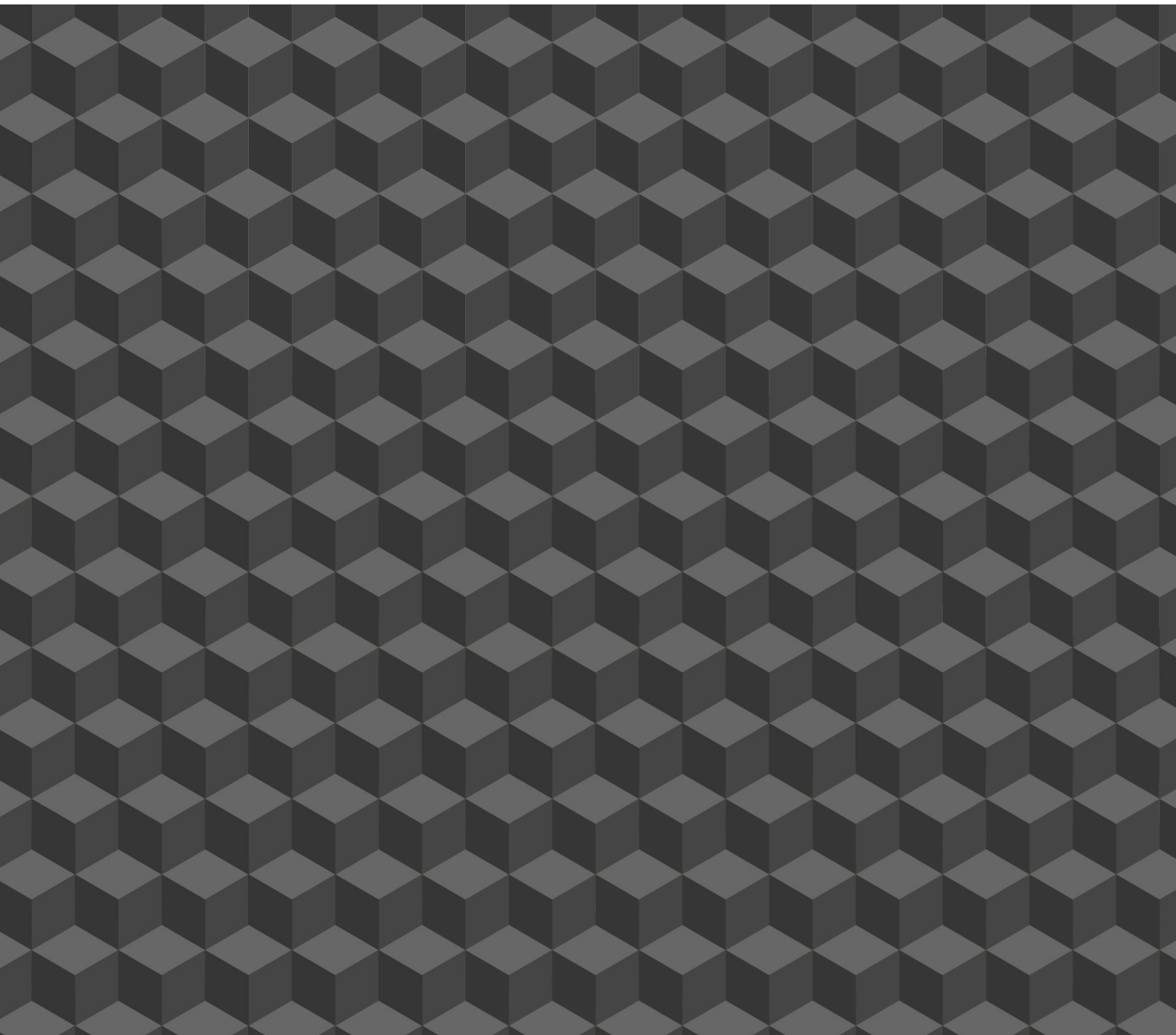




How to protect your vote

How communities can help ensure free and fair elections in 2019

AN ELECTION GUIDE COMPILED BY SDN





Stakeholder Democracy Network

London, United Kingdom

The Green House
244 - 254 Cambridge Heath road
E2 9DA

Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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

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

Email: info@stakeholderdemocracy.org

Website: www.stakeholderdemocracy.org

Twitter: [@SDNNigerDelta](https://twitter.com/SDNNigerDelta)

Readers are encouraged to reproduce material for their own publications. As copyright holder, SDN requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication. For online use, we ask readers to link to the original resource on the SDN website. The views presented in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of SDN or our partners. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial Licence (CC BY NC 4.0). © Stakeholder Democracy Network 2018

SDN reserves intellectual property rights for information and materials provided under this policy, including those materials distributed under an open license.

Contents

Chapter one: Pre-election registration	1
Chapter two: Pre-election logistics	1
Chapter three: Safety	2
Chapter four: Protecting Your Vote	3



Kingdom of the Netherlands

“This guide has been produced with the support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is based on previous material that was produced with other support.”

Pre-election registration

The first and most important step for all adult citizens who wish to participate in the electoral process is to register as a voter. Unless you are registered, and you have had a Permanent Voter Card (PVC) issued to you by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), you cannot vote in the general elections in Nigeria.

The benefits of a credible voter register

Many of us make the mistake of thinking all that is required to vote is to wait until election day and then go to the polling station to vote. But this attitude can contribute to the manipulation of our democracy.

Without registering and voting legitimately, we cannot influence how the country is run. We are more in number than those who are corrupt, and we must use our numerical strength to ensure that our growing democracy is strengthened.

For this to happen, the Voters' Register must represent only qualified and living Nigerian citizens.

Where can I register?

You can register anywhere you live in the country, whether or not it is your place of origin, but it is good to register where you are sure you will be at the time of election. All you need to do is to go to the approved centres in your ward, or the INEC Local Government headquarters, to register. You will be assigned to a voting unit within your area.

You can register anywhere you live in the country, whether or not it is your place of origin, but it is good to register where you are sure you will be at the time of election. All you need to do is to go to the approved centres in your ward, or the INEC Local Government headquarters, to register. You will be assigned to a voting unit within your area.

Registration Area Centres in Delta State:

<http://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/DELTA.pdf>

Registration Area Centres in Rivers State

<http://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/RIVERS.pdf>

Registration Area Centres in Bayelsa State

<http://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/BAYELSA.pdf>

Upon completing your registration, you will be immediately issued a Temporary Voters' Card (TVC) but you will still need to collect your Permanent Voters' Card (PVC). It is only when you obtain your PVC that you will be qualified to vote during the general elections.

What is the CVR?

INEC has introduced a Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) process ahead of the 2019 general elections. It is an opportunity for citizens who did not register during the last voter registration exercise, or who have since turned 18, to register.

The CVR process also provides for the replacement of lost or damaged PVCs, the transfer of registration, and the distribution of PVCs.

Once you have registered, your PVC can be used for all future elections.

Taking part in the CVR

Only register if:

1. You did not register in 2011 (by choice or you were not yet 18)
2. You have verified that you are not in the Voter's Register, because your registration has been deleted for any reason or your data has been lost.

Reviewing the voters' register

The voters' register is the list of all those who are currently signed up to vote. It is important to ensure that the voters' register is up to date and only contains the names of genuine voters. In order to ensure this, INEC periodically reviews the register, especially before major elections.

After doing so, it removes the names of voters who have died, reconciles the names of those who have transferred their registration, removes the names of those who have registered more than once, and removes the names of those under 18.

The Preliminary Register

Before the voters' register is published for the 2019 General Elections, the Preliminary Register of Voters will be displayed at all Polling Units for public scrutiny. It is likely this will happen during or after July, once the Continuous Voters' Registration process has been completed.

On the basis of this, citizens can raise objections, such as the presence of under-age voters and non-Nigerians on the register. These can be registered in INEC's 'Claims and Objection' form, which will be issued during the exercise.

How to check your registration status

There are three key ways to check if you are registered with INEC and eligible to vote in the 2019 elections:

1. Visit your polling unit during the 'display of voter register' exercise

INEC will display the reviewed or Preliminary Register at your local registration centre, as described above. Visit your local registration centre to confirm that your details are included and correct.

2. Use your phone

Send a text message to 08171 646 879 in the following format: state, surname, last five digits of your voter identification number (found on the top of your temporary or permanent voter card).

An example is given below: Rivers, Ibinabo, 02457

You should receive a response within 15 minutes displaying your full profile on the Voters' Register and your Polling Unit number, or an error message. If you receive an error message, check to ensure that you entered your information correctly. Note that text messages are charged at the local network rate.

3. Check your registration on the INEC website

Visit the INEC registration status website: www.inecnigeria.org/?page_id=2160

The final register

INEC has scheduled to publish the final Voter Register on January 7, 2019. Ensure that you look for your name on the register when it happens.

PVC collection

If you do not have your PVC from previous distribution exercises, do not re-register. Uncollected PVCs will have been returned to INEC's offices in their respective local government areas. Batch by batch distribution of new PVCs has also commenced, and in either case you should go to your local office to collect your PVC.

What should I do if I lose or damage my PVC?

It is possible to get your PVC replaced, provided you notify INEC and request a new one not later than 30 days before any election. You must clearly state the reasons for the loss or damage of your PVC. Take a photo ID and a passport photograph and go to the same INEC LGA headquarters where you obtained your PVC.

Double registration and fraud - the risks to you

In Nigeria you must be at least 18 years old for you to be eligible to register and vote in elections. It is an offence for anyone younger than 18 years to register or vote. Double registration is a punishable criminal offence.

Protect your PVC from fraud

Your PVC is issued for your use only. You must keep it safe and present it to INEC officials for accreditation during elections. You must not sell or transfer it to another person. Some politicians may go about offering money to voters to give up their PVCs, even though it should be impossible for anyone other than you to use your PVC because of INEC's verification processes, which use card readers. Selling your PVC is nonetheless a serious offence, and will also mean you cannot vote, as you cannot do so without your PVC

I have moved since I registered. What do I do?

You can transfer registration if you have relocated to a new area and would prefer to vote there. See SDN's How to transfer your registration guide.

Pre-election logistics

Check your Polling Units

INEC have selected strategic locations in your community as designated Polling Units or stations. Polling Units are the only approved places where voting can take place. Polling Units should be visible and easily accessible.

I do not know where the Polling Units in my ward are. Where can I find them?

Go to the link (http://www.inecnigeria.org/?page_id=20) on the INEC website to confirm the location of the Polling Units in your ward.

To confirm your Polling Unit, look at the Polling Unit number on your PVC.

After identifying the location of the Polling Units, community leaders should run this checklist:

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| • Can the Polling Unit be easily accessed by voters? | Yes | No |
| • Is the Polling Unit in a visible place? | Yes | No |
| • Is the Polling Unit close to where people live? | Yes | No |
| • Is the Polling Unit in a politically neutral location? | Yes | No |
| • Is the Polling Unit in a danger free zone? | Yes | No |

If the answer is 'Yes' to all the questions on the checklist, then your Polling Units are in good locations. However, if it is 'No' to one or more of these questions, then there may be a need to consult with the INEC Electoral Officer in your area. The location of Polling Units is officially fixed but small adjustments [for example, shifting within a designated field] are likely to be straightforward, especially if all stakeholders are aware in advance.

Only INEC can approve the changes in location of a Polling Unit. Community leaders must present such 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, suggest possible places where the Polling Unit could be relocated to, and present authorisation from the community leadership.

If this avenue is not available or responsive, the community can take practical steps that aim to bring the Polling Unit up to standard.

What can be done to improve conditions in existing Polling Units?

INEC have selected strategic locations in your community as designated Polling Units or stations. Polling Units are the only approved places where voting can take place. Polling Units should be visible and easily accessible.

1. Accessibility and visibility

Improving access to all Polling Units is important. The roads, paths, and walkways leading to Polling Units must be passable, so voters can access them. Special attention should also be given to persons living with disabilities (PLWDs), ensuring that adequate provision is made to enable them have access to the Polling Units. To improve visibility, communities should aim to arrange beforehand for the area to be cleared of obstructions, and post signs to direct voters to the Polling Unit.

2. Comfort

Elections usually start from 8:00AM, and the counting of the unit level votes often stretches to 4:00PM and beyond. This is a long period of time. Factors including tiredness, rain, and the heat mean the Polling Unit should be made as comfortable as possible. If they are not available, communities can seek to arrange for canopies and chairs to be present for polling officials, security agents, and voters, especially the elderly, women and PLWDs.

3. Security

The safety of voters is of utmost importance before, during and after the elections. Community leaders have a duty to help ensure security at Polling Units. Some suggestions for how to do this are included in this guide.

Known troublemakers who may cause disturbances should be reported to the police in advance, while individuals who are respected among a community should be assigned to each Polling Unit. They may be able to prevent the escalation of minor misunderstandings. These individuals can never replace the role of election officials in making decisions on elections day but their knowledge of the community and individuals means that they can often assist in resolving disputes.

Communities should note that INEC has taken steps to ensure polls open by 8am or very close to it. If turnout for an election is high, then there will be a crowd to manage. Any effort to increase the efficient management of crowds (particularly if there are many Polling Units near to each other) will help officials and voters to have a better experience.

All prospective voters in the community should have an idea of what to expect on election days and prepare accordingly. Each voter should be reminded to ensure they take provisions including water, snacks, an umbrella, and appropriate clothing to make what could be a very long day less stressful.

4. Engaging with party agents

Each political party has representatives at the Polling Unit and at ward level. These representatives are referred to as Party Agents. These individuals are usually from the community and are often known within the community. Their duty on the day of the election is to protect the interest 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 at the Polling Units by their actions or words. To forestall this, communities could try and meet with known Party Agents to discuss election day issues and conduct. The fact that the Party Agents are from the community gives the opportunity for some form of accountability, which the community should make the most of.

By ensuring that political Party agents are aware of their role and that all political parties are fairly represented at a community level, a signal is being sent to them and their leaders that they need to respect the rules of the election. The engagement with them will also serve as a reminder that their actions will remain with them after the election.

5. Engaging with security agencies

The protection of lives, property, election officials and materials, and the maintenance of law and order, are the primary responsibilities of the security agencies. Several security agencies are involved in carrying out this function during the elections. These include the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, the Department for the State Services, and the Nigerian Army.

At community level the most relevant agencies are the local division of the Police and the Civil Defence Corps, if available.

Fostering a good relationship with the security agencies before the elections is very important. The community can, and should, provide security agents with verifiable details of areas where there may be unrest, who could be involved, and any other relevant information that could forestall the outbreak of violence.

There is need for caution here! This should not be exploited as a means of gaining political advantage or settling scores. Information should only be passed on to security agents that are verifiable and unbiased.

6. Engaging with INEC Representatives and Electoral Officers

INEC has an office in every Local Government Areas (LGA). Sometimes its office will be inside the LGA Office itself.

Each LGA is overseen by an Electoral Officer (EO) appointed by the State Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC). Communities should direct all inquiries, complaints and reports to the Electoral Officer overseeing their area.

It is appropriate for selected community representatives to arrange to meet with the EO before the election. At this meeting, the community reps can raise relevant election issues which may affect the community - for example, the location of Polling Units or issues relating to Party Agents. This will also help ensure that the EO knows your community is mobilised, organised and not easily susceptible to manipulation.

Safety

Every election cycle in Nigeria presents challenges that require careful and effective safety measures. Below are some steps we suggest you should take to help manage the process safely as a community:

Establish a cordial relationship with the police

It is a good idea for the community to establish communications with the police division in your area. This is very important because it will provide the opportunity for the police and your community to agree on how you will support each to deliver peaceful elections. For example, the community could decide to set up a committee to engage the police.

You should note the following:

- The police are the only civil security agency responsible for maintaining order before, during and after elections in Nigeria. Other security agencies may join, but the police are the first responders.

- The police are willing to partner with communities to help bring orderliness and peace.
- The police can help you understand the lawful actions you can take as well as the degree of risk you should expose yourselves to.

Managing political Party Agents

Party Agents are important stakeholders who communities should be communicating with. They play a vital role for their political parties, although they can create challenging situations. As noted previously, it is important to try and identify and work with Party Agents in advance.

Who to call on election day?

In spite of the good steps taken by communities to achieve a safe election, some may still attempt to cause trouble. In such situations, it is important that you consider your safety and that of your community and take the following steps:

- Call the attention of the security personnel at the Polling Unit.
- Call the attention of the INEC officials present.
- Where there are no security personnel or if INEC officials are overwhelmed by the situation, call the INEC helplines in your area. If there is none in your area then call the national helplines stating the situation, the Polling Unit, ward, community, and State.

The INEC helplines are: 07098114865, 07098118346, 07098115592, 07098115583, 07098115257, 07098117563, 07098116381, 07098110916

These numbers may change and you should ensure you have the latest numbers before election day. <http://www.inecnigeria.org/?inecnews=inec-hotlines-and-vanity-number>

Managing post-election tensions

It is possible that after the election, tensions over the results could lead to conflict. It is therefore important that you plan, with the police and others, how to manage any disagreements. While it is important not to have problems during the elections, it is also important that your community does not become the stage for violence afterwards.

Protecting your vote

It is important that you safeguard your vote collectively as a community. There are a number of steps communities can take to strengthen the processes intended to ensure they are free, fair and credible.

This includes collective action to safeguard votes. Communities can send a clear message that they will resist the manipulation of the electoral process.

Below are four tactics that your community can use to strengthen the electoral process in Nigeria.

1. Watch out for compromising incidents, and speak to accredited inec observers at the polling unit

Local and international INEC-accredited observers will visit your Polling Units on polling day. They will monitor the election as it takes place, and report on the adherence to or violation of electoral laws and INEC's guidelines.

These observers are legally authorised to obtain the information they need to ascertain if the process is credible or not. They can ask electoral officials key questions, and their reports can be used as evidence in election tribunals or court.

You can help by communicating your observations on the process to the observers, especially concerning any incidents which take place before they arrive. These might include, for example:

- Monetary inducements to vote in a specific way
- The participation of underage voters
- The display of political campaign materials at election venues.

Observers will be dressed in uniforms provided by INEC with the inscription 'Local/Domestic Observer' or 'International Observer'. See the 'Reporting on Incidents' box below for more information on how to report incidents.

Note that you can also call or send text messages to the INEC helplines, and notify others such as the police and journalists.

2. Watch the vote counting at unit and ward levels

It is your right to remain at the Polling Unit after voting, and to watch the counting of votes.

You can help by encouraging the people in your community to be vigilant during the count, and by recording the results manually or electronically. This will make it more difficult to manipulate the results of the election, contribute to increased confidence in the results, and increase the likelihood of the outcome being accepted.

After the votes are counted and the result announced at each unit, the ballot and result materials will be moved to the ward centre for ward-level collation. Citizens (especially accredited party agents) are also encouraged to watch closely at this stage. Here they should monitor and ensure that the results announced at the collation centre do not differ from those announced at each unit in the ward.

3. Take pictures of important events on the election day

It is your right to remain at the Polling Unit after voting, and to watch the counting of votes.

You can help by encouraging the people in your community to be vigilant during the count, and by recording the results manually or electronically. This will make it more difficult to manipulate the results of the election, contribute to increased confidence in the results, and increase the likelihood of the outcome being accepted.

After the votes are counted and the result announced at each unit, the ballot and result materials will be moved to the ward centre for ward-level collation. Citizens (especially accredited party agents) are also encouraged to watch closely at this stage. Here they should monitor and ensure that the results announced at the collation centre do not differ from those announced at each unit in the ward.

4. Monitor all the elections in 2019

In 2019, citizens will vote for candidates of their choice to occupy the following political offices:

National level

President

Senate (Members)

House of Representatives (Members)

State level

Governor

House of Assembly (Members)

Local Government level

Chairman

Councillors


Ahead of the 2019 General Elections, your community should therefore make plans to mobilise and sensitise citizens to participate actively at each level of the elections. This means ensuring citizens vote as individuals while taking the steps outlined here to protect their votes as a community.



INEC contact addresses

Rivers State INEC Headquarters:
Plot 236, Aba Road, Port Harcourt.

Delta State INEC Headquarters:
NTA Road, Off Okpanam Road, Asaba

Bayelsa State INEC Headquarters:
Road State Road, Yenagoa

 www.inecnigeria.org  Inecnigeria  Inecnigeria  @inecnigeria

INEC Citizens  09050858629, 08180958715, 09025038466, 07062896047,
Contact Center:  09050858675, 09050858649, 08105119010, 08146697603

Disclaimer: the information in this document is based on publicly available INEC information and discussions with INEC officials in Port Harcourt in spring 2018. It is accurate and up to date to the best of SDN's knowledge, but processes may change as election preparations are finalised.