centres in both weekends. However, results in some LGAs were implausibly high compared to turnouts observed at polling units, especially in the Governorship elections.⁴

Allegations and observer reports of interference by military personnel took two main forms. There were reports of disruption at unit level, usually in the company of politicians, and interference at the level of local government collation. Both problems were too widespread to be seen as a localised problem and, before the national polls, there had never been an allegation of military personnel being accused of coming to a collation centre and systematically disrupting proceedings.

There were reports of uniformed personnel accompanying politicians in the Governorship poll when appropriating materials in Gokana, Asari Toru, Akuku Toru, and other LGAs.

In the post-elections period, the Nigerian Army cast doubt on whether it was really military personnel involved in disruption and violence at the polls. In the case of uniformed personnel accompanying politicians, the question of how many of these were cases of impersonation remains open. There have been a number of arrests by the security services of groups alleged to be impersonating security personnel

but these fall far short of the number of incidents across the state. In the case of security personnel around collation centres, the question of who was acting has little ambiguity—these were personnel interacting with colleagues and other agencies posted to these locations and, on a number of occasions, the commanding personnel were named in statements by INEC officials and others. The military continue to dispute accounts of their interference and their own investigation is ongoing at the time of writing.

3.3.2 Bayelsa State

3.3.2.1 Bayelsa State summary

The build-up to the elections in Bayelsa saw various attempts to intimidate and prevent political candidates and their supporters from participating. This included the destruction of campaign materials, the disruption of campaign rallies and meetings, cult clashes, killings, and the destruction of property belonging to politicians and their supporters.

A number of INEC officials, and its ad hoc staff, were reportedly harassed and intimidated in the course of performing their duties during the elections, while the atmosphere overall contributed to low voter turnout.

In the final tally, the PDP won the Presidential elections with 197,933 votes to the APC's 118,821. However, the long-established political hegemony in the state was broken in the National Assembly, with the APC securing three seats in the House of Representatives.

The Governorship election here is 'off-cycle' and scheduled to take place in November 2019. However, the Bayelsa State House of Assembly elections took place in March. During these elections, there was large scale vote buying by both the APC and PDP. There was also violence in some areas, despite the heavy presence of armed personnel in uniform, and alleged intimidation by the military towards opposition parties in the state.

3.3.2.2 Pre-election intimidation

Pre-election intimidation was seen in the form of inter-cult clashes on political lines, killings, destruction of campaign billboards and posters of candidates of opposing political parties, and the disruption of political rallies and meetings.

Cult groups reportedly aligned with political parties in the state in their bid to win the elections. One example, in Nembe is that of a member of the *Icelander* cult group attacking and killing a member from the *Greenlanders* cult group, loyal to an opposition party, which then led to reprisal attacks. In Ogbia and other places, campaign materials of political candidates across the board were destroyed.

3.3.2.3 Disruption and diversion of election materials

With less than two weeks until the Presidential elections, many registered voters were still unable to collect their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) in Ekeremor LGA, Bayelsa State, leading to suspicions that INEC was deliberately hoarding PVCs to sell to political parties during the election.

On the eve of the Presidential election, INEC materials, after arriving in Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri in Nembe LGA, were transported to different locations, none of which included the INEC office or the police station. In Ekeremor, APC leaders forcefully moved election materials to a secluded place, allegedly with the aim of perpetuating electoral fraud.

During the Presidential election, voting started late in a number of locations. In some units in Ekeremor, voting did not begin until 11:00 , and many units did not finish voting until 21:00. These delays were mainly the result of the late start, malfunctioning card readers, and inefficient ad hoc staff. There were reports of card reader failure at every polling unit in Ekeremor LGA, while in ward 8, young people reportedly loyal to the APC snatched a ballot box from INEC officials, although this was later recovered by security agents. In Nembe LGA, INEC materials did not arrive at several wards, while in other wards materials were hijacked for 'mass thumb printing'.

In the Bayelsa State House of Assembly elections, ballot boxes were snatched in Brass and Ekeremor, and in Sagbama voting was disrupted by military personnel alleged to be working for the APC.

3.3.2.4 Violence against INEC staff and security personnel

Prior to the general elections, ad hoc INEC staff members were reportedly attacked in Kolokuma/Opokuma while distributing PVCs. In addition, a Deputy Commissioner of Police in charge of the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad in the State was abducted by political thugs during the February 23, 2019 presidential and national elections, with reports of his security aides being attacked in the process.

3.3.2.5 Disruption of collation

Accredited observers were denied access to collation centres in most parts of Bayelsa State by security agents, giving rise to protests recorded in places including Ekeremor.

Bayelsa also saw a heavy presence of armed security agents, especially the military, at strategic points across the state. Uniformed personnel were reported to have aided some political leaders in perpetuating different kinds of electoral violence against their rivals and supporters.

In Sagbama, there was widespread disruption of voting by uniformed personnel alleged to be working for an APC chieftain in the area.

3.3.3 Delta State

3.3.3.1 Delta State summary

In Delta, there were more than 50 different candidates for the Governorship, although, as elsewhere, the contest ultimately came down to the two major parties, with the incumbent PDP Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan challenged by Great Ogboru of the APC.

Their rivalry degenerated into deaths, abductions, and ballot snatching, which likely helped contribute to the low turnout in Delta State, as elsewhere. Violence in the state continued into the post-election period, including clashes between APC and PDP supporters and, separately, cult groups, which led to further fatalities.

3.3.3.2 Pre-election intimidation

This was demonstrated across most parts of the state in the form of the destruction of campaign billboards and posters, the disruption of political rallies and meetings, as well as killings. In Ndokwa West LGA, for instance, a PDP loyalist was murdered by suspected thugs of a rival political party in the area. The same atmosphere was created in Uvwie LGA, where campaign materials were destroyed, and party supporters were killed or injured. The LGA also experienced politically provoked cult clashes that led to several deaths before the general elections.⁵ Serious violence also took place on February 16, 2019 in Ughelli South LGA, involving some supporters of the APC and Labour parties.

3.3.3.3 Disruption and diversion of election materials

The elections in Delta State witnessed pockets of election material diversions by chieftains of key political parties in places where they had their strongholds. This was perpetuated by both the APC and PDP across the state, leading to various clashes and protests by political thugs, party members, and voters.

In Ethiope West, the home LGA of a former Governor James Ibori, scores of youths protested wildly during the 09 March elections against their disenfranchisement because of the diversion of materials meant for the elections.

3.3.3.4 Violence against INEC staff and security personnel

INEC officials, especially temporary ones (usually referred to as 'ad-hoc' INEC staff because they help supervise polls on election day itself) were reportedly attacked by political thugs in Iyede community in Isoko North LGA. This led to the removal of Governorship and House of Assembly election materials, thereby preventing members of the community from voting.

3.3.3.5 Uniformed personnel interference in election processes

The scale of interference by the state security personnel in the 2019 elections in Delta State was less than other Niger Delta States. There were some reports of members of the political class being accompanied by armed security personnel and thugs to polling units and collation centres. These incidents generated pockets of violence and resistance across the state. In Sapele LGA, two voters were reported to have been shot by a security agent attached to one of the politicians in the area.

3.3.3.6 Disruption of collation

In most places across the state, accredited observers and media were denied access into the collation centres by political thugs and security agents. This very likely paved the way for the manipulation of some election results. In Bomadi LGA, observers were restricted from gaining entrance into the INEC office. In the same vein, the Police prevented accredited INEC observers from accessing the Ughelli North LGA collation centre for the Governorship and House of Assembly elections.

3.3.4 Akwa Ibom State

3.3.4.1 Akwa Ibom State summary

Since 1999, Akwa Ibom State has only ever been governed by the PDP. However, the defection of key PDP members in 2014 and 2018 suggested the potential for change in political dynamics ahead of the 2019 polls. Pre-election concerns that this might lead to violence ultimately came to pass, as Akwa Ibom State saw serious inter-party violence, reprisal attacks, overt and covert intimidation, killings, and kidnapping during the election period. There was more visible campaigning in Akwa Ibom State compared to other states under observation and, in the month before the Presidential election, violence in Akwa Ibom State included an attack on INEC officials.

3.3.4.2 Pre-election intimidation

Prior to the elections, various unfounded charges were made against members of the PDP, apparently in an attempt to have them arrested. Some who were arrested include a key PDP member (Engr. Uwem Okoko) in Ikot Abasi LGA, and the media aide to the incumbent Governor. The period also saw the invasion of the residence of the aide to the Governor by armed state security agents.

In November 2018, the State House of Assembly was violently occupied by five suspended legislators in an apparent attempt to impeach the House Speaker, and remove the incumbent Governor from office. This disturbing development set the tone for the later election in the state.⁶ The post-election period was characterised by accusations and counter-accusations between the APC and the PDP, and politicians continued to reward voters for their support during the elections.

3.3.4.3 Disruption and diversion of election materials

A number of voters were disenfranchised following the diversion of election materials headed for their polling units. Reports indicate that this was initiated by electoral officials, members of the political class, and their followers.

For instance, election materials for wards 8, 9, and 10 were diverted during the 9 March Governorship elections in Etim Ekpo, which led to the injuring of the Executive Chairman of the LGA after he attempted to stop this. INEC, however, cancelled election results areas where these acts were reported to have occurred.

3.3.4.4 Violence against INEC and security personnel

INEC and its officials in Akwa Ibom State were among those targeted in violent attacks. This played out in the burning down of two INEC office blocks in Ibesikpo Asutan LGA a few days prior to the Governorship and House of Assembly elections, resulting in the loss of card readers and permanent voter cards. Permanent and temporary INEC staff were also the target of abduction and harassment.

18 INEC ad-hoc staff were reportedly abducted in Abak, Itu, Ikono, and Uruan LGAs during the Presidential and House of Assembly elections in the state, but were later released by the perpetrators after achieving their goal of manipulating the elections.⁷

3.3.4.5 Disruption of collation

Collating at polling unit, ward, and LGA level was disrupted by both armed state and non-state security actors. The worst example of this was the invasion of the Akwa Ibom State North West senatorial district collation centre by Senator Akpabio and his security detail on 09 March, which disrupted the process and delayed the declaration of results of the Senatorial elections.⁸

There appeared to be broader interference in many electoral processes. For example, in Essien Udim, the brother of one of the senatorial candidates, who heads the anti-robbery unit of the Akwa Ibom State Police command, was reported to have used a team of his men to intimidate potential voters away from voting. A similar scenario was seen in the ward of the APC Governorship candidate in Ikot Abasi, where armed security officers were seen moving from one polling unit to another to hijack election materials.

4. Electoral processes: a quality assessment

This section of the report provides an analysis of the quality of different election processes. It draws on some of the incidents reported by observers mentioned previously, but discusses these in the context of what Nigerian law and procedures relating to the organisation of elections prescribe, and what is expected from the perspective of international and regional standards.

This section identifies specific issues relating to three main phases of the election cycle: pre-election campaigning, from November 2018 until the Presidential and National Assembly elections on 23 February; Presidential and National Assembly election weekend itself; and the subsequent two-week period leading up to, and election day itself for, the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections on 09 March.

4.1 Pre-election: November 2018 until the Presidential and National Assembly elections

4.1.1 Vote buying

Nigerian legal framework:

The Nigerian Electoral Act (section 124) establishes vote-buying ('vote bribery') as an offence, punishable with a maximum fine of NGN500,000, 12 months' imprisonment, or both. It also establishes as an offence the buying or selling of PVCs (section 23). A proposed electoral amendment (not signed into law by the President) would have further strengthened these provisions and increased the penalties. The Nigerian Code of Conduct for Political Parties further forbids political parties and their agents from engaging in corrupt practices, including the buying of votes or offering of bribes.⁹

Regional and international standards:

Vote buying is a violation of the free expression of the will of the voter, as established in Article 25 of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). General Comment 25 interprets this as: "Voters should be able to form opinions independently, free of violence or threat of violence, compulsion, inducement or manipulative interference of any kind."¹⁰ The African Union Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa calls for all stakeholders to renounce the practice of 'granting favours' to the public so as to influence the outcome.¹¹

The 2019 election cycle in the states observed was characterised by cases of vote buying. There was a gradual increase in incidents of vote buying reported by observers in the run up to both elections (General Elections of 25 February 2019 and Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections of 9 March 2019). The vote buying ranged from giving money to voters during campaign events, to providing free medical treatment, distributing free rice, cows and computers. It should be mentioned that the practice was used across the political spectrum.

There were reports that PVCs became a subject of buying and selling, in violation of the Nigerian Electoral Act (section 23). Another trend noticed by observers was a close link between vote buying and violence when in a number of cases vote-buying related incidents escalated into violence or resulted in a rise in inflammatory rhetoric as disputes followed in the fallout from payments.

4.1.1.1 Vote buying strategies by political parties

Vote buying is part of the election strategy of political parties in the Niger Delta States. According to observer reports, party officials see nothing wrong in their actions. Other forms of vote-buying strategies included high level party officials distributing money to supporters in advance of elections, and promising more to the constituency, ward, and unit that delivered the highest number of votes on election day. This creates competition between electoral wards to outdo each other in support of the candidate with the highest price.

4.1.1.2 Vote buying focused on vulnerable groups

There was a trend reported by observers that women and other vulnerable groups (such as widows and orphans) were being specifically targeted by candidates and political party members in their campaigns to bribe them with money or gifts to win their support.

4.1.2 Election administration (INEC)

Nigerian legal framework:

The Constitution of Nigeria establishes INEC as the body responsible for the registration of voters and the conduct of elections.¹² The Electoral Act provides for the establishment of INEC, including appointment of lower-level commissions and staff, its financing, and its responsibilities.¹³ The Electoral Act requires that all staff appointed by the Commission swear an Oath of Neutrality.¹⁴

Regional and international standards:

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance recognises the importance of independent electoral authorities, requiring that “the bodies responsible for organising elections shall be independent or neutral and shall have the confidence of all the political actors”.¹⁵ The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) similarly calls on AU Member States to “establish and strengthen independent and impartial national electoral bodies”.¹⁶ The ICCPR guarantees the ‘free expression of the will of the electors’ and this is tied to the independence of electoral authorities in General Comment 25.¹⁷

4.1.2.1 Lack of trust

Overall, voter confidence in the electoral process was reduced given the number of serious operational shortcomings attributed to INEC and federal government agencies involved in the elections. The decision by INEC on 16 February to postpone the elections by one week (due to logistical reasons), announced only five hours before polling was due to start, had a negative impact on the overall trust in the election administration.

4.1.2.2 Ineffectiveness and logistical failures

The last-minute postponement of the presidential and National Assembly elections presented logistical problems for a number of voters who had to undertake significant travel to vote at their assigned polling station. Prior to election day, observers reported delays in the delivery of key election materials, including ballots and results sheets, to all four states, as well as in their further distribution to polling stations.

All three of the most recent elections in Nigeria have suffered postponements of the first national poll, with two of the three being solely due to logistical failures over the delivery of election materials. The demands on materials distribution have increased with the number of political parties and the compression of elections into two weekends. The volume of materials, together with complicated protections and overseas printing, contributes to bottlenecks at national and regional levels that seem unlikely to be overcome unless significant changes are made.

There were also reports that INEC handled the accreditation for domestic observers very late, leading to undue operational pressures for observers.

However, it should be mentioned that INEC also faced problems and the obstruction of its activities by party supporters. This included, for example, the vandalising of vehicles assigned for the delivery of election materials. INEC has been severely criticised in the past, but it has undertaken attempts at reform, and operates in an extremely difficult environment. It is important to recognise the efforts of its Residential Electoral Commissioners to resist pressure to change results, and of its ad-hoc staff to maintain order at polling units themselves.

4.1.3 Voter registration

Nigerian legal framework:

The Constitution and the Electoral Act provide for universal suffrage, establishing that a person is eligible if he/she is a citizen of Nigeria, has attained 18 years of age, is “ordinarily resident, works in, originates from the LGA” and presents him/herself for registration.¹⁸ Persons “subject to any legal incapacity to vote” are however ineligible. It is an offence to hold more than one valid voter card.¹⁹ While the Nigerian Electoral Act does not include any specific provisions on biometric voter registration and the fingerprint identification process at the PU, the INEC Guidelines clearly state that a valid PVC is necessary to vote.²⁰

Regional and international standards:

The ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance requires that “voters’ lists shall be prepared in a transparent and reliable manner, with the collaboration of the political parties and voters who may have access to them whenever the need arises”.²¹ Voter registration also must ensure universal and equal suffrage, as protected by Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and ICCPR. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires States to provide both the right and the opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected.²²

4.1.3.1 Problems with PVCs and voters list

While INEC made efforts to facilitate the collection of PVCs, observers reported problems with the distribution and collection of PVCs, which was, in their view, due to poor logistics on INEC’s side. For example, despite the extension of the deadline for collecting PVCs from 8 to 11 February, a number of registered voters were still unable to obtain their cards due to logistical problems at some LGA collection centres (for example, at an INEC office in Ethiope East, Delta State, where a day before the initial deadline for collecting their PVCs, voters complained that the INEC office was working very slowly). Observers also reported on allegations including, for example, officials in another area copying voter identification numbers from PVCs in the process of distribution.

4.1.4 Campaigning

Nigerian legal framework:

The Electoral Act sets the campaign period as starting 90 days prior to polling day and ending 24 hours prior.²³ It sets as an offence any political advertising during the final 24-hour period. The Electoral Act designates the Commissioner of Police in each state as responsible for providing adequate security at campaign events.²⁴ State resources, including media, are not to be used in the interests of any party or candidate.²⁵ The Electoral Act further prohibits and sets penalties for the carrying of weapons and a number of other types of conduct at campaign events, including abusive language, threats and use of force or violence.²⁶ The Code of Conduct for Political Parties further specifies what actions the parties have agreed are prohibited.

Regional and international standards:

Fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, and association are particularly relevant for the conduct of election campaign activities and establish the ‘enabling environment’ in which an election takes place.²⁷ The African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) guarantees these rights²⁸, which are reiterated by Article 1 of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, along with the rights set out in ‘other international instruments’. The ECOWAS Protocol further states that political parties shall participate “freely and without hindrance or discrimination” and that the “freedom of association and the right to meet and organise peaceful demonstrations shall also be guaranteed”.²⁹ Articles 19 and 20 of the UDHR also guarantee the rights of expression, assembly and association.

A positive development ahead of the elections was that the majority of presidential candidates signed the “Abuja Accord” on 11 December 2018 which aimed at increasing confidence in the electoral process. Similar accords were also signed at state level.

4.1.4.1 Intimidation, pressure, and harassment (not including physical violence)

From the beginning of observation under this project, there were reports of verbal and physical threats to intimidate political opponents, a phenomenon linked particularly to the two major political parties, the PDP and APC. There were also reports by observers that party leaders were threatening voters not to vote for their opponents. Observers flagged that INEC staff, in some areas, were also subject to intimidation and violence.

4.1.4.2 Abuse of state resources

Observers reported a few cases of possible misuse of state resources for campaigning by both main parties. More specifically, there were reports of potential use of public money on vote inducement in the form of interest-free loans (River state) or receiving free healthcare (Ika North East, Delta state) or educational benefits (Owerre-Olubor, Delta state).

4.1.4.3 Removing or defacing campaign posters

The trend of defacing, vandalising and destroying campaign posters was reported consistently by observers throughout the campaign and in all four states. While observers reported that perpetrators of these actions were unknown, the leading parties levelled accusations at each other—which generated further attacks and reprisals.

4.2 Presidential and National Assembly elections

4.2.1 Voting

Nigerian legal framework:

The Electoral Act requires that voting must be by secret ballot according to the procedures determined by INEC.³⁰ INEC is responsible for requesting the deployment of security personnel and assigns them in consultation with the relevant security agencies.³¹ The Electoral Act also sets out penalties for various offences, including officials failing to report for duty, or committing acts in breach of his/her duty, such as interference with voting.³² No party campaign activity is allowed within 300 metres of the polling station, and any disorderly conduct is prohibited.³³

The INEC Guidelines provide specific procedures for both voting and counting. At 07:30, officials crosscheck the adequacy of materials, and polls open at 08:00.³⁴ The Presiding Officer of the polling unit regulates admission of voters, and excludes all other persons except polling agents, electoral officials, security personnel, and accredited observers.³⁵ According to INEC Guidelines, when a smart card reader malfunctions, accreditation and voting should be suspended until a new card reader is delivered. If none is available until 14:00, accreditation and voting should be continued the following day.³⁶ At the time of closing, all those in the queue are to be allowed to vote, and counting procedures commence.³⁷ Results are to be announced and publicly posted at the polling unit.

Regional and international standards:

Regional and international instruments guarantee a number of rights and freedoms relevant for election day, including the right to vote, the free expression of the will of the people, equal suffrage (one person, one vote), and secrecy of the vote.³⁸ The ECOWAS Protocol requires that “the civilian authorities shall respect the apolitical nature of the armed forces and police”.³⁹ According to ICCPR General Comment 25, any abusive interference, intimidation or coercion of voters should be prohibited by law and strictly enforced.⁴⁰

4.2.1.1 Delayed opening of polling stations

On election day, observers reported that polling stations in all four states opened late, some very late. This was mostly a knock-on effect from the late delivery of key election materials across all states, an evolving problem, where despite the additional week to prepare, key materials were still missing or were delayed. INEC could not properly deal with logistical challenges in the delivery of election materials and was not able to stick to the three-day delivery schedule ahead of each poll. Although voters in the queue at 14:00 were allowed to vote, there was general confusion (nationally) about a last-minute extension of voting hours which INEC had failed to communicate effectively.

4.2.1.2 Failure to check voter’s identities (problems with card readers)

In all four states there were reports of card reader failures, with varying responses. Some failures were addressed by technicians, while elsewhere officials resorted to manual accreditation without further reference to the card reader. More specifically, the card readers were either not able to read finger prints or there were network failures. Reports of resorting to manual accreditation were geographically relatively widespread, reflecting the degree of frustration with the delay in opening the polls in locations where awaiting a replacement card reader—in line with the specified procedure—would have been impossible before the 14:00 cut-off for the vote.

4.2.1.3 Intimidation of voters

The main problems reported on election day were not only related to access to delayed polls, but also to intimidation and voter concerns about safety. There were reports that some party supporters intimidated voters known for supporting another party also on election day when they tried to prevent them from exercising their franchise.

4.2.1.4 Vote buying

Observers reported that some people were instructing voters on election day to vote for a specific candidate in order to get their compensation. While forbidden by law, people were reportedly asked to take a photo of their ballot before it was cast to prove that they voted for the “right” candidate.

4.2.2 Collation of results

Nigerian legal framework:

According to the Electoral Act, every result form completed at the ward, local government, state and national levels should be stamped signed, and countersigned by the relevant officers and polling agents, with copies provided to police officers and polling agents.⁴¹ The Electoral Act also provides that INEC “shall cause to be posted on its notice board and website a notice showing the candidates at the election and their scores; and the person declared as elected or returned at the election”, although it does not provide any time limit for the publication.⁴²

The INEC Guidelines provide details on how results forms are delivered to the next level of commission, where they are collated, results announced, and copies provided to the police and polling agents.⁴³ For polling units where results have been cancelled due to over-voting, or where elections could not take place, supplementary elections are scheduled if the margin of lead between the two leading candidates is not bigger than the number of registered voters in the affected polling units.⁴⁴

Regional and international standards:

Transparency at every stage is key to ensuring honest tabulation of results. Article 3 of ACDEG calls for the “holding of transparent elections”, while article 6 of the ECOWAS Protocol states that “the preparation and conduct of elections and the announcement of results shall be in a transparent manner”. The UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) also calls for systems that promote transparency and measures to ensure transparency in public administration.⁴⁵ Recording and tabulating votes accurately also relates to ensuring the free expression of the will of the voter, as guaranteed by ICCPR.

Overall, observers reported significant delay, disruption, and interference during voting and collation. In particular, several LGAs saw the total cancellation of their vote counts. However, there were notable differences across the states, with Rivers State having markedly more cancellations and incidents with the collation of results than the other three states. Observers reported pressure exerted on INEC staff and ad hoc officials over the collation of results.

The majority of reported incidents related to the control of the collation of results, where there were serious, often violent, clashes. There were serious partisan breakdowns over the collation of results in all of the states observed. In Delta and Akwa Ibom States, the APC rejected the polls in the state, while in Bayelsa State, the state government announced an inquiry. In Rivers State, the state government accused the 6th Division Commander of directing interference in collation while the

army alleged attempted bribery against the state Governor. In Bayelsa State there were accusations by the PDP of interference by the military in collation in Nembe and Southern Ijaw LGAs.

In Rivers State, four local governments were unable to complete results collation in the Presidential Election due to interference and clashes. In two of these LGAs (Ikwerre and Okrika), INEC Electoral Officers reported that the military were directly involved in dispersing collation officials and forcefully shutting down collation centres on Saturday evening.

The collation process saw immense pressure on INEC officials, and ended with the cancellation of four full LGA vote counts, and two that never even began. Observers reported significant problems, including ballot snatching and shoot-outs in Akwa Ibom State—particularly in Udung Uko, Ikono, and Ini LGAs. In Udung Uko LGA, there was widespread violence on the day of the elections, which scared away voters, electoral officials, and observers. This culminated in the abduction of the Udung Uko collation officer, who was released 24 hours later. This development led to the complete cancellation of the Udung Uko results, in line with the INEC guidelines.

4.2.2.1 Failure to post official results at the polling station

There is a general lack of disaggregated results by LGA, ward, or polling unit, which would allow for a thorough checking of results and increased confidence in the outcome of the elections.

4.3 The Governorship and State House of Assembly elections

This section focuses on the two-week period between the two polls, as well as on election day and the results collation that followed. The applicable legal and procedural requirements, as well as the international and regional standards, for these polls are the same as outlined above for the general elections.

4.3.1 Voting

The 9 March Governorship polls took place 14 days after the general elections. The elections in Rivers State were deeply flawed, with voting and collation both disrupted, leading to suspension of the polls by INEC. In comparison with the 25 February General Elections, there were discernible improvements in logistics, particularly when it came to the distribution of materials and starting times for the poll. While in Bayelsa State, the Governorship election are to be held in November 2019, the State House of Assembly elections did take place, with a number of problems reported by observers. Reports from Delta State indicated issues with vote buying, multiple voting, the bullying of voters, and the late and unmonitored collation of results. In Akwa Ibom State, observers reported a number of incidents including violence, disruption, and alleged partisan behaviour by the police.

In the run-up to the polls, observers reported arrests of some leading PDP members. In most local governments, observers reported improvements in respect of the delivery of election materials, with some exceptions (Andoni, Khana, Degema, and Abua Odua).

4.3.2 Collation of results

Observers reported that in many LGAs, unit and ward collation was abnormal, with a number of problems.

In some areas in Rivers State, ward materials which had been snatched resurfaced at collation centres. For example, in Gokana, ward election materials which had been taken away by groups with uniformed personnel re-emerged at the collation centre at Kpor Police Station—on 10 March. While PDP party agents and domestic observers were not granted entry, international observers were able to gain access. On 9 March in the evening, domestic observers were denied access to multiple collation centres, including in Asari Toru, Degema, Akuku Toru, Oyigbo, Gokana, and Khana. In some of these centres, access was possible later.

Observers also reported on incidents around the collation centre with the security services forcing people to leave (Emohua and Ahoada West). In a number of the collation centres observed, PDP party agents were denied access. The centres which had closed collation without any apparent declaration of results included Emohua, Degema, and Asari Toru. In others it was difficult to ascertain whether any declaration had been made, because of a lack of access to centres and lack of information after collation staff and security had departed. In a few cases, collation processes concluded violently (Khana).

At the Port Harcourt State Collation centre, there was a heavy presence of uniformed personnel. Several LGAs (Ikwerre, Onelga, Ahoada West, Eleme, Port Harcourt (Phalga), and Etche) had delivered their materials but were still compiling the results, and effectively seemed to be completing collation at the state office (several of the LGAs appeared to be reconciling ward results for final calculation of the local government result).

INEC's Head of Voter Education in Rivers State later made a statement noting that the military had taken over the area and pleading that election officials be allowed to access the state office without hindrance. Observers reported that election results for a number of LGAs appeared to have significant and ongoing time gaps between when they left their centres and when they should have reached the state office.

In a number of LGAs, it was of concern that observers were only able to see part of the results chain, generally lacking access to additional information. In the majority of the LGAs where it was possible to see information at several levels, there were multiple breaches of the process, including with wards that reportedly had seen material snatching or where observers had reported no election results were seemingly collated (Khana, Degema, and Gokana). In the same LGAs, there were serious issues with 'snatching' of materials during the day, and they also saw partisan access to collation centres. Many LGAs (Degema, Gokana, and Asari Toru) had the results announced at their collation centre.

In Bayelsa State, the State House of Assembly elections for 21 of 24 constituencies were held (the remaining three elections were declared inconclusive due to violence and card machine failures). In comparison with the other observed states, there were fewer reported incidents. However, there were incidents of violence recorded in some areas, despite the notably heavy presence of armed personnel in uniform. Observers

also reported large-scale vote buying from both major parties. The supplementary elections were held on 23 March in Southern Ijaw Constituency IV and Ogbia Constituency II. The election in Brass Constituency I was suspended due to a Court ruling on 22 March. The elections on 23 March were mostly peaceful, apart from areas such as Ward 16 in Southern Ijaw, where there were reports of hijacking of election materials. The two constituencies were successfully concluded, and results collated. Voter turnout was low and there was a large presence of security personnel.

In Delta State, observers reported vote buying, multiple voting, and the bullying of voters by party agents and uniformed men. Collation Officers reportedly appeared late to collation centres. As a result, collation of polling unit results was only concluded in the early hours of the following day, often in the absence of key monitoring officials.

In Akwa Ibom State, there were many incidents and disturbances. Ahead of the elections, the PDP accused the APC of importing political thugs to the state, while there were reports that most parties were involved in trying to force people to vote for them, including that the PDP disguised themselves, claiming to be agents from other parties. During elections, observers reported the card readers not working, lacking technical support, as well as delays in the release of materials, and voter inducements.

4.3.3 The role of the military

Observers reported throughout 9 and 10 March that uniformed personnel were directly involved in pre-election arrests, the snatching of ballot boxes, denial of access to collation centres, and the apparent abduction of INEC staff. The headquarters of the Nigerian Army put out a press statement highlighting the presence of 'fake military personnel', and their alleged responsibility for security incidents. From debriefings with observers, it was considered possible that some incidents could have been committed by persons impersonating security personnel. In other cases, particularly around collation centres, it was thought unlikely that fake personnel could have been responsible, as those observed were interacting with other security personnel and seemed to be following a chain of command.

5. Stakeholder perceptions of the election

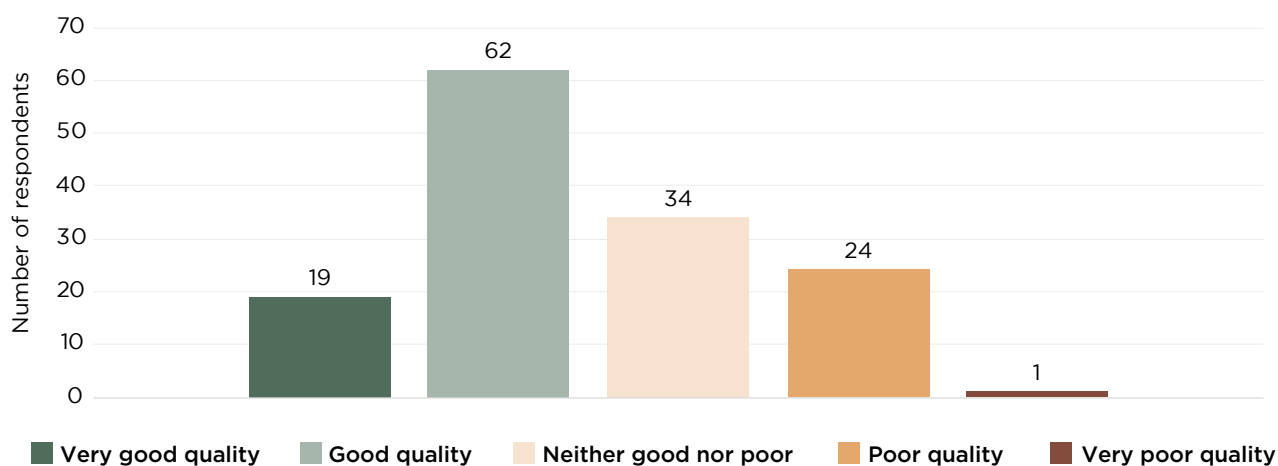
After the elections, the *Niger Delta Watch 2019* team organised focus group discussions with different stakeholders involved in organising or taking part in the elections. These were conducted with members of civil society organisations (CSOs), security agencies, INEC, the political Inter Party-Advisory Council (IPAC), the media, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and community representatives. Participants in focus group discussions with each set of actors were asked to rate the elections in different questions. The following sections of this chapter discuss some of the data generated as part of this work.

5.1 The overall quality of the 2019 Nigerian election cycle in the Niger Delta

Participants were asked to rate the quality of the 2019 Nigerian election cycle in the Niger Delta, with consideration for how peaceful, fair, and credible the elections were. Discussions with stakeholder groups highlighted the disparities between actors in the elections and the work that is needed for actors to acknowledge their roles in problems and steps for improvements. Just 25% of community representatives rated the elections as “good quality”. In contrast, 90% of the security forces and 100% of INEC respondents rated the polls as of “good quality” or “very good quality”.

Figure 15: Assessment of the quality of the 2019 Nigerian election cycle

Q: How would you assess the quality of the overall 2019 Nigerian election cycle in the Niger Delta? Think about how peaceful, fair and credible the elections were:



The strong split in opinion on the polls highlights the need for key issues to be openly reviewed and for all actors to be comfortable discussing what marks both progress and challenges that need to be addressed. The clear majority of actors who said the elections went well—in stark contrast to the ‘end users’ in communities—also highlights the need to develop a better shared understanding of voters as the central yardstick of election quality.

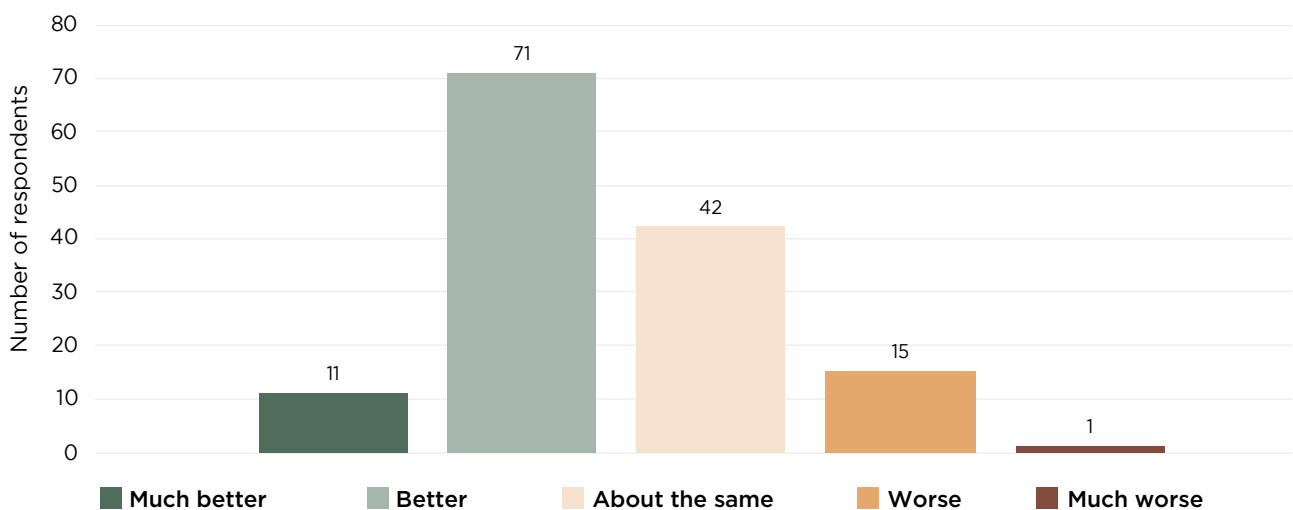
5.2 The 2019 elections vs 2015 elections

Assessing the quality of the 2019 election cycle compared with 2015, the majority of respondents thought the quality of the elections was better in 2019. The data presented in the graph below mirrors the same trend as responses to the previous question on the overall quality of the 2019 elections, with security services and INEC actors giving the polls markedly better ratings. About one third of community representatives rated the 2019 elections as better than 2015, and two-thirds rated the elections as “about the same”. However, context is important: in 2015 the same states saw major electoral fraud, serious violence, and disenfranchisement, so care should be taken in interpreting this relative ranking.

The proportion of those who said the elections were better was more or less evenly split across the four states. Those who said the elections were worse compared with 2015 were mostly from Rivers State, which is unsurprising, given the problems Rivers State faced in 2019. Most respondents who said the elections were much better in 2019 were from Delta State, and generally also INEC staff.

Figure 16: Assessment of the quality of the 2019 elections compared with 2015

Q: How would you compare the quality of the overall 2019 Nigerian election cycle in the Niger Delta compared with 2015?

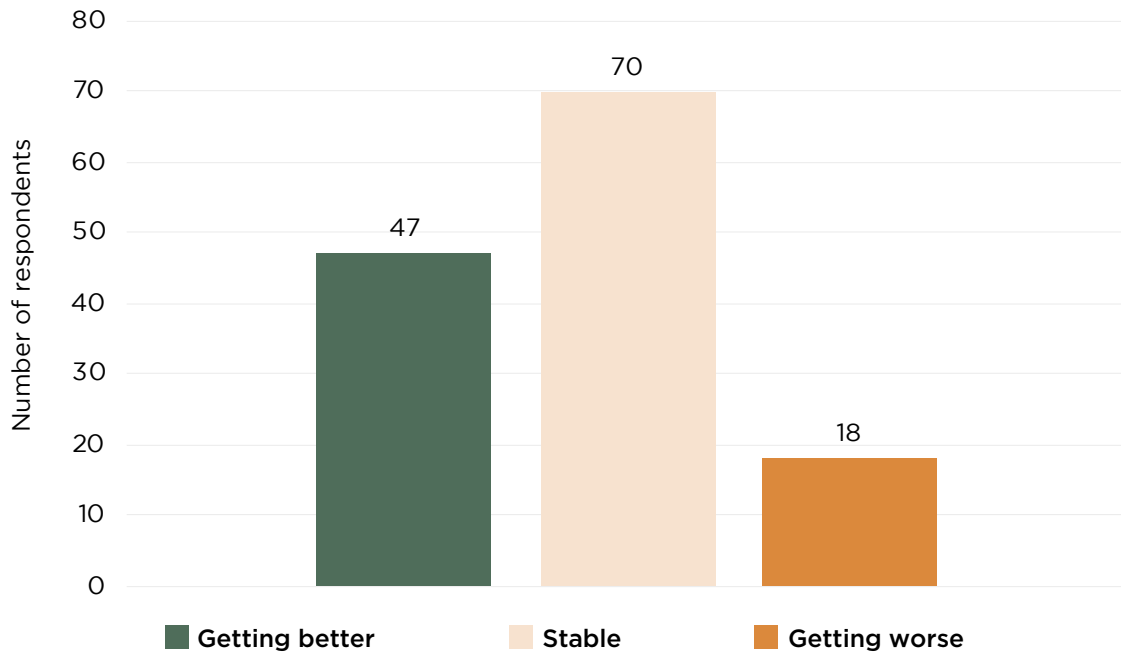


5.3 Democracy in the Niger Delta

Participants were asked to state whether they thought the overall quality of democracy in the Niger Delta was getting better, getting worse, or stable. Figure 16 shows that the majority of respondents believe that democracy in the Niger Delta is stable. The majority of those who think it is getting better were INEC staff, and all but one of the “getting worse” responses came from respondents in Rivers State.

Figure 17: Perceptions of democracy in the Niger Delta

Q: Overall, do you think democracy in the Niger Delta is:



6. The election on social media

6.1 Introduction

The impacts of social media on democracy has been on the agenda in Nigeria since the last electoral cycle in 2015. Then, it was portrayed as a positive force that enabled people to campaign and have their voices heard by political leaders, such as with the #BringBackOurGirls movement, concerning the kidnapping of schoolgirls by Boko Haram. 2015 reports on the role of social media in the electoral cycle emphasised its role in increasing youth engagement,⁴⁶ as a forum for political discussion and participation,⁴⁷ and as a way to overcome information scarcity.⁴⁸

The narrative around social media has now changed, with concerns around disinformation, the use of targeted ads, hate speech, and automated accounts—and the ways in which these can be used to manipulate public debate.

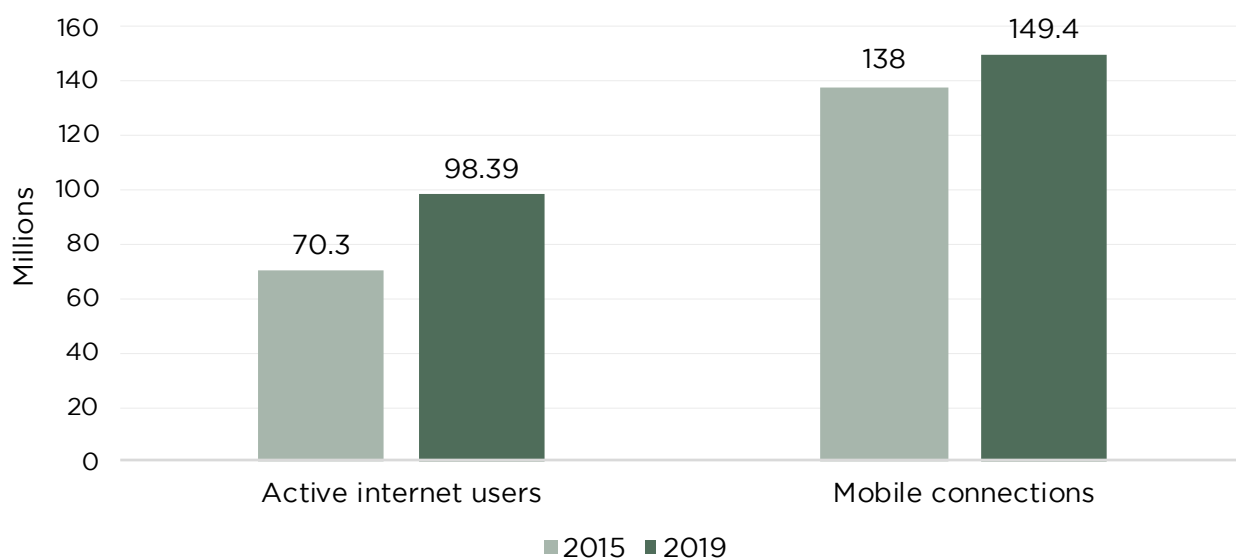
In response to this, for the first time ever, the European Union Election Observation Mission in Nigeria assigned a social media analyst to track the influence of digital forms of communication around the 2019 Elections in Nigeria. Similarly, SDN collaborated with Democracy Reporting International, and local analysts, to support a weekly monitoring exercise to track social media use.

This section of the report highlights insights from this work. The project focused on Facebook, with insights from Twitter.* The aim was to track how political actors, media pages, and influencers used social media to shape users' opinions over social media. Note that the stories portrayed in this report do not suggest that particular political actors misused social media more than others. Rather, they serve as examples of how social media was manipulated; identifying who might be behind these efforts was beyond the scope of this election observation initiative.

6.2 Social media in Nigeria: an overview

6.2.1 Facts and figures

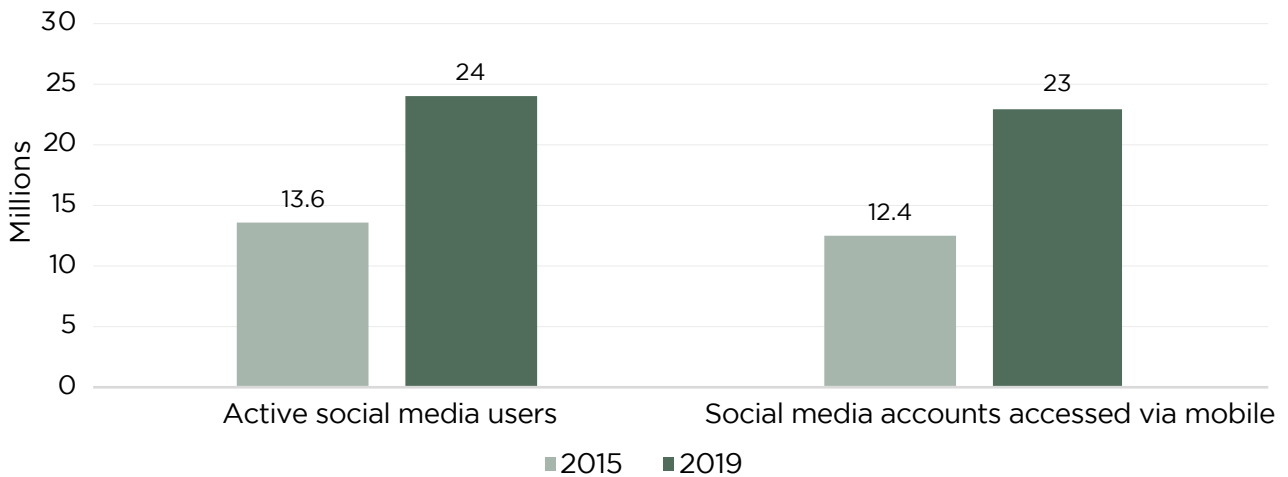
Figure 18: Connectivity in Nigeria (2015-2019)



Source: hootsuite/WeAreSocial (Digital in Nigeria 2015 & Digital in Nigeria 2019)

*This initiative did not specifically consider WhatsApp, as its end-to-end encryption presents challenges to accessing and using data from it.

Figure 19: Social media use in Nigeria (2015-2019)

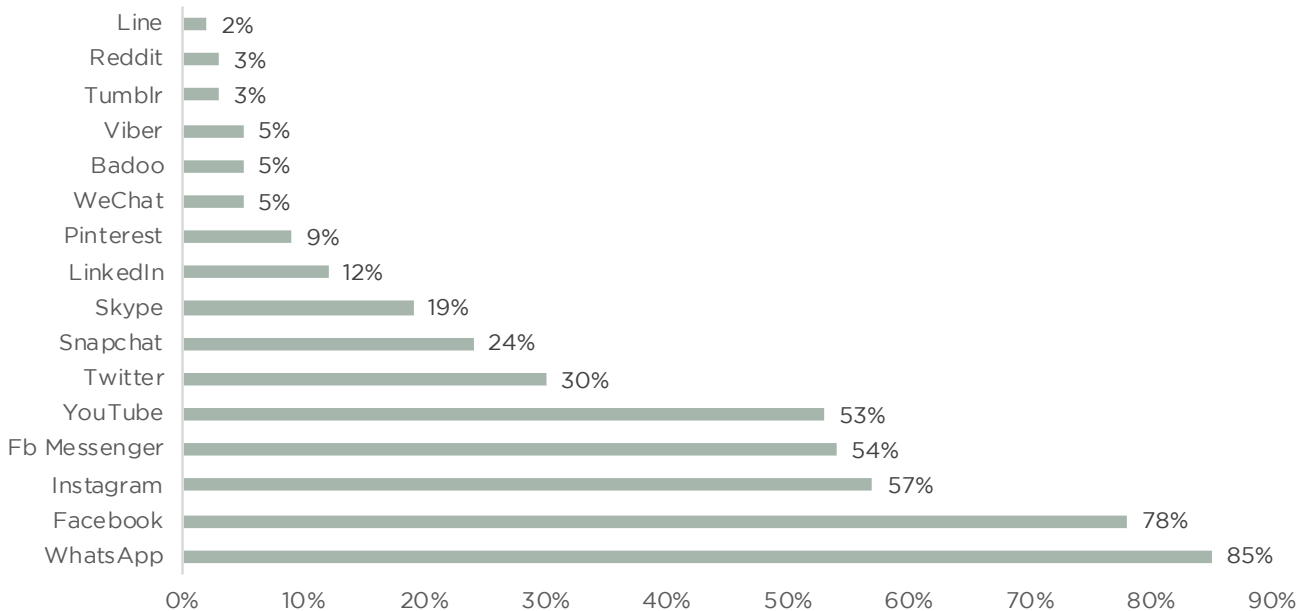


Source: hootsuite/WeAreSocial (Digital in Nigeria 2015 & Digital in Nigeria 2019)

The number of active social media users almost doubled from 2015 to 2019. The high percentage of mobile internet use means platforms such as WhatsApp are very popular. 85% of Nigerians with mobile internet access use WhatsApp, followed by Facebook (78%), Instagram (57%), Facebook Messenger (54%), YouTube (53%), and Twitter (30%).

Between 2015 and 2019, the number of active social media accounts went from 13.6 million to 24 million—with 23 million accessing such platforms via a mobile connection.

Figure 20: Most active social media platforms in Nigeria (2019)



Source: hootsuite/WeAreSocial (based on data from Globalwebindex)

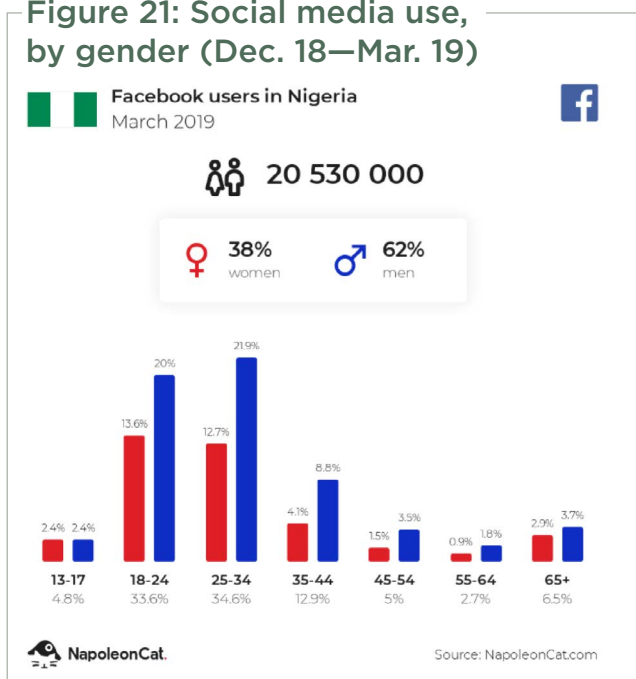
A 2018 Niemann Lab study⁴⁹ found that Nigerians have low levels of trust in the media, and experience greater exposure to false information, which they often knowingly share. Combining this trend with social media usage, private messaging services—which have seen a significant rise in use compared to 2015⁵⁰—can be seen as a potential threat when it comes to sharing unreliable information around elections.

The encrypted character of messaging platforms makes it difficult to understand how content travels across them, although preliminary work on the use of WhatsApp in the 2019 Elections in Nigeria show that both major political parties constituted national structures to coordinate campaign efforts via the app.⁵¹ This does not indicate any wrongdoing but shows how the platform gained traction as a campaign strategy.

The analysis in this section focuses on the narratives pushed on Facebook.

6.2.2 Gender imbalance

Figure 21: Social media use, by gender (Dec. 18—Mar. 19)



The data below shows that activity on Facebook from December 2018 to March 2019 was dominated by young male users. This imbalance relates not only to users, but also candidates. We noticed in our monitoring that across the Niger Delta, and in Nigeria, women are heavily under-represented in politics, with men dominating the political debate on social media. Data collected from *NapoleonCat* shows that about 62% of active users of Facebook in Nigeria between December 2018 and March 2019 were male.*

A positive aspect found in our monitoring is that the few female candidates with social media presence received generally positive comments in their posts.

6.3 Social media engagement

6.3.1 The Presidential elections

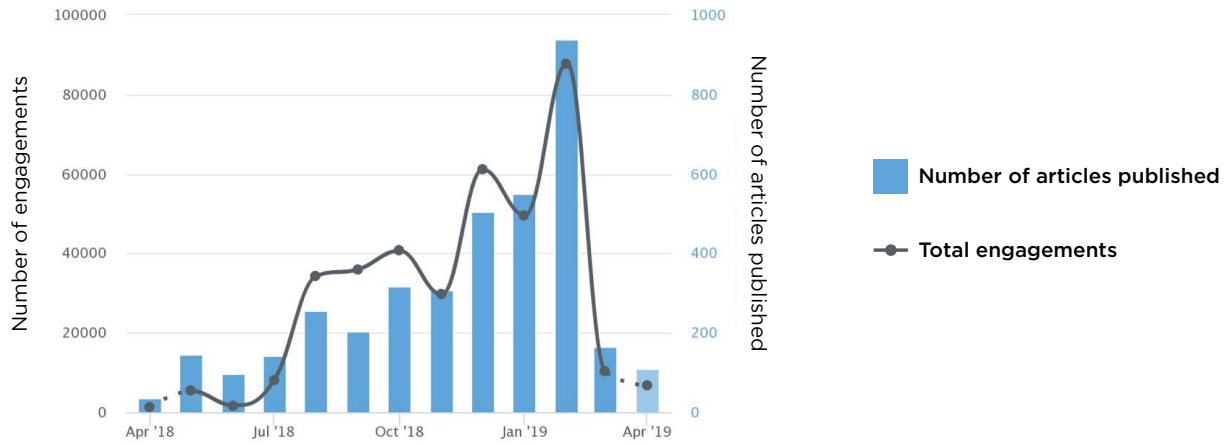
At the national level, interest in the 2019 Nigerian Elections increased in the months prior to voting day. During the election month of February, 940 articles referring to the general elections were posted on social media, receiving almost 88,000 engagements (likes and shares) from users.** This represents about one quarter of all articles posted about the elections in the last year (April 2018—April 2019).

The vast majority of engagements happened on Facebook, reinforcing the initial data presented on this study about the relevance of the platform as a space for public discussion in Nigeria.

*The graph shown is for March, but is similar to previous months.

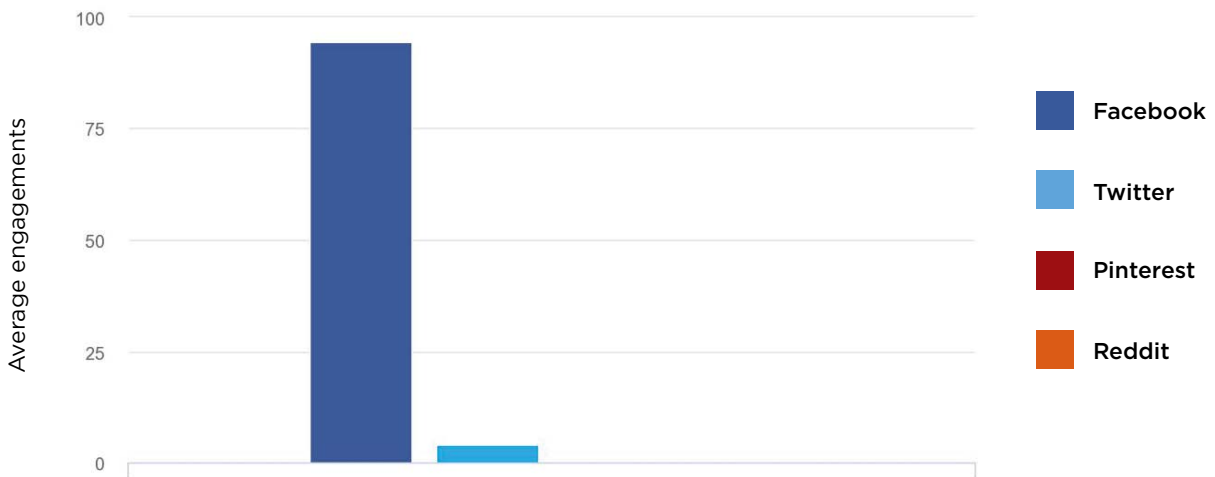
**This is the total figure at the time of analysis from any source in English when searching for the 2019 Nigerian elections elections

Figure 22: News articles and engagements about the 2019 Nigerian Elections



Source: Buzzsumo

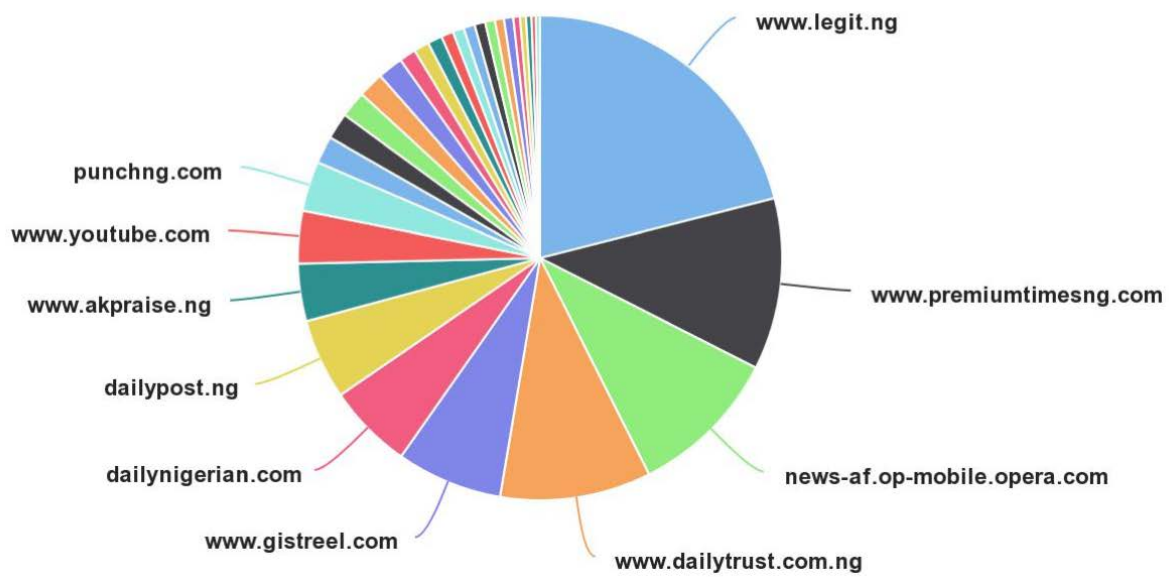
Figure 23: Average engagement by network (April 2018-April 2019)



Source: Buzzsumo

While there was a diverse set of overall sources informing Nigerians on the elections, the majority of articles shared and read came from only four sources: the news portals legit.ng, premiumtimesng.com, the app Opera News, and the portal dailytrust.com.ng.

Figure 24: Main sources of news about the 2019 Nigerian Elections



Source: Buzzsumo

In February 2019, 30,000 of the 88,000 engagements came from two legit.ng stories:

- Ukraine-based Nigerian pastor reveals 34 reasons Buhari will win presidential election (15,800 engagements)⁵²
- Yul Edochie in search of Nigerian man who predicted PMB’s winner of 2019 elections in 2015 (14,200 engagements)⁵³

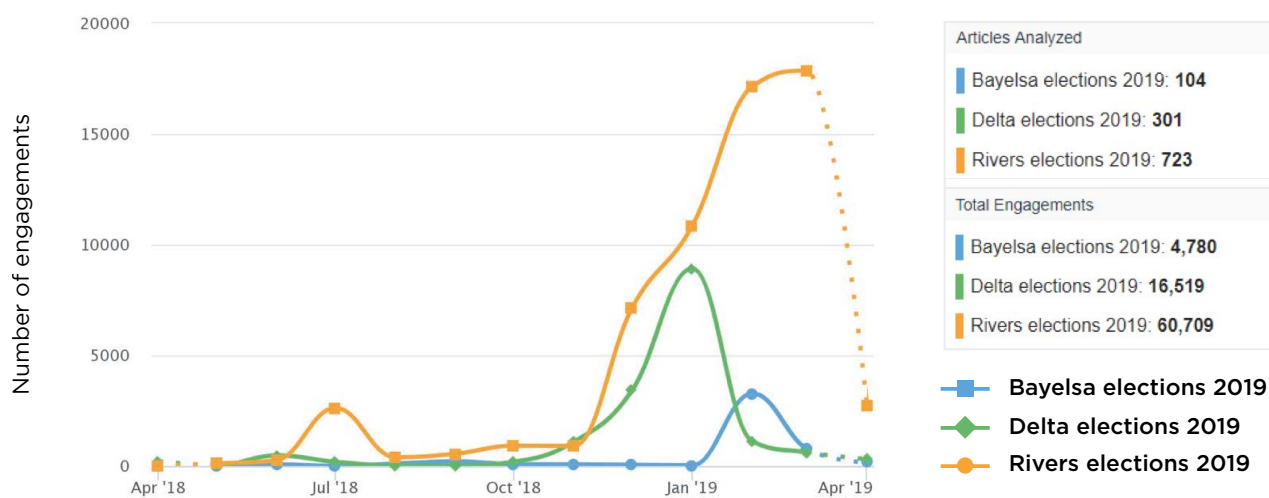
As the headlines suggest, the articles do not provide substantive or informative information, but rather superstitions and unsubstantiated opinions about one of the candidates. The first article describes 34 reasons to be positive about President Buhari’s chances, but without stating facts in many of them. Posts like these were common throughout the campaign, and present on both sides of the political spectrum. This type of article is frequent on social media, and although not necessarily malicious, sensationalist content tends to get more attention in comparison with measured, credible content. This presents a challenge for democracy, when voting takes place in the context of a low-quality information environment.

6.3.2. The regional elections: Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States

The engagement and discussion with articles referring to the state elections was on a much smaller scale than the national elections, as expected.*

*In contexts where national and regional elections take place at the same time, or very close to each other, it is common that the national debate receives more attention both from media outlets and social media users.

Figure 25: Engagement with Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States' election-relevant articles



Source: Buzzsumo. The dotted lines are predicted trends at the time of analysis, based on engagement information.

The graph above shows the same trend as for the national elections—increasing social media engagement as the elections approached. It also demonstrates that there was far higher engagement with content related to the Rivers State elections than elsewhere. This is an indication that the social media landscape in Rivers State is more active, which is important to bear in mind in the following sections.

The lower coverage of the state elections was observed in our weekly reporting,⁵⁴ where it was noted that national controversies were brought into local discussions. This included, for example, stories relating to perceptions of Muslim-Christian divisions, which can be used to create and manipulate political divisions in Nigeria, given the disparity between its predominantly Muslim north, which is a strong APC area, and predominantly Christian south, where people largely support the PDP. Such stories went viral on social media, while very few stories relating to the state elections received comparable attention.

6.4 Social media campaigning: tools and tactics

Online political campaigning is a legitimate tool and likely to be central in any campaign strategy. However, the lack of rules and clarity when it comes to how this is done is a matter of concern.

Our monitoring efforts identified a number of tactics used to discredit opponents, mislead voters, and cast doubt on the electoral process.

6.4.1 Dark ads

“Dark ads”⁵⁵—or political messages that do not explain to the user why they are targeted, or who paid for it—were widely used in the 2016 US elections and during the UK Brexit referendum. A consensus is forming on when, and under which conditions, such ads can be used, but action to ensure transparency in political advertising has been sparse.

Facebook has implemented ‘Ad Libraries’ in certain countries to allow people to learn more about who pays for such ads and who they intend to target. In such libraries, Facebook also shows which ads were taken down for not complying with rules set for this kind of advertising.

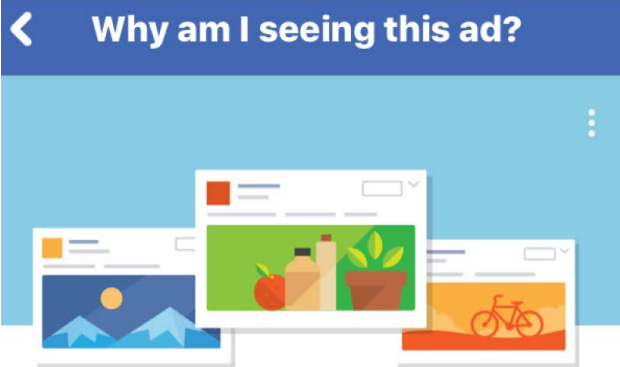
No such Ad Library was available in Nigeria during these elections, and political ads were used without showing a lot of information to the user. Figure 25 shows one of the political messages identified in our monitoring. It shows that the user was targeted with the message for their location and age. It does not show who paid for the ad and the amount paid.

To put this in context, the US Ad Library provides all versions of political ads showed to people, as well as an spreadsheet containing all organisations who run political ads in the country, including the amount of money they pay for them.

This is important to contextualise the following section. Discrediting campaigns and misleading information were shared during the electoral campaign in Nigeria, and no action was taken to improve the information environment online.

Misleading and false information was identified in almost every weekly report of our monitoring. This section explains how this was done. The aim was not to fact-check news or debunk hoaxes, but rather to understand the techniques used on social media to confuse users and spread misinformation. These findings are the basis of our recommendations to improve social media debate in future elections.

Figure 26: Political ad note



You're seeing this ad because **Rivers State had enough** wants to reach **people ages 18 and older who live or were recently in Rivers State.** This is information based on your Facebook profile and where you've connected to the internet.

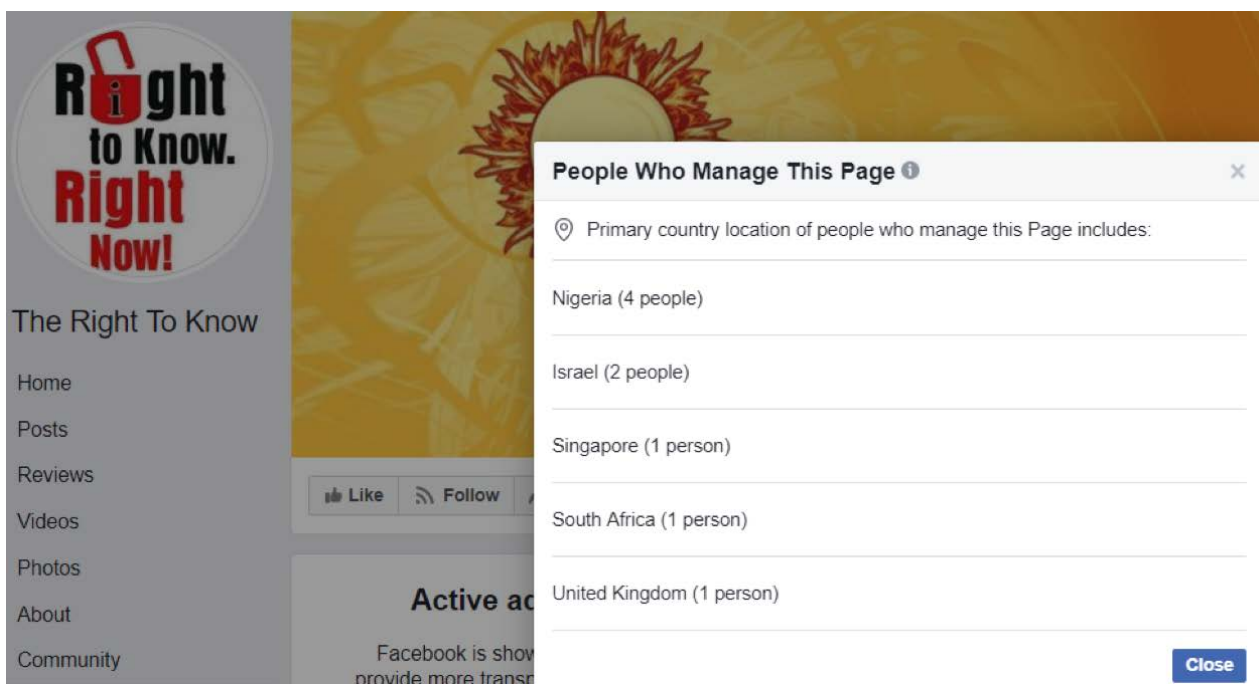
6.4.2 Pages managed from abroad

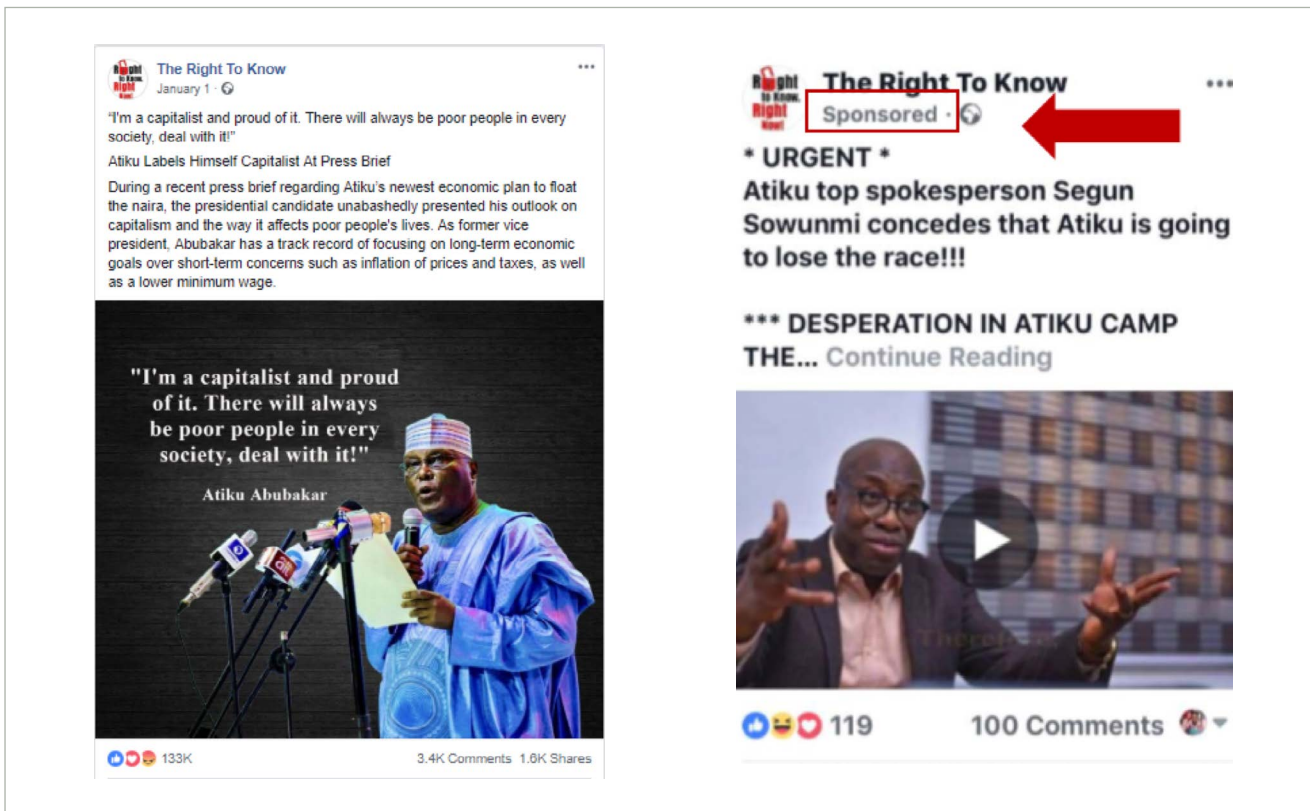
Some pages are clearly managed with the involvement of people based elsewhere. For example, a video showing an Atiku spokesperson, released in sections, went viral. The most popular post had at least 319k views at the time of the analysis. In the recording, a spokesperson for the Atiku campaign, Segun Showunmi, is heard saying that it would be impossible for Atiku to win unless the elections were rigged.

Showunmi denied making the statement, claiming that the audio was doctored and manipulated by the APC.⁵⁶ The story was sponsored by *The Right to Know* page, which seems to have a political purpose, since it was created on 02 December 2018,⁵⁷ and has shared several politically-related posts.

While further investigation would be needed to establish the authenticity of the recording, the manipulation of audio-visual material is common in disinformation, and the fact that audio from different people was leaked days before the elections were due to take place suggests coordinated action to manipulate voter behaviour, especially because the posts were sponsored. Another interesting aspect of *The Right to Know* page is that it is operated by people in five different countries.

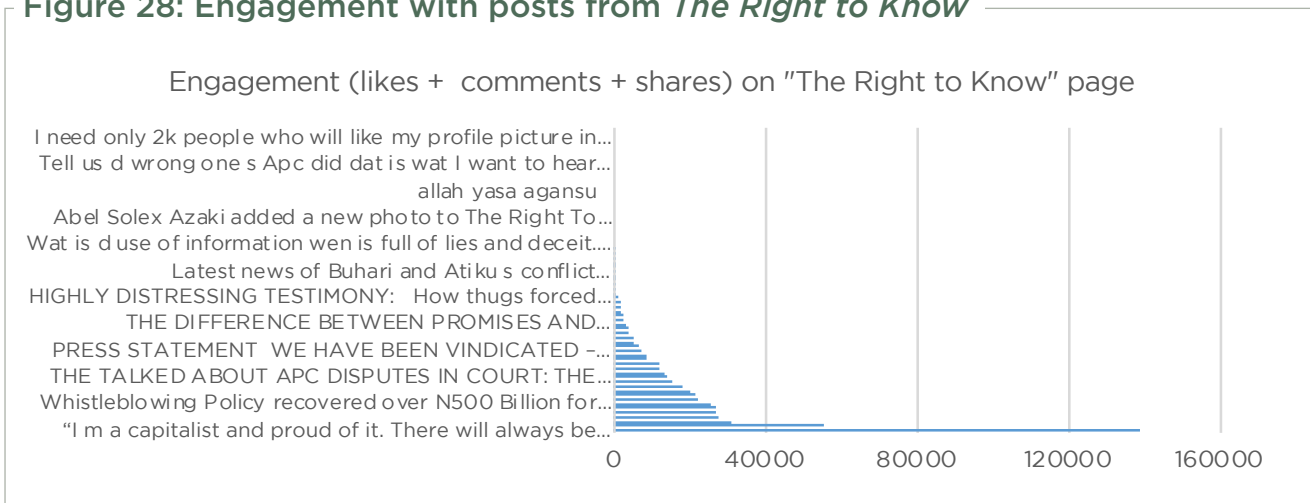
Figure 27: Page sharing political information about Nigeria, but being managed from abroad





The print screen above shows the use of sponsored ads by *The Right to Know* to spread discrediting campaigns and false assumptions. Sponsored content is common during election periods. It is used to target specific public audiences in attempts to influence a majority decision in favour of a certain candidate or political party.

Figure 28: Engagement with posts from *The Right to Know*



Data from December 2018 to March 2019 shows that there is little consistent engagement with posts on *The Right to Know*. The most popular post has around 140,000 engagements. Half of the posts in the period (34) had one engagement or less, which shows that the page does not receive attention organically from its followers—potentially why its content is sponsored.

6.4.3 False media pages

Another social media page which was active in posting election-related content is *Rethink Nigeria*. *Rethink Nigeria* directly paid for many political ads and received a large amount of attention from users on their Facebook page. In *Niger Delta Watch*

Figure 29: Page sharing political content, heavily relying on paid political ads



#10 report, we identified that the page had several active targeted ads. Among them was a narrative saying that President Buhari's wife was accused of running away with campaign money; this was not reported by major newspapers, and nor does it present official sources.

Analysing the data from the page, we see the same behaviour as with *The Right to Know*—some posts with a huge number of engagements, as a result of the post being sponsored, and other without any engagement at all. One interesting fact is that the page stopped sponsoring ads after the electoral period—indicating that the purpose of these was related to the election.

Figure 30 demonstrates that significant engagement with Facebook posts shared by *Rethink Nigeria* began in mid-December and ended towards the end of February. Its final election-related post (with around 25,000 engagements) was shared by the page on 27 February, shortly after the elections took place. This suggests the aim of this social media page was to spread false information during the election cycle. Without clear regulations on what social media can be used for during elections, malicious actors will continue to influence and manipulate voters' perceptions as they please.

Figure 30: Engagements with the posts from *Rethink Nigeria* page

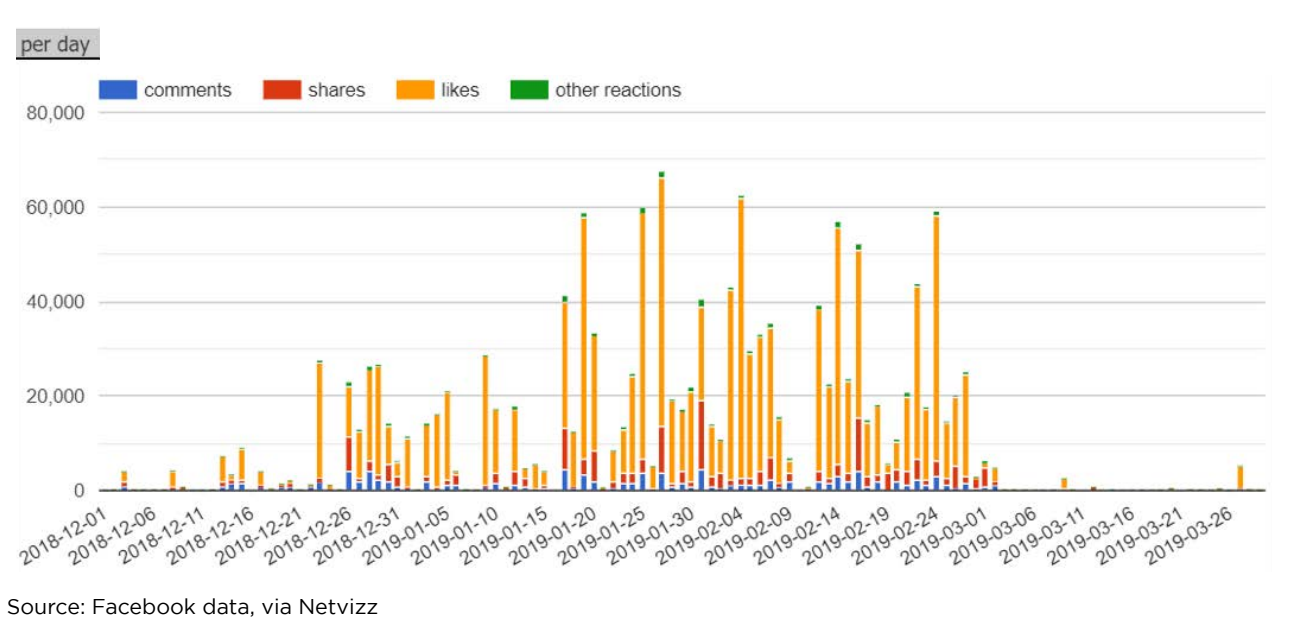
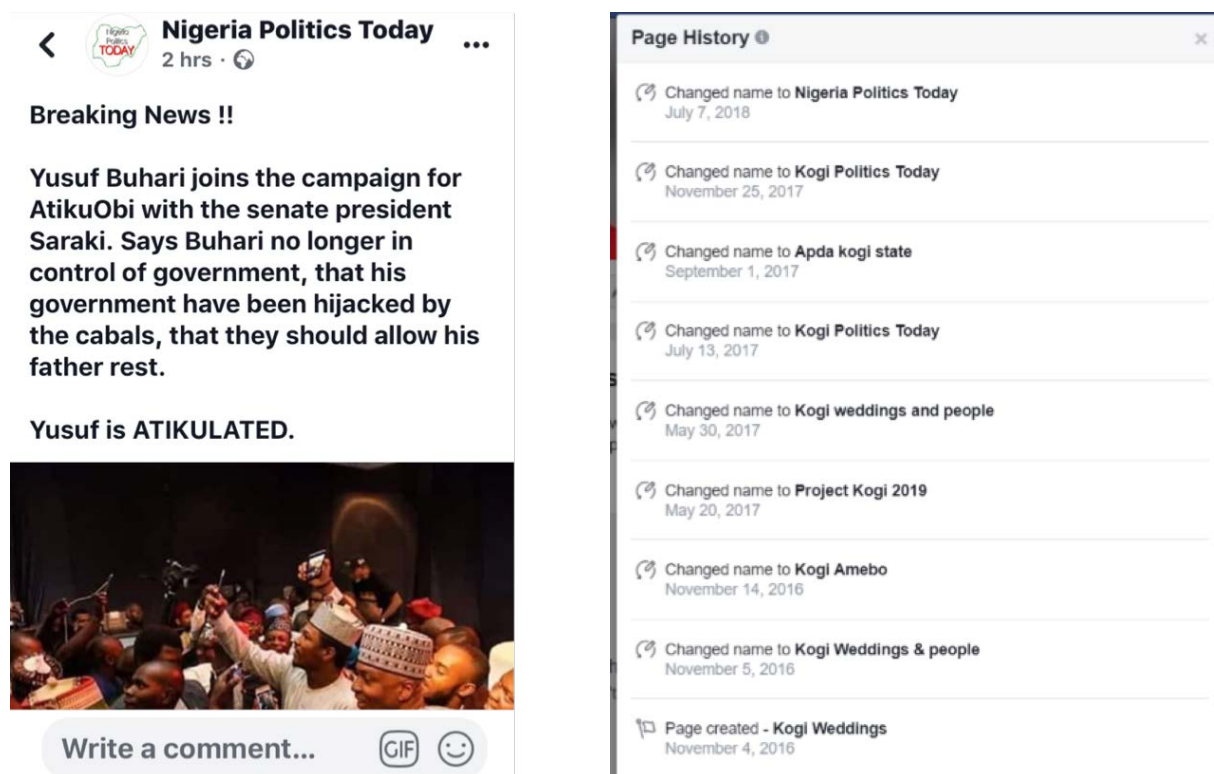


Figure 31: Pages previously associated with a political party transformed into a media page



One story that went viral related to the alleged attendance of President Buhari's son, Yusuf, at a campaign in Ebonyi State by Buhari's presidential competitor, Atiku Abubakar. After further research, it was discovered that the page that posted this story—*Nigeria Politics Today*—has changed its name many times in recent years. One previous name of the page was *APDA Kogi State*, indicating that the page is partisan (the Advanced People's Democratic Alliance, or APDA, is a political party).

Page name changes are a common tactic to mislead social media users. Under a different name (*Nigeria Politics Today*), the owner of the page that was potentially affiliated with this political party tries to pose as a neutral source in the run-up to elections. The page lists itself on Facebook as a media page, but its listed webpage, www.nigeriapoliticstoday.com, does not exist.

6.4.4 Discrediting specific candidates

Campaigns attacking candidates or accusing them of something are not new to social media. However, the fact that the social media environment is not yet regulated, and there are no lines between what is legitimate and illegal to do, means there is potential for the abuse of the information environment.

Figure 32: Discrediting campaign pages

Alliance of SDP against Governor Wike in Rivers State
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Rivers State Teachers beg to get paid

Where Are Our Educators Salaries?

An educated nation is a free and mighty nation. So why is Port Harcourt refusing... [Continue Reading](#)

WHERE ARE OUR EDUCATORS SALARIES?
TEACHERS IN PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE ARE PLEADING WITH THE GOVERNMENT TO PAY THEIR LONG DUE SALARIES

👍👎👤 7.6K 415 Comments

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Rivers State had enough
Sponsored · 🌐

Dear Governor Nyesom wike is been almost 2years since u promised to help us medical students. We're still waiting, that means two years out of school.

Governor Wike's Candid Response on Foreign Scholarships at Chatham House

21.9K Views

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

👍👎👤 220

76 shares

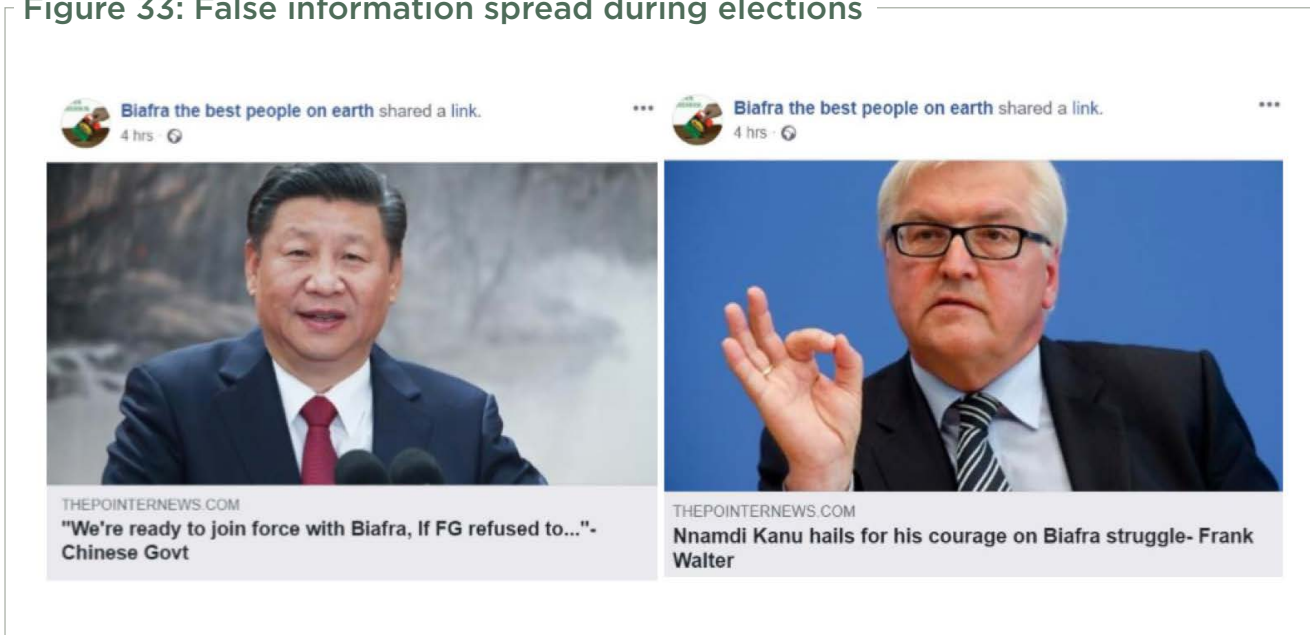
Traditionally, when a candidate receives a false accusation from one opponent, or from a media outlet, he or she has the right to answer such claims. They also know where it comes from, such as an opposition candidate or a media outlet. This is not true for social media, where accusations come from anonymous actors and false information may be spread without caring about the source. The posts above show that discrediting campaigns paid for ads to accuse another candidate, but we don't have access to the data showing who paid for it and how much was paid for it.

6.4.5 Casting doubt on the electoral process

Social media is often used to amplify criticism of the electoral process, sometimes via false or misleading information. This can be used to raise suspicions about the conduct of elections, or induce voter apathy. Our monitoring identified several attempts at this, during different campaign periods.

One group with many associated social media accounts is the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). There are many Facebook pages related to IPOB, which also reportedly encouraged a boycott of the 2019 elections, as it has done with previous elections. A network of pages associated with the Biafra secessionist movement spread a number of pieces of false information via unofficial media outlets.

Figure 33: False information spread during elections



On 13 February 2019, the *Biafra the best people on earth* Facebook page shared two links with false information from the news outlet *The Pointer News*, suggesting that world leaders from Germany and China supported the creation of a Biafran state, and that people should boycott the elections. While the page itself does not have a significant number of likes, the page replicates content that is being highly shared on other Facebook pages affiliated with Biafran groups.

6.4.6 Summary

The findings above describe some of the means used to manipulate people's perceptions and cast doubts over the electoral process during the 2019 Nigerian elections. False information spread online can lead to action offline—such as violence, boycotts, or voting based on false assumptions—and these issues should be addressed in Nigeria, as elsewhere.

7. Disclaimer

Disclaimer: this report was produced as part of a Niger Delta elections observation project led by SDN, in partnership with the Nigerian CSSR. The project is funded by the UK's Department for International Development. Please note that the information and analysis contained in the report do not necessarily represent the views or policies of the British government. The information and analysis contained in the report also do not represent the views of any one organisation. SDN and the CSSR have made efforts to ensure that the information is accurate, and will aim to correct any demonstrable errors or omissions.

8. References

¹ www.stearsng.com/article/10-data-trends-from-the-2019-presidential-election-results

² www.stearsng.com/article/10-data-trends-from-the-2019-presidential-election-results

³ <https://allafrica.com/stories/201903050322.html>

⁴ For example there was a huge variation in official turnouts in the Governorship polls ranging from 12% in Port Harcourt LGA to an average of 86% in the wards where elections held in Khana LGA. Despite limited access to collation turnout in some LGAs seemed implausible at best—for example, in Akuku Toru, which had suffered a disabling level of conflict, with claims of up to 30 deaths in the first weekend turnout, was 64%, while in troubled Emohua, turnout was 79% in wards where elections took place.

⁵ www.vanguardngr.com/2019/03/elections-will-be-peaceful-in-uvwie-emakpor/

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⁹ Code of Conduct for Political Parties, paragraph 19.iv.

¹⁰CCPR General Comment 25, paragraph 19.

¹¹ AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa (2002), IV.10. Note that the Declaration is not legally binding.

¹²Constitution of Nigeria (1999), article 78.

¹³Electoral Act, sections 1-8.

¹⁴Electoral Act, section 28.

¹⁵ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), article 3.

¹⁶ACDEG (2007), article 17.1.

¹⁷ICCPR GC 25, paragraph 20 states: “An independent electoral authority should be established to supervise the electoral process and to ensure that it is conducted fairly, impartially and in accordance with established laws which are compatible with the Covenant.”

¹⁸Electoral Act, section 12. Also articles 77.2 and 117 of the Constitution.

¹⁹Electoral Act, section 16.

²⁰INEC Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections (2018), paragraph 2.

²¹The ECOWAS Protocol, article 5.

²²The Committee of the CRPD has provided an authoritative interpretation that there are no reasonable restrictions on the right to vote due to disability, including mental incapacity.

²³Electoral Act, Section 99.1.

²⁴Electoral Act, Section 94.

²⁵Electoral Act, Section 100.2.

²⁶Electoral Act, Sections 94, 95 and 96.

²⁷Articles 39 and 40 of the Nigerian Constitution also guarantee these freedoms.

²⁸See ACHPR (1981). Article 9 guarantees the right to express and disseminate opinions “within the law”, Article 10 allows free association “provided that [an individual] abides by the law” and Article 11 allows for ‘necessary restrictions’ on the right to assembly.

²⁹The ECOWAS Protocol, Article 1, paragraphs i and j.

³⁰Electoral Act, section 52.

³¹Electoral Act, section 29.3.

³²Electoral Act, sections 123 and 125.

³³Electoral Act, sections 128 and 129.

³⁴INEC Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, paragraph 9.

³⁵INEC Regulations and Guidelines, paragraph 8.d.

³⁶INEC Regulations and Guidelines, paragraph 13.

³⁷INEC Regulations and Guidelines, paragraph 21 and 22.

³⁸In particular, ICCPR article 25, which is echoed in the ECOWAS Protocol, Article 1. Article 13 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights recognises the right of participation, which should be free, with representatives freely chosen.

³⁹The ECOWAS Protocol, Article 20.2.

⁴⁰ICCPR GC 25 paragraph 11.

⁴¹Electoral Act, section 74.

⁴²Electoral Act, section 71.

⁴³INEC Regulations and Guidelines, paragraphs 30-32 (for presidential elections).

⁴⁴INEC Regulations and Guidelines, paragraph 33.

⁴⁵UNCAC articles 7.4 and 10.

⁴⁶www.iafrikan.com/2015/07/14/twitter-facebook-social-media-elections-nigeria-2015-buhari-jonathan/

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⁵³www.legit.ng/1222759-yul-edochie-search-nigerian-man-predicted-pmbs-win-winner-2019-elections-2015.html

⁵⁴Niger Delta Watch #5, available at: www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/elections-report-05/

⁵⁵www.nytimes.com/2018/09/02/technology/03adarchive.html

⁵⁶www.vanguardngr.com/2019/02/its-practically-impossible-for-atiku-to-win-except-rigging-atikus-spokesperson-allegedly-said/

⁵⁷www.facebook.com/pg/The-Right-To-Know-1206718639453249/ads/?ref=page_internalb. This link has actually now been removed or deactivated, which reflects the point that these types of pages often shut down after an election period is over.



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