



Support to the
2019 Bayelsa
governorship
e l e c t i o n s

A voters' guide

SDN



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

Email: info@stakeholderdemocracy.org
Website: www.stakeholderdemocracy.org
Twitter: [@SDNNigerDelta](https://twitter.com/SDNNigerDelta)

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

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

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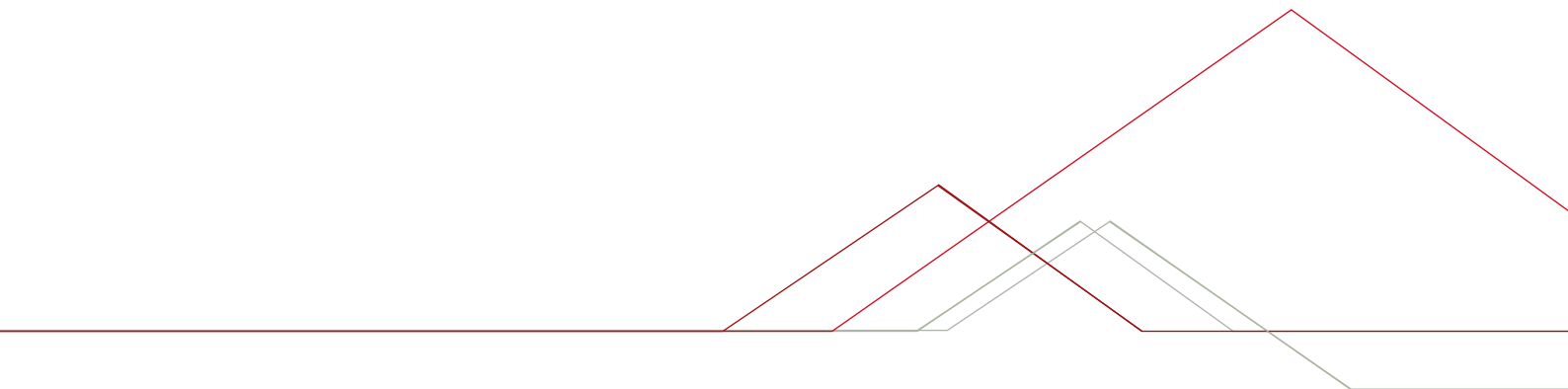
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Summary

The Bayelsa State Governorship election is scheduled to take place on 16 November 2019. This guide is for all Nigerians registered to vote in Bayelsa State, on how to do so safely and securely, ensuring their voice is heard in the forthcoming elections.

It provides an overview of what to expect on election day, how polling works, and what voters need to know. It also contains tips on how to stay safe during the elections, which can be a tense period.

1. The Bayelsa State election

1.1 Overview

Nigeria held Presidential and National Assembly elections in February and March 2019. These took place across the country. Most of Nigeria's 36 states also held Governorship and State House of Assembly elections.

However, some of these hold their Governorship and State House of Assembly elections on a different cycle. One of these is Bayelsa State, where the elections is due to take place at the end of 2019.

This is a guide for Bayelsa State voters on how they can take part in this election, contributing to fair and safe democratic processes in Nigeria.

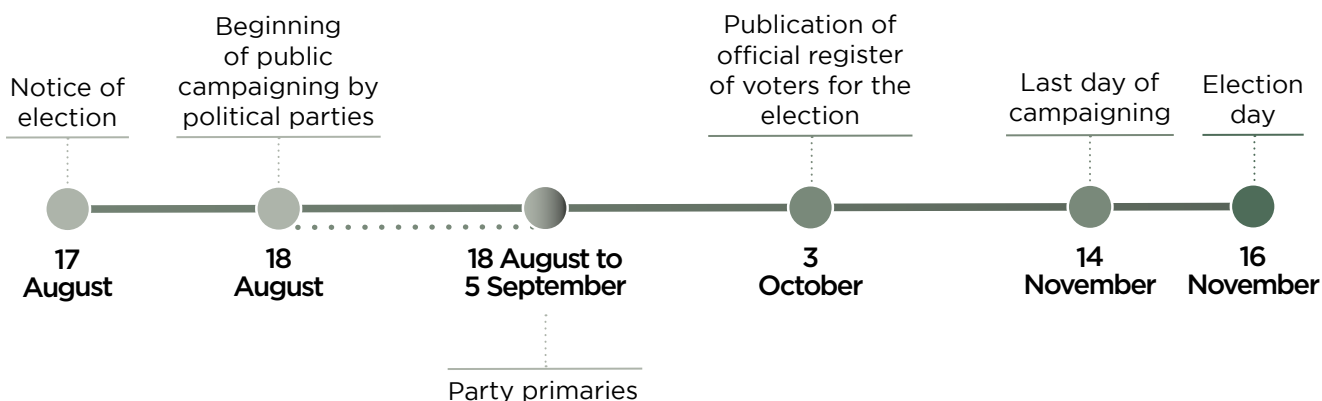
1.2 Why voting matters

It is important to vote because it is your formal opportunity to influence how decisions are taken in Nigeria. Voting is a process by which you can express who you want your political leaders to be. The first step is for as many people as possible to cast their vote. The more people do this, the clearer the political message is.

2. Pre-election

2.1 Election timeline

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has published a schedule for the 2019 Bayelsa State Governorship election. Here are some key dates:



2.2 Registration

The first, and most important, step for all adult citizens wishing to participate in Bayelsa State election is to register to vote. Unless you are registered and have had a permanent voter card (PVC) issued to you by INEC, you will not be able to vote.

The registration process is known as continuous voter registration (CVR). This is ongoing, so you can register when it is most convenient for you. CVR is also used to update the voter register, which is a list of everyone who has registered, and is therefore eligible to vote.

2.2.1 Checking your registration

You should first check if you are already registered. You can do this by:

- Sending an SMS text message to 081 7164 6879 in the following format:
 - **State[space]Surname[space] Last six digits of the Voter Identification Number on your Temporary Voter’s Card (TVC) (in the top right-hand corner of the card)**



Example of a correctly formatted text message: **“Bayelsa Ibinabo 06932”**

You should receive a response within 15 minutes, displaying your profile on the voter register and your polling unit number—or an error message.

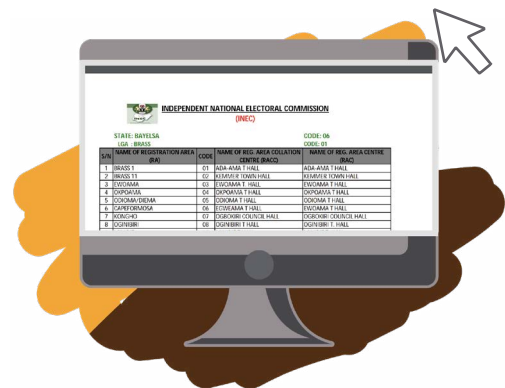
For further details visit: <https://govote.ng/status#voterreg>

2.2.2 How to register

You should register to vote where you wish to vote in Bayelsa State. To do this, go to the INEC voter Registration Area Centre in your ward. The full list of 2019 Registration Area Centres for Bayelsa State is available online:

www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/BAYELSA.pdf

The staff at the Registration Area Centre will guide you through the registration process. Once this is complete, you will be issued a TVC, until you are issued with your PVC. Your PVC is what will allow you to vote. It will be valid for all future elections.



2.2.3 After you have registered

Close to the governorship election, INEC in Bayelsa State will display a ‘preliminary register’ at the different registration centres. You should check the register to ensure your name is present and correct. If it is not, you should contact INEC to have it changed.

2.2.4 If you have moved since you registered

You can transfer your registration if you have relocated and it will be difficult to vote where you registered, or would prefer to vote in your new area. To do this, you must inform INEC. This must be done in writing, addressed to INEC's Bayelsa State Office at the following address:



INEC Bayelsa State Headquarters,
Swali Road,
Yenagoa

You can go to the INEC Registration Area Centre office in your Local Government Area (LGA) to submit your application for transfer of registration. They will help you with the process. You will need to include information on the LGA, Ward, and polling unit where you wish to vote, your new address, your reasons for relocation, and a copy of your TVC or PVC. Make sure to keep a copy of the letter you submit asking for the transfer as evidence that you have submitted a letter.

After processing your application, the Bayelsa State INEC office will direct the Local Government office where you want to enter your name in the voters list, assign you to a polling unit in the new location, retrieve your previous TVC or PVC, and issue you with a new PVC for the new location.

Important

You must apply to INEC for transfer of registration no later than 30 days before the Governorship election. As this is scheduled to take place on 16 November 2019, you need to ensure your application is submitted by 15 October 2019 at the latest. However, you should aim to do so as quickly as possible.

2.2.5 If you have lost or damaged your PVC

You should notify the INEC office where you obtained your PVC and request a new one no fewer than **30 days before the election**. Take photo ID and a passport photograph with you—as you may need to re-register. Note that replacing a damaged PVC is free, but there will be a fee if it has been lost.

2.2.6 Fraud

Your PVC is issued for your use only. You must keep it safe and present it to INEC officials for accreditation during elections. Because of INEC's card reader verification processes, it should be impossible for anyone other than you to use your PVC. You must not sell or transfer your PVC to another person. You must be at least 18 years old to register to vote and to vote. You must not try to register twice. These are serious offences, and punishable under the law.

2.3 Logistics

2.3.1 Your local area

Before the election, it is a good idea to ensure that your community has prepared well for the election. There are a number of things you can do.

- **Check your polling units.**

Are your polling units in a good location? INEC should have selected sensible locations in your community as designated polling units. These are the only approved places where voting can take place.

For further details go online: www.inecnigeria.org/elections/polling-units to check the location of the polling units in your ward. After identifying these, community leaders should run this checklist:



- Are the polling units easily accessible to elderly people or those with disabilities?
- Are the polling units visible?
- Are the polling units close to where people live?
- Are the polling units in a politically neutral location?
- Are the polling units in a safe area?

If the answer to all these questions is ‘yes’, then your polling unit is in a good location. If it is ‘no’ to any of the questions, consult with the INEC Electoral Officer in your area. The location of polling units is officially fixed but small adjustments, such as shifting location within a playing field, may be possible.

However, only INEC can approve such changes. So community leaders should make a request to the Electoral Officer, in writing, at least **30 days before the election**. The letter should state clearly the reasons for the request, and a suggestion for where the polling unit(s) should be relocated.

The community can take practical steps to help ensure that the polling unit(s) are up to standard, by considering:

- **Security**

The safety of voters is the most important concern. Community leaders have a duty to support security agencies during elections (some suggestions for measures to take are included in this guide). Non-partisan and respected community leaders should be assigned to each polling unit. These leaders may be able to prevent the escalation of any incidents which take place, although they cannot replace the role of election officials in making decisions.

- **Accessibility and visibility**

Clear access is important. Roads, paths, and walkways leading to polling units should be passable. Special attention should also be given to elderly people and people living with disabilities, ensuring that they have access to the polling units. To improve visibility, the community can arrange beforehand for the area to be cleared of obstacles, and place signs to direct voters to their polling units.

- **Comfort**

Election day is long, and the rain and heat can take its toll. If you can, as a community, aim to arrange for the polling unit to be more comfortable. This could

include organising canopies, chairs for the elderly, or snacks to stop people from getting hungry. Remain patient; although polls should open at 08:00, crowds can be large and it can take time to vote. Bring provisions if you can, including water, snacks, an umbrella, and anything else that will make the day easier.

2.3.2 Engaging with relevant people

Before the election, it may be advisable to make contact with people who will be involved in the election, to help voting run more smoothly. These people might include:

- **Party agents:** each political party usually has representatives at the polling unit and ward levels. These representatives are referred to as ‘party agents’. These individuals are usually from the community. Their duty on the day of the election is to protect the interests of their political parties and ensure that the declared result from the polling unit is an accurate reflection of actual votes cast. However, there have been instances of party agents causing or contributing to conflict. It may help for the community to meet with party agents in advance of the election, ensuring that party agents are aware of their role, to respect the rules of the election, and to ensure that all political parties are fairly represented at a community level. Engagement with them will also serve as a reminder that their conduct will be remembered and associated with them after the election by their community.
- **Security agencies:** the protection of life, property, and election materials is the primary responsibility of security agencies. Several security agencies are involved in carrying out this function during the elections, including the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, the Department for the State Services, and the Nigerian Army. Fostering a good relationship with the security agencies before the elections, and providing them with any information that could help, is very important. NB: **Engaging with the security services should not be exploited as a means of gaining political advantage or ‘settling scores’.**
- **INEC:** Each LGA is overseen by an Electoral Officer appointed by the State Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), to whom the community should direct all inquiries, complaints, and reports. It is also appropriate for selected community representatives to arrange to meet with the Electoral Officer before the election. At this meeting, they can raise any issues relating to the community and the election.

3. Election day

3.1 Election day outline

The polling procedure to be used in the governorship election requires voters to first undergo accreditation, and then to cast their vote. Accreditation is the process of confirming that a voters’ name is on the Register of Voters in the particular polling unit where they registered and intend to vote. It involves checking identity document (voters register) and marking a finger with indelible ink, to prevent double voting.

The outline of election day is as follows:

- 06:00: INEC staff arrive at polling units.
- 08:00: Polling units open for accreditation and voting.
- 14:00: Polling units close (however, voters already in the queue at this point will be accredited and allowed to vote).

3.2 Election day officials

At each polling unit, there will be a number of permanent INEC officials, including the Presiding Officer, who is in charge of overall. Together, they form the polling team, and are responsible for ensuring that voting takes place smoothly. In general, you should address queries to them.



3.3 How to cast your vote

3.3.1 Accreditation

You need to go through the process of accreditation. This is to ensure that only people who are registered to vote can do so, and that only one vote is cast per person. To do this, present your PVC to the INEC Polling Officer responsible for identification. This is to ensure that your face corresponds with the photo on the card. Your thumbprint will then be used to verify that the PVC you have belongs to you, and is registered correctly. If there are problems with accreditation, you may not be able to vote.

If accreditation is successful, the Polling Officer will stamp and sign the back of a ballot paper, fold it vertically with the printed side inwards, and then issue the signed, stamped ballot paper to you. You must use only this ballot paper to vote.

3.3.2 Casting your vote

After accreditation, you need to cast your vote in a designated ballot box. To do this, enter the polling booth with your ballot paper, alone, or with an assistant, if you have any physical challenges. The polling booth should be stationed in such a way that nobody can see who you vote for. Mark the ballot paper in the space provided, beside the party logo of your choice, with your thumbprint. Fold the marked ballot paper vertically. Put the folded ballot paper into the ballot box in view of all present.

You must **not**:

- Make more than one thumbprint on your ballot paper.
- Make a thumbprint that is not clearly next to one name and symbol.
- Make a thumbprint on the line separating the parties on the ballot paper.
- Sign or write anything on your ballot paper.
- Fold the ballot paper horizontally.

3.4 Protecting your vote

As well as making preparations in advance, there are steps you can take on election day itself to ensure that voting takes place as it should. These include:

- Reporting misconduct to the police, security agents, or election observers as soon as it is safe to do so. INEC accredits local and international observers to monitor elections. Accredited observers will be dressed in uniforms provided by INEC. Note that observers are allowed to ask officials specific questions relating to the election, but they cannot interfere in its conduct, or settle security or logistical problems. You can also report incidents using the INEC helplines provided in this guide.

- Supporting your own community members to remain calm and patient on what can be a long day. This will help to reduce tensions.
- Watching vote collation processes. More detail on this is below.

3.4.1. Watching collation

After voting, the ballot papers will be counted and the total numbers collated at a number of levels. This is an opportunity for results to be manipulated, so one important thing you can do to support a fair election is to observe collation:

- **Unit level collation**

It is much harder to falsify results at the polling unit. So after voting, if it is safe to do so, remain and observe the collation of results at your polling unit, recording the results as they are announced. It is your right to do so, as long as you observe the distance limits. This is important for the ward-level result, and they can also be checked later against the results which are made public.

- **Ward collection**

After the vote count and election result announcement exercises at the various polling units, ballot and result materials are moved to an assigned ward centre for the ward level collation. Here, all collated polling unit results are put together and announced as the overall ward result. The important task here is to ensure that the ward-level result is not different from the sum of the polling unit-level results previously announced, which you can check by getting polling unit results from other polling units from other ward observers.

Important: taking pictures

Note that you are not violating any law by taking pictures during the collation process, and it may help to have photographic evidence of specific incidents. **Only take photos if it is safe to do so.**

3.5. Safety and security

3.5.1 Personal attitude

You should be conscious of your safety at all times. It is important to know the security situation in your area and avoid areas that are identified as officially off limits, considered politically sensitive, or where security incidents are known to take place. The best way to be safe is to avoid trouble in the first place rather than try to remove yourself later. Always be polite and courteous, and set a good example. If something goes wrong, try to remain calm, assess the situation, and decide what can be done. Do not react violently.

3.5.2. Community attitude

It is possible that after the election, tensions over results may lead to conflict. It is therefore sensible that local safety arrangements include plans for how to manage disagreements. You should work as a community to ensure your area does not become the stage for violence during these election periods.

4. Contact information

Bayelsa State INEC Headquarters

INEC Bayelsa State Office, Road Safety Road, Yenagoa

Phone helplines:

- 07022554632
- 09025038466
- 09050858649
- 08180958717
- 09050858629
- 07062896047
- 08105119010
- 07086945927
- 08180958715
- 09050858675
- 08146697603
- 08180958709

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Website: www.inecnigeria.org

App: [myINEC](#) (available on Google Play)

Disclaimer

The information provided in this guide is correct to the best of SDN's collective knowledge. Information on voting processes and electoral procedures is based on decisions and policies of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). SDN will aim to correct any errors or omissions brought to its attention.