

NIGER DELTA WATCH 2019

A citizen-led election observation project

Report: Niger Delta Watch 2019 #14

Report published: 05 April 2019

Report period: 18-24 March 2019

Summary

This is the latest weekly report from Niger Delta Watch 2019, an elections observation project which has been monitoring the political environment in four Niger Delta States – Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta and Akwa Ibom – in the run up to and over the course of the Nigerian Presidential and Governorship election cycles.

The election period is nearly over, although activities remain ongoing in collating and verifying results from contested polls, with the potential for re-runs of some elections in Rivers to come.

Incidents in our four target states have continued to be reported, although events in Bayelsa, in particular, have been noticeably calmer than was once feared.

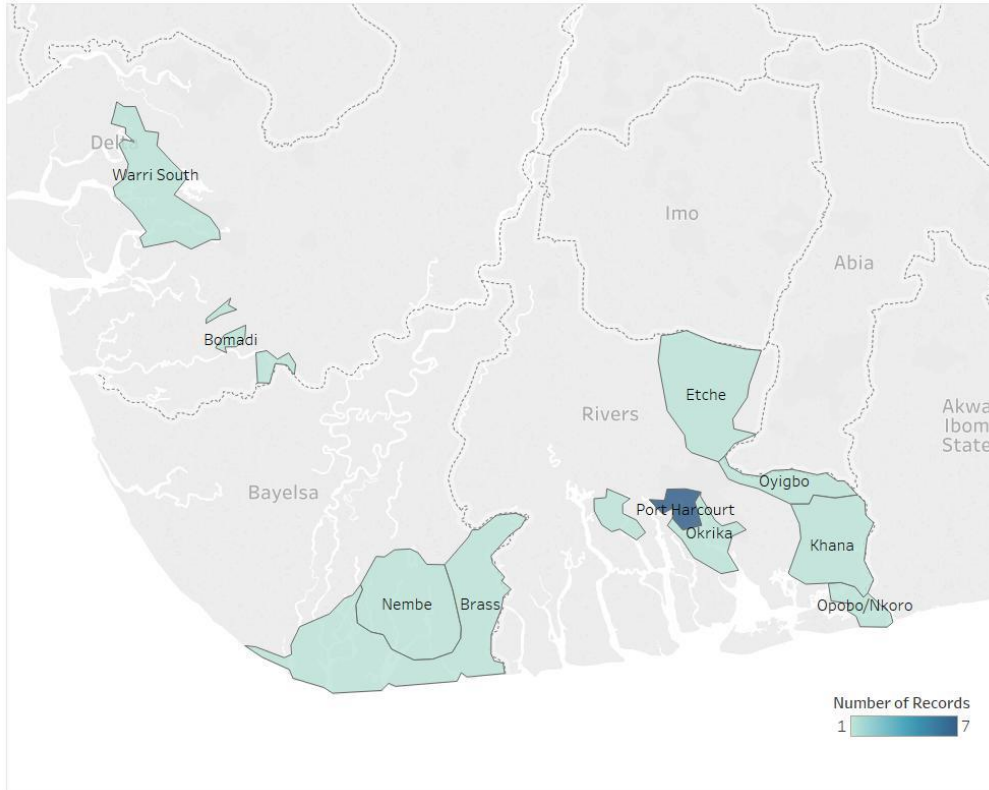
Activity on social media has included posts accusing the victorious All Progressive Congress (APC) of voter intimidation and violence.

Outside of the reporting period, there were major developments this week as the Rivers Governorship Elections and most of the other state level constituencies for the State were finally concluded, with current Governor Wike re-elected as Governor of Rivers State.

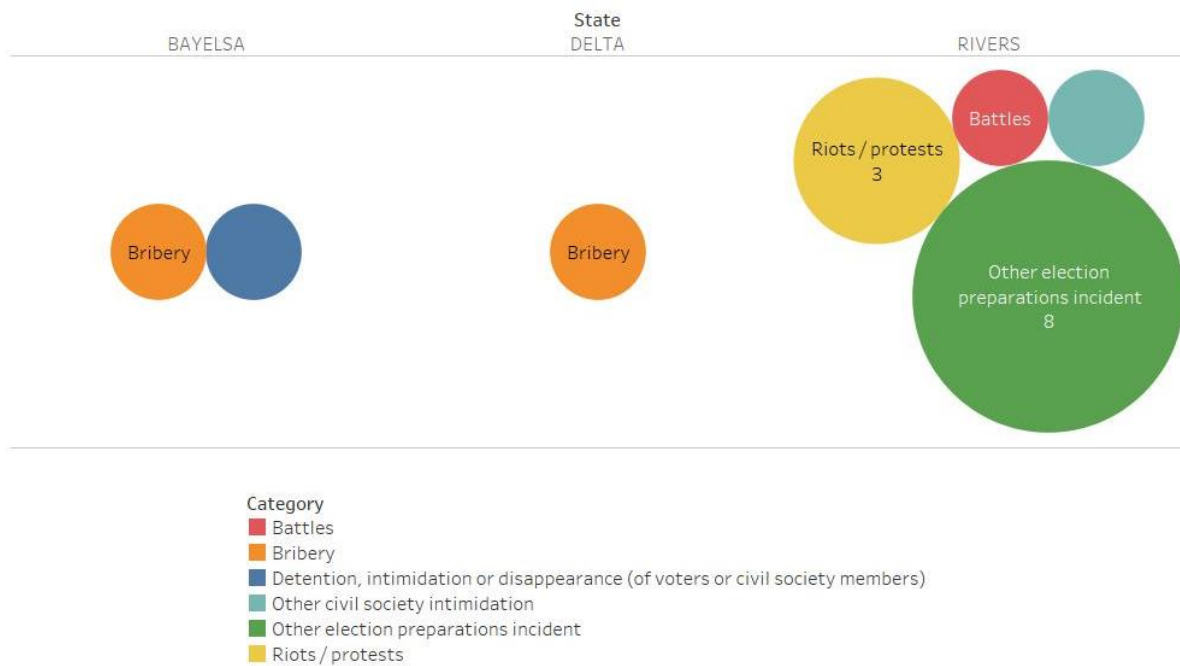
Please continue to check <http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/elections2019/> for news and updates.

Regional snapshot

During the week in review (18-24 March), we received incident reports from the following Local Government Areas (LGAs):



The diagram below shows the types of incidents that were reported during the week of 18-24 March 2019:



- Category
- Battles
 - Bribery
 - Detention, intimidation or disappearance (of voters or civil society members)
 - Other civil society intimidation
 - Other election preparations incident
 - Riots/protests

Rivers

The suspension of the Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections in Rivers State received mixed reactions. Propaganda, accusations and counter accusations have continued to dominate the fallout of the elections. These have been exacerbated by the announcement of a timeline for the conclusion of elections, starting with the collation of results in six LGAs from April 2-5, 2019 as well as the State level collation of 17 LGA results. At the time of publishing this report, it had been announced that supplementary elections will be conducted on April 13 in areas where elections were not initially held as scheduled.

The Rivers Governorship elections and most of the other State level constituencies for the State were finally concluded on Tuesday 3 April. The official numbers give a very wide margin of over 700,000 votes in favor of Governor Wike, who has been officially returned despite objections from the African Action Congress (AAC) and APC. The results were delivered in a two-day collation process in Port Harcourt that was accompanied by rowdy protests of hundreds of protesters brought in by mini bus each day. Reference points for the results are limited because observers were locked out from collation and even much of counting in many LGAs. Based on limited examples, a number of LGAs seem to be in line with observations on election day, with Port Harcourt city being the most obvious example, where results were reasonably accessible with results and collation in alignment at all levels. Some other troubled LGAs, such as Khana, where distribution was extremely late and cancellations partly matched accounts of elections not holding, are more difficult to reconcile (there seemed to be an 86% turnout in areas where elections were reported as holding). There are still many unanswered issues regarding the interference with collation, violence against officials, and systematic disruption that is reflected in the results (cancellations were reported in areas that tally over 470,000 registered voters). The Governorship election will almost certainly go to election tribunal, likely along with other constituencies, but resolution of cases will be upwards of six months. Rivers will have a limited number of State Assembly and House of Representatives seats to complete on 13 April.

Specific incidents reported recently include the following:

Port Harcourt

- On 21 March, the National Youth Council of Nigeria, Rivers State Chapter, along with friends and family of Hon. Kenneth Dan Opusingi, took to the streets to protest his continued detention by 6 Division of the Nigerian Army. Kenneth Opusingi is a People's Democratic Party (PDP) Chieftain in Asari-Toru LGA and one of those arrested by the military during the Presidential and National Assembly Elections. The protest took place after the Nigerian Army denied that military men were responsible for violence on election day, claiming that the perpetrators were impostors dressed in military uniform. The protesters, with a court order, demanded the immediate release of Kenneth, who was arrested following the death of a soldier on Presidential Election Day, 23 February. Following the protest, Kenneth was moved from the 6 Division Army barracks to the State Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) Centre.
- The State Government responded to claims by the Nigerian Army that aides to Governor Nyesom Wike attacked its operatives and attempted to disrupt the polls in the State. In a statement by the Commissioner of Information, Emma Okah, they described the army claims as unfounded, saying that the army was only trying to save its reputation, having entangled itself in unprofessional acts and malpractice.

- The African Action Congress in Rivers approached the Federal High Court in a bid to stop the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) from declaring the results of the State Governorship election. The party also wants INEC to further desist from concluding the results collation process.
- The Coalition of Rivers group accused Wike and INEC REC Obo Effanga of rewriting the Governorship Election results in Government House. The group said they would challenge the election result in the State if it is declared under the watch of Effanga.
- On 22 March, Rivers State Governor Nyesom Wike hosted the Nigerian Army Investigative Committee on Electoral Violence, involving the Army Major General Ayibakuro Gagariga. During the meeting, which was held in Government House, Governor Wike told the committee that the reported Army interference in the 2019 elections was the worst in the country's history. Governor Wike requested the redeployment of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Division, Major General Jamil Sarhem, for deliberately subverting the elections in Rivers State.

Asari-Toru

- A man, who was reportedly abducted by the army along with four other people, said he was ready to face the army panel to explain the story of his abduction.

Oyigbo

- Hon. Amb Chisom Kenneth Gbali JP, a PDP Chieftain who was beaten by the military on 8 March, was discharged from the hospital.

Khana

- On 22 March, a lecturer from Kenule Beenson Saro Wiwa Polytechnic staged a peaceful protest at Bori Police Station decrying the silence of the police force on the death of their colleague and immediate past chairman, Dr Ferry Gberegbe, which was reported last week.

Bayelsa

Bayelsa state has been relatively peaceful following the elections. During the elections there were cases of electoral violence in areas including Brass and Nembe LGAs, while incidents of ballot box snatching were also reported in some areas in Southern Ijaw. Following the disruption and rescheduling of elections, there were fears of post-election violence. It is therefore a relief to see that those fears have not come to pass, as political differences between supporters of the APC and PDP have dissolved following the announcement of results.

One positive development contributing to this is that politicians are choosing not to incite violence, but rather to channel their grievances to the appropriate authorities, as can be seen in the series of cases at the State Elections Petition Tribunal. This has helped to calm supporters of the APC and PDP who believe that justice will be served through the court.

Reports from the week in review include:

Brass

- The post-election activities in Brass LGA are generally very peaceful as winners of the various positions celebrate their victories in their communities. The APC Candidate in Bayelsa East Senatorial District was given the certificate of return as the winner of the Senate elect. Similarly, the APC candidate in Nembe/Brass Federal Constituency was also given the certificate of return as Member Elect in the Federal House of Assembly. The candidates that won their constituencies in the State Assembly are yet to be given their certificates as some results are inconclusive.
- There is lobbying going on between the two major parties regarding certification of candidates for the off cycle Governorship Elections in Bayelsa State, which are due to take place later in the year.
- The PDP invited the leadership and elders of the community to the Government House where promises were made by the Governor and money was given to the community people. Money was reportedly shared among men, women and young people, as well as chiefs and elders, who were invited to the Government House. The APC has also invited the chiefs and elders to meet in Port Harcourt.

Nembe

- At around 23:00 on 19 March in Nembe Town, a group of young people were reportedly seen loading some undisclosed items. The community vigilante tried to chase them but the young people fired shots to scare them away. It was later alleged they were loading weapons.

Delta

Losers of the 9 March Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections have begun the process of litigation. Some say that pursuing court action after losing elections is a waste of resources, while others think it is more appropriate to seek redress through the courts than risk candidates resorting to violence, which is possible in the already charged political environment. The concern moving forward is that the court judgements inflate tensions further.

We received few reports from Delta this week. Below are the incidents:

Warri South

- The outcome of the elections in Warri South has been peaceful despite one or two candidates vowing to contest the elections. The PDP won in almost all constituencies in the LGA, with APC and Social Democratic Party (SDP) candidates taking some contests to court. For the House of Assembly, Augustine Uroye won under PDP; the APC Candidate, Prince Emiko, is pressing that the election is not fair; he wants to go to court but allegedly the elders in the communities have pleaded with him not to contest the election in an effort to maintain peace in Warri South.
- Due to the massive voting for PDP during the elections, the people of Delta South Senatorial District have been awarded more road projects in the riverine communities, particularly Okerenkoko community. This announcement was made by the Deputy Governor of Delta State.

Akwa Ibom

While the week under review witnessed few political incidents, the media space has seen much post-election rhetoric. There were news reports that the APC plans to challenge the election results announced by INEC in court, accusing the PDP of vote buying with taxpayer money. On the other hand, the PDP claimed the party has evidence to prove in court that the APC perpetuated violence in the elections upon realising they were going to lose.

Also during the week, the APC in the State made a case to the Attorney General of the Federation for the relocation of election tribunals from Akwa Ibom State to Abuja. In a letter by the State Chairman, Ini Okopido, the party cited alleged attempts to perpetuate electoral fraud by the INEC State Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), Barr. Mike Igini, in collusion with the Akwa Ibom State Government and the PDP. This allegedly included plans to destroy electoral materials required to substantiate the election petition of the APC.

Rtd. Commodore Idongesit Nkanga, Director General of the Divine Mandate Campaign Team of Governor Udom Emmanuel, said he believes the APC lost the State elections because they did not campaign and that their strategy was to rely on 'federal might' and violence.

On Friday 22 March, the body of Ukeme Edem Efangha of Uruan LGA of the State was laid to rest in his hometown, Ekpene Ibia. Ukeme was shot during the APC Gubernatorial primaries in Akwa Ibom between Obong Nsima Ekere and Senator John Akpan Udoedehe. The tension within the community during the burial was palpable as there were fears of a reprisal attack.

Incidents from the week are as follows:

Abak

- A money sharing incident during the Gubernatorial and State House of Assembly Elections in Abak LGA degenerated into post-election violence. According to eyewitness reports, prior to the elections, the outgoing Senator of Ikot Ekpene senatorial district, Godswill Akpabio (APC), had given funds estimated to be in excess of NGN 3,000,000 to one individual for onward distribution to various cult groups in the area to assist them in committing acts of election thuggery in the LGA. Mr Etukudo was alleged to have kept the money for personal use, which led to a confrontation and later cult clash between the Vikings fraternity and the Mafia fraternity. The fight resulted in injuries and damage to property by the feuding group and innocent members of the public. The situation was later diffused with the intervention of senior citizens and Abak clerics who proffered a solution for sharing the money.

Mkpat Enin

- A PDP chieftain in Mkpat Enin donated a new house to a woman to coordinate supporters/voters to the PDP in his village, Ikot Abia in Mkpat Enin. The incident was witnessed by multiple community members and others PDP chieftains in the area.

Onna

- On the morning of Thursday 21 March, 120 youths were rewarded by the PDP each with the sum of NGN 5,000 for working as party security during the election. The Honorable Commissioner for Works in Akwa Ibom State gave the sum of NGN 60,000,000 to an individual and his team to be shared among the youths.

Social media

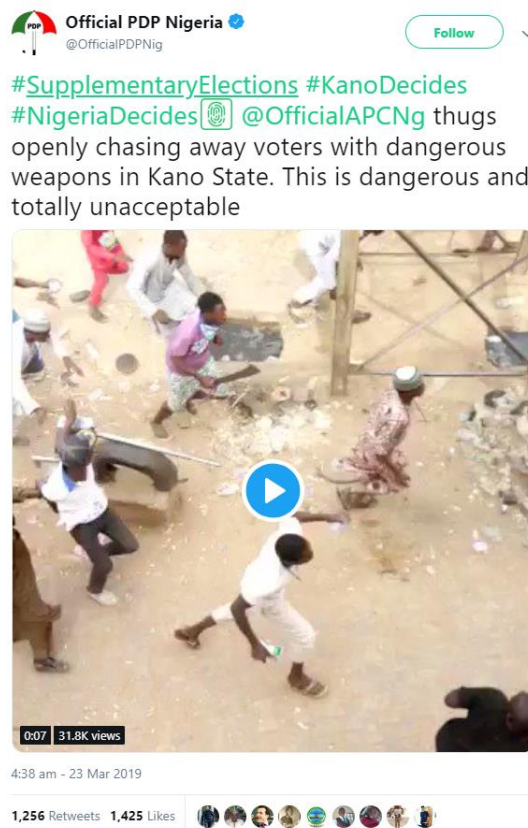
The post-election period on social media has been characterised by posts attempting to discredit the electoral process and the legitimacy of the candidates that won the elections. This was also identified in our last report and, while actual fraud has been identified in the electoral process, it appears some reports have been manipulated to foster tensions between different political groups or to cast doubt on the election. The content circulating on social media this week demonstrates how, after elections, it is common for the losing party to share negative stories about the winning party in an attempt to discredit their success.

The first two stories selected this week show a classic way of trying to manipulate social media users' perceptions, with the official PDP handles posting images and video clips which harm the reputation of the APC in the elections process. The third story demonstrates attempts by public figures and rivals of President Buhari to discredit the President and the APC.

Story one

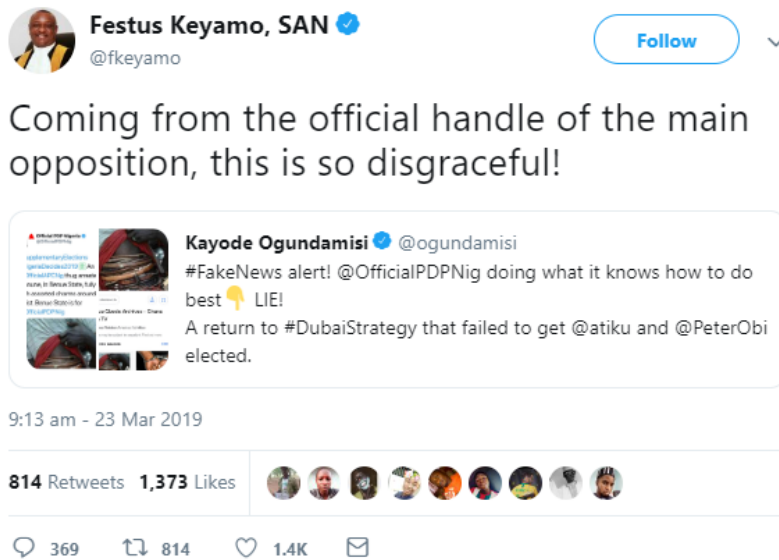
On 23 March, the @official PDP Nigeria posted a [video](#) of election violence, supposedly instigated by APC thugs, to chase away voters with weapons during the supplementary elections held in Kano State.

While incidents were reported during the election period involving voter intimidation from supporters of both parties (APC and PDP), there is no evidence that the people in the video are APC 'thugs' or that they are chasing voters. This post is therefore suspected to be an attempt to spread disinformation and discredit the APC by accusing the party of intimidating voters.



Story two

On 23 March, Festus Keyamo retweeted a [post](#) with the hashtag #FakeNews extracted from the PDP Twitter handle by Kayode Ogundamisi (his original post [here](#)). The post refers to a story previously shared by the @OfficialAPCNg Twitter handle in which images show a supposed armed thug belonging to the APC being arrested.



This appears to be a clear attempt to use false content to mislead voters by the official PDP Twitter handle on social media, in order to discredit the APC in the elections. The story was fact checked and the original post was deleted from the PDP official page, so we cannot say with 100% certainty that it really existed (the image that was shared may have also been manipulated). The picture of the alleged thug arrested remains on this [website](#), which spread the news of the story. The media outlet seems to be fake, and the photograph is of a man who was arrested in Ghana in September 2018. It could be suspected that the PDP account discovered this story, decided to share it and later deleted it after people indicated it was a false image.

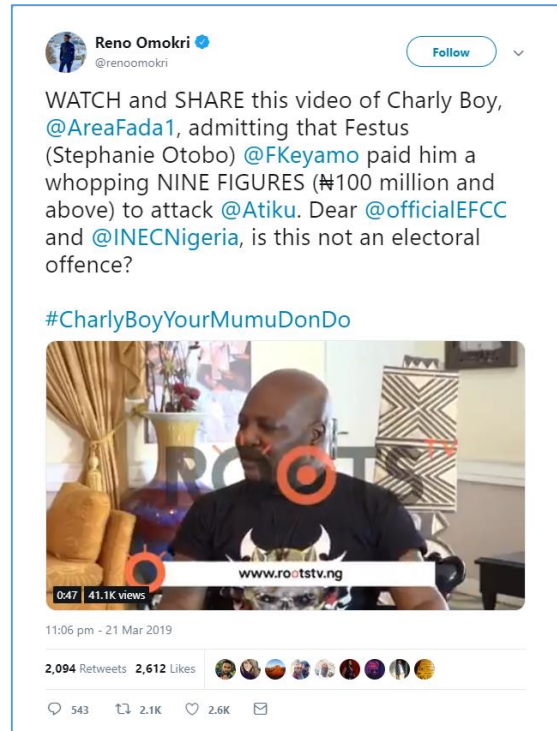
This type of content has been a weekly occurrence after the elections (we previously reported on it last week in Niger Delta Watch #13). It is also common after elections, when the losing side may try to cast doubts on the electoral process, and make accusations of rigging.

Story three

On 22 March, author and lawyer, Reno Omokri, tweeted a [video](#) in which Nigerian musician 'Charly Boy' says he was paid NGN 100 million by Festus Keyamo, who is the official chairperson of President Buhari's campaign team, to insult PDP Presidential Candidate and Buhari's main opponent, Atiku Abubakar. We reported on this story last week, which was shared by Sahara Reporters in this [tweet](#), however there has been more discussion of this incident by various public figures on social media.

On 26 March, days after the apparent interview confession, Reno Omokri tweeted another [video](#) of Charly Boy in which Charly Boy denies accepting any money.

Reno Omokri, who is the former presidential aide of Goodluck Jonathan (PDP), is a popular figure on social media and has had a strong online presence throughout the elections process. He posts often on election-related content and receives a lot of traffic. He is therefore an influential figure, with the ability to steer online narratives surrounding the elections through the stories he shares. The claims and counter-claims shared here by Omokri create confusion and portray the APC in a negative light.



Anti-government activist Comrade Deji Adeyanju had previously [tweeted](#) about this story via his social media account, on 20 March. Later on the same day, Comrade Deji Adeyanju, who is a supporter of Atiku, posted another [tweet](#), in which he said that he had been offered more than \$2 million in total and been imprisoned and accused of terrorism after he refused to accept bribes from Buhari. The claims are a further attempt by PDP supporters to discredit the President's campaign after winning the 2019 election.



About Niger Delta Watch 2019

Niger Delta Watch 2019 is a citizen-led elections observation project reporting on the 2019 Nigerian presidential and governorship elections. The project focuses on the states of Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, and Akwa Ibom. It is a joint initiative of Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) and the Civil Society Situation Room (CSSR), and builds on previous election observation work carried out by SDN, including during the 2011 and 2015 election cycles.

The goal of Niger Delta Watch 2019 is to generate accurate information on the election campaign as it unfolds, for the benefit of the Nigerian government, its electoral agencies, and journalists, researchers, civil society organisations and others working to support democracy in Nigeria.

The project's reporting is based on information generated and analysed by approximately 100 citizen Election Observers, Data Analysts, and Social Media Analysts.

Please visit www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/elections2019 for more information on all aspects of this project, including how the reports are produced. We are also keen to hear how the reports could be made more useful.

Disclaimer: *this report is produced as part of a Niger Delta elections observation project being led by SDN in partnership with the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room. 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.*

Note that the information and analysis contained in these reports do not represent the views of any one organisation. SDN and CSSR have made efforts to ensure that the information is accurate, but will aim to correct any errors or omissions as new information emerges.

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) was consulted for training in data management and visualisation for this project. Democracy Reporting International led the training of Election Observers participating in this project.

