

## **Report on Electoral Violence in the South South following the April 12<sup>th</sup> Senate and House of Representatives Elections**

In the South-South zone of the country, notably Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States, the April 12<sup>th</sup> elections were marred by violent disrespect for democratic electoral procedures manifest in organized thuggery, intimidation, and hijacking of election materials. These events were supported by members of key political parties in the region and armed individuals operating outside party boundaries, who share responsibility for making fear a central factor in the political climate on that day. In many areas elections were not held due to the hijacking of election materials and/or chaos carried out by organized groups. Civilians and security officers died on April 12<sup>th</sup>, weapons were brandished by thugs at polling stations where voting did occur, and in various places attempts to control electoral material led to destruction of property valued in the millions of Naira. A general context of mistrust in democratic processes was intensified through the murky distinction between state security forces, INEC and supporters of the PDP in the conduction of the election. This region is particularly significant in the national power structure not only as 'swing states' for PDP or ANPP, but also because territorial control in this region is central to accessing the oil industry and its profits.

Given the instability and crisis events experienced by the South-South in the pre-election period this context of violence was anticipated. In particular, the murder of ANPP Chieftain Marshall Harry from the Kalabari district of Rivers State, intra-communal and youth versus military clashes in Delta State, the availability of sophisticated weapons and thuggery related to competition over sites of oil production, and the frustration created by the fuel crisis which particularly affected this region, were all warning signals that this socio-economic crisis would erupt on polling day. Perhaps less expected was the extent to which violent intimidation would serve as the basis for major electoral irregularities on April 12<sup>th</sup> which severely compromise the election results. The reported results will likely fuel conflict in the region, given that these results are being questioned off record by INEC officials deeply disturbed by '95% turnouts' which they know are highly implausible.

Events observed on April 12<sup>th</sup> included the following:

- Open intimidation, including serious assault of INEC staff and electorate by thugs (often PDP) brandishing weapons
- Violent clashes between PDP, ANPP and UNPP supporters, and violence directed at the police involving guns, machetes, dynamite and broken bottles.
- Hijacking of election materials by heavily armed groups, at times led by politicians, followed by forceful attempts to retrieve these materials by opposing parties/groups. This occurred in both land-based and riverine areas.
- Destruction of public and private property in the form of arson, burning of vehicles and other mob actions, at times in response to alleged election rigging or capture of electoral materials.
- Reactions of police and security forces ranging from a concerted attempt to facilitate a transparent, orderly process to direct collusion with party members in the hijacking of election materials and intimidation of the electorate.
- Confirmed and unconfirmed deaths and severe injuries as a result of the above incidents.

## **Recommendations**

Last weekend's events add to a general sense of disenfranchisement among the population of the South-South that feeds the cycle of violence in the region. The occurrences set a particularly dangerous precedent for the upcoming gubernatorial and presidential election which, if effective intervention is not taken in short order, will likely prove even more brutal. Such violence alienates the South-South from the transition process in Nigeria and compromises prospects for future democracy. We thus call for:

- prompt investigation of the electoral irregularities and incidents of violence that occurred in the South-South on April 12<sup>th</sup>.
- effective action by State Security and INEC to ensure that elections are held in a climate of transparency and trust.

### **Addendum**

While the election results in the entire region are severely compromised, the conduct of the elections, according to IDASA field reports, were particularly problematic in all or part of the following areas: <sup>1</sup>

#### **Akwa Ibom:**

Etinan LGA, Obo-Akara (check)  
Abak Urban 3 (ANPP ward chairman shot dead)  
Ikot Ekepek LGA

#### **Bayelsa:**

Brass LGA  
Nembe LGA  
Ekeremor LGA  
Ogbia LGA  
Sagbama LGA  
Southern Ijaw LGA

#### **Delta:**

Warri South West LGA  
Warri North LGA  
Warri South LGA

#### **Rivers:**

All of Rivers State saw serious violence and intimidation in the lead up to the election creating an environment in which any sort of transparent, free voters process was seriously compromised. The following areas were especially problematic on Saturday according to our observers:

Andoni LGA  
Eleme LGA  
Etche LGA  
Gokana LGA  
Port Harcourt LGA

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<sup>1</sup> For the protection of our field staff, events occurring in specific areas are not indicated. Further information may be requested through IDASA.