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Elections in Nigeria

2015 General Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Africa

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Nigerian Independent National Electoral Commission as of March 23, 2015. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

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When will the elections be held?

The presidential and National Assembly elections will be held on March 28, 2015. The governorship and State House of Assembly elections will be held on April 11, 2015.

Why were the elections postponed?

The presidential and National Assembly elections were originally scheduled for February 14, 2015, with governorship and State House of Assembly elections scheduled for February 28, 2015, however, on February 7, the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Attahiru Muhammadu Jega, announced a six-week postponement of the polls. INEC announced the postponement after being informed by the National Security Services that neither the security of the polling units or polling staff could be guaranteed for the original dates.

The new election dates are in compliance with Nigeria's Constitution.

Who will Nigerian citizens elect into public office in the 2015 elections?

Nigerians will be electing the President, Governors at the state level and members of the legislature in the National and State Houses of Assembly.

Who sits in the Nigerian National Assembly?

The bicameral National Assembly is made up of two chambers. The House of Representatives, which is the lower house, and the Senate, which is the upper house.

The current House of Representatives, formed following elections held in April 2011, has a total of 360 members who are elected in single-member constituencies using the simple majority system. Members serve four-year terms. The House is presided over by a Speaker who is elected by the members of the House.

The Senate consists of 109 Senators, including the President of the Senate, whose primary function is to guide and regulate the proceedings in the Senate. Each of the 36 states is divided into three senatorial districts that elect one Senator. The entire Federal Capital Territory elects only one Senator.

Who sits in the State Houses of Assembly?

Nigeria has a total of 36 Houses of Assembly, one in each state. A total of 990 members make up all the 36 Houses of Assembly. Total numbers of members per House in each state depends on population size of the state.

Which institution has the mandate to conduct the elections and how is it structured?

The elections will be conducted by Nigeria's election management body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). INEC was established by Section 153 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a corporate body with perpetual succession. This means that it may sue and be sued in its corporate name, and that its legal existence is separate from that of its owners or managers.

According to Section 14 (1) of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution, INEC shall be comprised of the following members: a Chairman, who shall be the Chief Executive Officer and twelve other members to be known as National Electoral Commissioners. Section 14 also stipulates that the Chairman and the National Electoral Commissioners shall be persons of unquestionable integrity and not be less than 50 years old and 40 years old respectively. The Constitution also provides for the appointment of a Resident Electoral Commissioner for each State of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja.

In June 2005, a key institution within INEC – The Electoral Institute – was established to carry out the following objectives:

1. Facilitate capacity building and professionalism in the commission through training and development of the commission's staff;
2. Engage in vigorous voter education activities with a view to achieving an increased and effective participation of the electorate in the electoral process; and
3. Carry out electoral research and documentation.

How many states will hold elections in 2015?

Citizens in every state will be able to vote for members of the legislature and presidential candidates. Governorship elections will be held in every state with the exception of Anambra, Ondo, Edo, Kogi, Bayelsa, Osun and Ekiti. The tenure of the Governors in these states has not yet expired because by-elections have been held since 2011.

Will elections be held in the North East?

Yes. Elections will be held in every state. However, citizens of some local government areas (LGAs) that are particularly affected by the violence will vote in their respective state capitals instead of those LGAs. The LGAs that will be "recreated" as polling units at the state capital level include Mubi, Mauha, Gombi and Michiga in Adamawa; Gujba and Gulani in Yola and sixteen LGAs in Borno.

What are INEC's responsibilities with regards to the 2015 election?

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) supervises all elections to the offices of the President and Vice President, the Governor and Deputy Governor of a state and to the membership of the Senate, the House of Representatives and the House of Assembly of each state of the federation. It is not involved in local government elections.

Its duties include registering political parties and monitoring their operations and finances; monitoring political campaigns and providing rules and regulations to govern them; conducting voter and civic education; and conducting any national referendums.

INEC is headquartered in Abuja, with offices in the capital cities of all 36 states, including the Federal Capital Territory, as well as in the 774 local government areas in the country.

What is the legal framework for the 2015 elections?

- The 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended
- The Electoral Act 2010 as amended
- Independent National Electoral Commission 2015 Election Guidelines and Procedures

Does Nigeria use quotas for women to include them in government?

No. There is no provision for this in the Nigerian Constitution.

However, political parties give some seats and executive positions to women at their discretion. The Independent National Electoral Commission has also encouraged political parties to make provisions in their constitutions for a certain percentage of their executive committees to be reserved for women in consonance with United Nations best practices.

Which electoral systems will be used in the general election?

Members of the National and State Houses of Assembly will be elected using the first-past-the-post system, also known as a simple majority. The presidential and governorship elections will also use a majority system, which includes some race-specific stipulations. To be declared winner in the presidential election, the candidate must score the highest number of votes cast in the country and score at least one quarter of votes in two-thirds of all the states and the Federal Capital Territory of the country. Winning Governors must score the highest number of votes cast in the state and score at least one-quarter of votes in two-thirds of all local government areas across the state.

Under what circumstances would a presidential run-off be held, and when would it be held?

A run-off will be held if any candidate in the presidential election fails to meet the following criteria: a candidate must score the highest number of votes cast in the country and score at least one quarter of votes in two-thirds of all states plus the Federal Capital Territory of the country. If necessary, the run-off vote would take place seven days after official results are declared.

Who is eligible to vote?

Section 12 (1) of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended states that a person shall be eligible to vote if she or he:

- Is a citizen of Nigerian
- 18 years old or older
- Is ordinarily resident in, works in or originates from a local government area, council, or ward covered by a registration center
- Presents her or himself to the registration officer of the commission for registration as a voter
- Is not subject to any legal incapacity to vote under any law, rule or regulation in force in Nigeria

Is there any punishment for multiple registrations?

Section 12 (2) of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended states that a person cannot register in more than one registration center or register more than once in the same registration center as this amounts to an electoral offense punishable by law. As such, Section 12 (3) of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended has warned the public that offenders are liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding ₦100,000 (NGN) (approximately \$500 [USD]) or up to a year of imprisonment, or both.

Who has the custody of the voter register?

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is in charge of the voter register according to Section 9 of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended. INEC compiles, maintains and updates the voter register on a continuous basis. The INEC Electoral Officer of each local government area (LGA) is expected to take custody of the voter register for their LGA under the supervision of the Resident Electoral Commissioner for each state.

How many registered voters does Nigeria have?

There are 68,833,476 registered voters on the national voter registry that will be used in the 2015 general elections.

How can voters verify their registration?

A voter is expected to check the register of voters to ascertain that her name is included and spelled correctly. This can be done when the register is displayed for inspection. Voters can also check the registration portal on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) website or send a text to a voter registration platform that INEC set up for this purpose.

What is being done to ensure electoral security?

Security agents will be in place to provide security at the polling units and polling stations. The Independent National Electoral Commission is collaborating with the Inter-agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), a platform pooling various Nigerian security agencies, to bring about a peaceful election process.

What does the ballot paper look like?

Each ballot paper will include the symbols adopted by the political party of the candidate. The ballot paper will be bound in a booklet, and must include a serial number. The ballots for each office being contested will be differentiated by their color.

Will Nigerians in the diaspora be able to vote?

No, there are no provisions in the law for out-of-country voting at this time. However, Section 77 (2) of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended states that every citizen of Nigeria who is 18 years or older at the time of voter registration for the purpose of election to a legislative house shall be entitled to be registered as a voter for that election.

The Independent National Electoral Commission has advocated an amendment to the law that permits Nigerians living abroad to vote where they are, although this law will not be in place by 2015.

Who is eligible to be a candidate?

Candidacy requirements differ slightly between positions. All candidates must fulfil basic minimum requirements of citizenship and be registered voters. In addition, they must show that they have been educated up to at least school certificate level or its equivalent, and that they are a sponsored member of a political party. Senate candidates must be at least 35 years old, while House of Representative candidates must be at least 30.

Does INEC have the power to disqualify candidates or parties?

Yes. The Independent National Electoral Commission will then write to the candidate or party involved explaining why they have been disqualified.

How many parties have been registered?

The Independent National Electoral Commission has registered 28 parties for the 2015 elections.

Can anyone run as an independent candidate?

No. There is no legal provision for independent candidates. A political party must sponsor a candidate before he or she can run for a political position.

Are there measures in place to ensure access for persons with disabilities?

The Independent National Electoral Commission's procedures allow persons with disabilities to come to the front of the lines in polling units when voting or registering to vote. People with disabilities may also be accompanied into the polling unit by a person of their choice, other than a poll agent. Tactile ballot guides will not be available for voters in the 2015 general elections.

Will internally displaced persons be allowed to vote in the 2015 elections?

There are numerous legal and logistical challenges to enfranchising voters who have been internally displaced in Nigeria, due to conflict or other disaster. However, efforts are being made to include internally displaced persons (IDPs) to the greatest extent possible. IDP voting centers, which replicate constituencies affected by violence, will be created at the IDP camps in affected states. No voter from one registration area can vote at a station replicated from another area. Intensive voter education activities are also being carried out to inform the public about these new polling centers.

What are the rules on campaigning?

Once the Independent National Electoral Commission gives notice of election, it also publicizes the dates of the various stages of the election. This includes a period of time in which campaigns may take place.

Section 30 (1) of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended states that that the campaigning may begin no later than 90 days before an election. For these elections, campaigning began on November 16, 2014 for the presidential and National Assembly races and on November 30, 2014 for the governorship and State House of Representative elections.

Section 99 (1) of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended prohibits advertisements or broadcast of campaign materials 24 hours prior to campaign day.

What are the rules for campaign finance?

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has defined expenditure limits for all candidates. All candidates are required to submit financial reports specifying their campaign income and expenditures no later than seven days after Election Day.

Candidates may accept financial donations from citizens, but are forbidden from receiving any support or funds from foreign or illegal sources. The donations received by candidates shall not exceed the expenditure ceiling specified by INEC for each candidate. Financing an election campaign by means of public funds, ministries, treasuries, government companies, institutions or bodies is also strictly prohibited.

The expenditure ceiling for each candidate is summarized below:

- Presidential: ₦1,000,000,000 (NGN) (approximately \$5 million [USD])
- Governorship: ₦200,000,000 (NGN) (approximately \$1,005,000 [USD])
- Senatorial seat: ₦40,000,000 (NGN) (approximately \$200,100 [USD])
- House of Representatives: ₦20,000,000 (NGN) (approximately \$100,500 [USD])
- State House of Assembly and Chairmanship: ₦10,000,000 (NGN) (approximately \$50,200 [USD])
- Councillorship: ₦1,000,000 (NGN) (approximately \$5,000 [USD])

INEC has established the Election and Party Monitoring department, which is tasked with watching over party finance activities.

What are the basic polling procedures on Election Day?

Accreditation starts at 8:00 a.m. when the polling stations open. Voters must bring their Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) identification document to the polling center where they are registered to vote. Accreditation ends at 1:00 p.m., or after the last voter in the line before that time is accredited.

Upon entering the polling center, voters will be directed to a polling station that contains their voter registration number. Once in the polling station, the voter's name and details will be confirmed on the register of voters, her or his photograph will be checked and the PVC reader will be used to authenticate the card and the fingerprints of the cardholder.

Indelible ink will be applied to the voter's finger, and the voter will be issued an accreditation tag. The finger used for voting depends on the race being voted on. The left thumb will be used for the presidential and National Assembly elections, and the left index finger will be used for the governorship and State Assembly elections.

Voting starts at 1:30 p.m., or whenever accreditation ends, in all polling stations. Voting does not have an end time, it goes on until the last accredited voter in the queue has voted.

Eligible voters will exercise their right to vote for candidates of their choice. Candidates nominated by their respective political parties to contest the elections shall be elected through a voting system known as the Re-Modified Open-Secret Ballot System (or REMOBS). In this system, voters thumb/finger-print the ballot for the candidate(s) of their choice in secret and cast their votes in the open. Nigeria has a political party-based system as candidates run for elective offices on the platform of political parties.

Can voters still be accredited and allowed to vote after accreditation is over?

Voters waiting in the queue at the close of accreditation shall be accredited and allowed to vote if they are in queue, but any voter coming after shall not be accredited to vote.

What new voting procedures are being introduced in the 2015 general elections?

Several new voting procedures will be introduced in the 2015 general elections that have not previously been implemented at a national scale. One is the use of Permanent Voter's Cards (PVCs) that contain voters' biometric information in an embedded microchip. The PVCs replace the Temporary Voter's Cards (TVC) that were used in the 2011 general elections.

Electronic card readers with fingerprint scanners will also be used to accredit voters for the first time in the 2015 general elections. The electronic card readers will verify that the presented PVCs are legitimate and that the voter presenting the card is registered at that polling unit. The card readers will also display a picture of the voter so that poll workers can visually confirm the identity of the voter against the card, and allow for scanning of fingerprints to check the voter's fingerprints against the biometric information contained in the PVC.

In order to vote in the 2015 general elections, voters must present their Permanent Voter's Card at the polling unit and that card must be read and confirmed by the electronic card reader. If the voter's scanned fingerprints do not match the fingerprints in the voter registry, they will still be allowed to vote after the poll worker completes an incident form to report the issue.

The PVCs and electronic card readers have been introduced as voting procedures in an attempt to curtail voter fraud and ballot stuffing. As an additional benefit, the card readers will track the total number of accredited voters at each polling unit and send this information to a central database, allowing INEC to confirm that the number of votes counted in a polling unit does not exceed the number of accredited voters.

Does INEC have a 24/7 contact or emergency line?

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has opened a Citizens' Contact Center, which gives the general public constant access to the INEC with inquiries and exchange of information. The Center

operates daily. It currently opens between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. As the elections near, the Center will scale up to round-the-clock, 24-hour service. The Center offers the public the opportunity to get real time responses to inquiries, incident reports, complaints and queries about any aspect of the electoral process.

Please find contact information for the Center below:

- **Telephone:** 07098116381, 07098115257, 07098117563 or 07098110916
- **E-mail:** iccc@inec.gov.ng
- **Facebook:** <http://www.facebook.com/inecnigeria>
- **Twitter:** <http://www.twitter.com/innecnigeria>
- **Website:** www.inecnigeria.org

When are ballots rejected?

A ballot shall be rejected if:

- The choice of the voter is not clear
- The back of the ballot paper has not been stamped and signed by the Presiding Officer
- The ballot is without any thumb-print of a voter
- The ballot contains any writing or mark that identifies the voter
- The ballot is thumb-printed for a party not contesting the election

What are spoiled ballot papers?

If a ballot paper is badly torn by the Presiding Officer (PO) when detaching it from the ballot paper booklet or the ballot paper is by accident dealt with by a voter in such a manner that the ballot paper cannot be used for voting, the PO shall write the word "Spoiled" on the front of the ballot paper and place it in the envelope provided. The PO shall then issue a fresh ballot paper to the voter.

Who is responsible for managing and staffing polling centers and stations?

The Independent National Electoral Commission works with the National Youth Service Corps to recruit and train its members as Presiding Officers, polling clerks and assistants to manage the polling units.

Who will announce the results?

Results will be announced at the polling unit immediately after collation, sorting, and counting of votes at the polling unit level. Following this announcement, results are transferred on to and collated at the collation centers at the ward, local government area, state and national levels. The level of the final announcement of results depends on the type of seat in question. The presidential results will be announced at the national level Presidential Collation Center. Governorship, House of Representatives and Senatorial races are announced at the state level.

Where will results be published?

Polling station results will be publically posted at polling centers by the Presiding Officer immediately after counting at that polling station. Constituency and nationwide results will be announced on live television by the Returning Officer, then at the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Media Center, and then published on the INEC website.

When will results be announced?

The time of the announcement will depend on the speed of collation and tabulation of the results. On average, results are announced 48 hours after the election is complete. However, this may take longer in certain cases.

Can the results be challenged?

Only registered candidates or parties can challenge results. These challenges must be submitted to a court. Section 138 (1) of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended states that an election may be brought into question on the following grounds:

- That a person was not qualified to run at the time of the election
- That the election was invalid by reason of corrupt practices or noncompliance with the provisions of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended
- That the respondent was not duly elected by majority of lawful votes cast at the election
- That the petitioner or its candidate was validly nominated but was unlawfully excluded from the election

What constitutes an electoral offense on Election Day?

An electoral offense is any violation of a regulation or law passed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Examples of electoral offenses on Election Day include vote buying, campaigning during the silence period, multiple voting and voting despite ineligibility. Voters, polling agents and candidates can submit a written complaint to the nearest INEC local office; all claims will be reviewed by INEC.

How does someone become an observer?

Civil society organizations and concerned local and international bodies must formally write to the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) Election and Party Monitoring department and await approval from INEC. Interested parties will receive observer kits on approval. Observer groups are expected to submit a detailed list of their observers as well as photographs for each observer. Tags with photographs will be printed by INEC and issued to each observer. Observers must wear their INEC issued observer tags on Election Day or risk arrest.

Are election observers allowed to interfere with the Election Day proceedings?

No, election observers are not allowed to interfere with electoral proceedings.

Domestic and international observers are appointed by their respective organizations and accredited by the Independent National Electoral Commission. They have the right to observe the entire voting process and the counting of ballots at the polling stations and the collation and declaration of results at the collation centers.

With regard to election observers, election officials shall: check that all observers are duly accredited and wear their observer badges while in the polling station; allow observers to watch the distribution of election materials, conduct of the voting, sorting and counting of ballots, and announcement of results; and allow observers to call to their attention to any irregularities.

What are candidate agents?

Candidate agents (also known as polling or party agents) are appointed by the parties to represent their interests during polling, counting and collating. Each party has the right to appoint one agent for each polling station and collation center. The Electoral Officer should send the names of these agents to each Presiding Officer before polling begins. Also, any candidate can act in place of his or her candidate agent at any polling station or collation center.

Is there any engagement by INEC with civil society organizations and international bodies?

The Independent National Electoral Commission has been working with its development partners to build staff capacity, create awareness on election activities, sensitize the public on voter activities and facilitate widespread participation.

Who is allowed access to the polling station on Election Day?

The following people shall be allowed full access to the polling station:

- Voters
- Independent National Electoral Commission officials on election duty
- Security Agents
- Accredited candidate agents
- Accredited journalists
- Accredited domestic and international observers

Resources

- [IFES Nigeria](#)
- [Independent National Electoral Commission](#)