

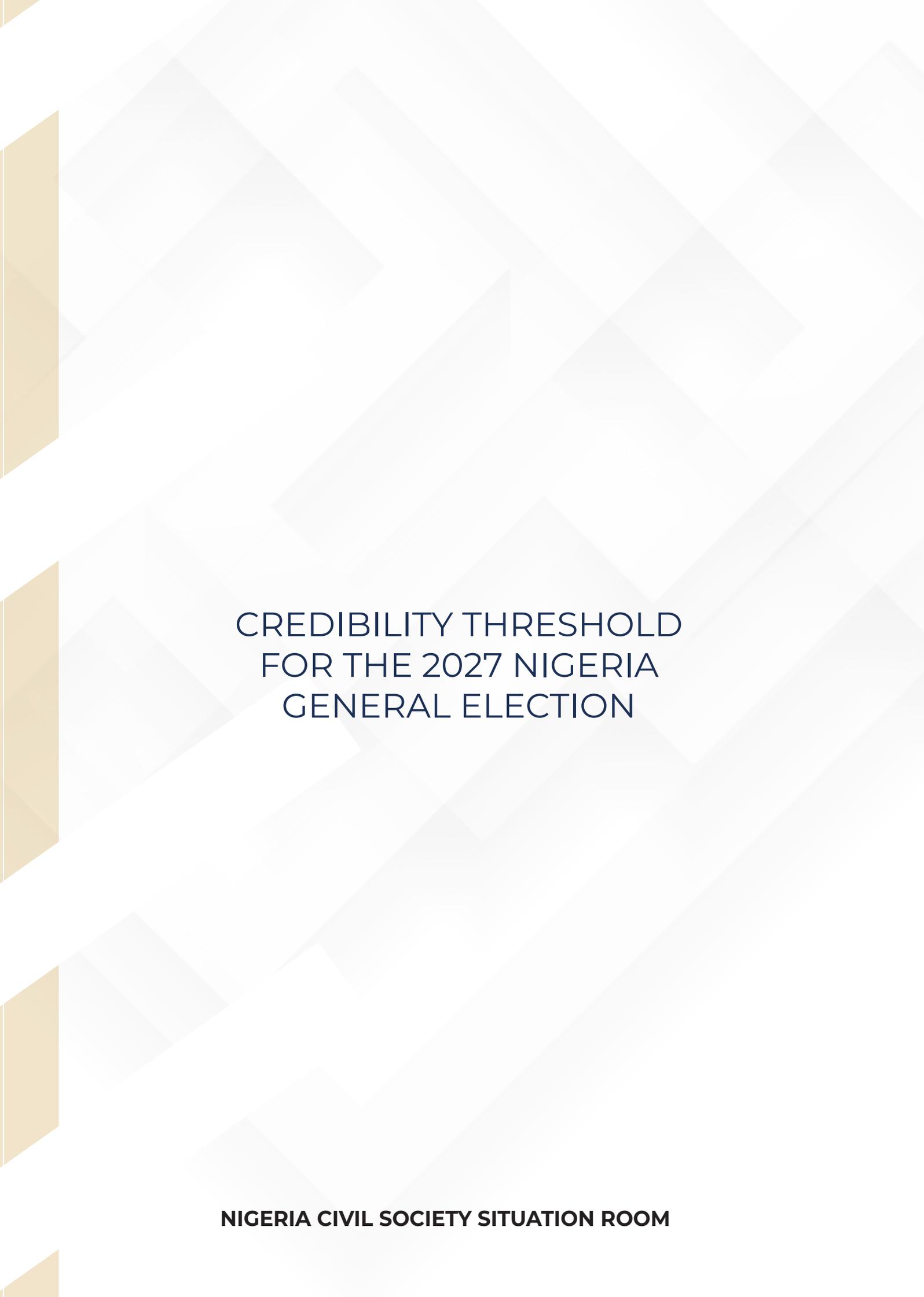
NIGERIA CIVIL SOCIETY
SITUATIONROOM

CREDIBILITY THRESHOLD

FOR THE
2027 NIGERIA GENERAL ELECTION



A Framework for Electoral Reforms in Nigeria



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FOR THE 2027 NIGERIA
GENERAL ELECTION

NIGERIA CIVIL SOCIETY SITUATION ROOM

2025 Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room

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Table of Contents

Background	1
Credibility Threshold for the 2027 General Election	12
1. INEC Institutional Integrity	13
i. Appointment of INEC Chairman and Commissioners	13
ii. Election Legal Framework	14
iii. Public Accountability by Institutions Involved in Elections	14
iv. Election Result Management	14
v. Management of Election Security	15
vi. Prosecution of Electoral Offences	16
vii. Electoral Dispute Resolution	16
viii. Role of Political Parties	17
ix. Monitoring of Campaigns	18
x. Role of Civil Society Organizations	19
2. Delivery of Elections	20
i. Reorganization of INEC	20
ii. Election Management	20
iii. Training of Election Officials	21
iv. Voter Registration	21
v. Accreditation and Voting	22
3. Stakeholders' Engagement	24
i. Voter and Civic Education	24
ii. Communication Strategy	24
Conclusion	26
Acknowledgments	27
About the Situation Room	27

Background

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Situation Room), comprising over 70 civic groups, serves as a coordinating platform for civil society's engagement in governance and democratic development in Nigeria. Among other objectives, the Situation Room aims to enhance the quality of Nigeria's electoral process and bolster the capacity of civil society groups to engage with and monitor electoral institutions and processes. To further its goals, the Situation Room has issued a Credibility Threshold Document prior to all general elections in Nigeria since 2019. This document outlines the fundamental minimum standards for elections to be considered credible. The Credibility Threshold Document assists the Situation Room by providing its members with a unified focus and a set of criteria to guide their evaluation of elections, as well as their advocacy and interaction with duty bearers and stakeholders involved in the electoral process. The document highlights and explains the key issues that election observers and the public should monitor as Nigeria prepares for its general elections.

A central theme typically guides the Credibility Threshold Document for each general election. In defining this theme, the Situation Room usually considers Nigeria's political realities, international election standards, and past experiences from observing elections. For the initial Credibility Threshold Document published by the Situation Room prior to the 2019 general election, the theme focused on raising the standards established during the 2015 general election. The Situation Room members found this theme appropriate for a clear reason.

While previous elections in Nigeria have been marked by organizational flaws, allegations of fraud, and disputes over results, the general elections of 2003 and 2007, in particular, were widely regarded as significantly flawed.¹ This situation compelled the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the government, civil society groups, and Nigeria's

¹ Rotimi Suberu, Nigeria's Muddled Elections, *Journal of Democracy*, 18(4): 95-110, 2007; see also Okechukwu Ibeanu, "Simulating Landslides: Primitive Accumulation of Votes and the Popular Mandate in Nigeria", in Isaac O. Albert, Derrick Marco and Victor Adetula eds., *Perspectives on the 2003 Elections in Nigeria*, Abuja: IDASA-Nigeria, 49-63, 2007.

development partners to initiate and implement extensive electoral reforms.² These reforms seem to have significantly contributed to the improvements seen in the 2011 and especially the 2015 general elections.³ As the 2019 general election approached, hopes emerged that it would provide an opportunity for Nigeria to consolidate the gains made in 2011 and 2015. According to the Situation Room, “with the relative success achieved in the 2015 general elections, the Nigerian electorate was optimistic that a standard had been established, below which future elections should not fall. Therefore, the 2019 elections were expected to consolidate the gains made in 2015.”⁴ It was against this backdrop of expectations, the theme of the Credibility Threshold Document for the 2019 general election was framed.

The Credibility Threshold Document for the 2019 general election outlined eight major improvements expected in the electoral process.⁵ These include:

1. Non-partisanship by the security agencies,
2. Reliable voter register,
3. Prevention of Card Reader failure during elections,
4. Transparent results collation,
5. Efficient and accountable election administration,
6. Effective management of political parties,
7. Elimination of restrictions on opposition campaigns, and
8. Violence mitigation and electoral accountability.

The Situation Room conducted its observation and assessment of the 2019 general election based on the expectations it set in the Credibility Threshold Document.

In the report of its observation and assessment of the 2019 general election, the Situation Room expressed deep disappointment at the conduct of the election, insisting that the election failed to meet the minimum standards for a credible election as outlined in the Credibility Threshold Document. According to the report, “the 2019 elections were supposed to be a consolidation of the gains made in 2015. Instead of this happening, the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room’s observation of the 2019 general elections revealed serious shortcomings that questioned the credibility of the exercise.”⁶

2 Kehinde Bolaji, “Toward Institutionalizing Credible Elections in Nigeria: A Review of Reform Measures by the Independent National Electoral Commission,” in Raul Cordenillo ed., *Improving Electoral Practices: Case Studies and Practical Approaches*, Stockholm: International IDEA, 49-82, 2014.

3 Sylvester Akhaine, “Nigeria’s 2011 Elections: The ‘Crippled Giant’ Learns to Walk?,” *African Affairs*, 110(441): 649-655, 2011; See also Nkwachukwu Orji, “The 2015 Nigerian General Elections,” *Africa Spectrum*, 50(2): 73–85, 2015.

4 Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, *Report of Nigeria’s 2019 General Elections*, Abuja: Situation Room, p. 1.

5 Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, *Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Threshold for the 2019 Nigeria Elections*, Abuja: Situation Room.

6 Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, *Report of Nigeria’s 2019 General Elections*, Abuja: Situation Room, p. 1.

The Situation Room noted that the credibility of the 2019 elections was tarnished by numerous pitfalls, including severe operational shortcomings, lack of transparency, and breach of electoral security. The report maintained that there was significant non-compliance with five out of eight credibility criteria used by the Situation Room to assess the election. Consequently, the Situation Room concluded that “the 2019 elections fell short of the immediate expectation of matching the standards of election conduct achieved in 2015.”⁷ The disappointment of the 2019 general election prompted the Situation Room to call for a comprehensive electoral reform. Although the Nigerian National Assembly and other election stakeholders embarked on an electoral reform exercise, the process was limited to mere legal reforms. Many observers have recognized that legal reforms alone are not sufficient to address the persistent challenges with Nigeria’s electoral process.⁸ Thus, the failure to adopt a comprehensive electoral reform led to concerns that the 2023 general election, like the previous ones, would be marred by longstanding issues such as ethnic and regional tensions, inadequate preparations, allegations of fraud, and violence.⁹ These apprehensions were reinforced by the worsening security situation across the country, the failure of the authorities to genuinely address the shortcomings identified in previous elections, and the increasing tendency of the political class to win political power at all costs.

As the 2023 general election approached, it became clear to the Situation Room that the success of the election depended largely on the extent to which INEC and other authorities were ready to genuinely address the perennial shortcomings of elections in Nigeria. The Situation Room, therefore, worked with other stakeholders to ensure that the legal framework for the 2023 general election provided an adequate basis for the conduct of the election in accordance with international democratic principles. The Situation Room was gratified that several amendments aimed at improving the legal framework for the 2023 general election were endorsed by the then president, Muhammadu Buhari, on 25 February 2022 following his assent to the Electoral Act 2022.

For the Situation Room, the Electoral Act 2022 represents the most comprehensive electoral legislative reform since 2010. The Act introduced a range of measures to promote integrity and inclusion in the electoral process. Some of the key provisions and innovations of the new electoral law include early release of election funds to INEC, early conduct of party primaries and

7 Ibid, p.1.

8 See, Nkwachukwu Orji, “Fixing Nigerian Elections: Why Electoral Reforms are not Working,” *The Round Table*, 109(6): 730-741, 2020.

9 Kunle Sanni, “Zoning may create Challenge for Nigeria’s 2023 Elections — U.S. Diplomat,” *Premium Times*, 24 October 2019, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/359252-zoning-may-create-challenge-for-nigerias-2023-elections-u-s-diplomat.html>.

submission of list of candidates, legal support for electronic voting and transmission of results, assisted voting for persons with physical disabilities and special needs, redefinition of over-voting, powers to INEC to review election results declared under duress, early commencement of campaign, and powers to INEC to respond to death of a candidate during polls. The general sentiment held by many Situation Room members before the 2023 general election was that the election provided an opportunity for Nigeria to consolidate and improve on the gains from reforms and innovations introduced since 2011. In this regard, the theme of the Credibility Threshold Document for the 2023 general election focused on ensuring an effective implementation of electoral reforms.

Bearing in mind the risks to the credibility of the 2023 general election, the Credibility Threshold Document for the 2023 general election outlined 13 key expectations.¹⁰

These include:

1. Reform of the electoral legal framework,
2. Efficient and accountable election management,
3. Improved access to polling units,
4. Reliable voter register,
5. Effective monitoring of political parties and the campaign process,
6. Effective management of political parties,
7. Improved voter education and stakeholder engagement,
8. Hitch-free accreditation and voting,
9. Accurate and transparent results collation,
10. Effective monitoring of complaints and petitions process,
11. Violence mitigation, conduct of security agents, and electoral accountability;
12. Equal access to media, and
13. Expectations from civil society organizations.

These expectations provided the criteria against which the Situation Room conducted its observation and assessment of the 2023 general election.

In its observation of the 2023 general election, the Situation Room expected that the innovative reforms introduced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in furtherance of the Electoral Act 2022, will lead to efficient and accountable election management, particularly improved access to polling units, hitch-free accreditation and voting, accurate and transparent results collation, and effective violence mitigation. Contrary to the above expectations, the 2023 general election was marred by very poor organization, severe logistical and operational failure, lack of essential electoral transparency, substantial disruption of voting, and several incidents of violence.

¹⁰ Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Credibility Threshold for the 2023 Nigeria Election, Abuja: Situation Room.

The Situation Room's 2023 general election report noted that "the 2023 general election represents a missed opportunity in Nigeria's democratic development. There were hopes that the election would consolidate and improve on the gains made from the electoral reforms and innovations introduced since 2011."¹¹ However, "organizational pitfalls, including inefficient management of permanent voters cards (PVCs) distribution, failure of operational and logistical arrangements, malfunctioning of election technology, inefficient handling of results management procedures, lack of transparent results collation and declaration process, and poor crisis communication, dented the credibility of the election. The high level of election violence and insecurity, as well as extensive vote buying, further undermined the credibility of the 2023 election."¹²

The report further maintained that "given the lack of transparency, particularly in the result collation process, there can be no confidence in the results of these elections. In addition, there was very poor communication from INEC on election day and on its challenges with its processes; its citizen's contact numbers did not work, and even when there were challenges with uploads to the INEC Results Viewing (IREV) Portal. This is all the more disappointing since the elections were held in an atmosphere in which the people showed remarkable commitment to democracy, eagerly engaging in the electoral process and waiting patiently to vote in very difficult circumstances."¹³

On the way forward, the report notes, "the Situation Room recognizes that, in the aftermath of the 2023 general election, public confidence in the credibility of the electoral process and the capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct elections is gravely shaken, and that extraordinary efforts will be required to re-establish trust. In this regard, the Situation Room will renew its commitment and redouble its efforts to address the persistent challenges with the Nigerian political culture and electoral process through vigilance and further electoral reforms."¹⁴ The Situation Room "believes that more reforms and improvements are required to ensure that the quality of future elections in Nigeria does not further decline and that public confidence in the capacity of INEC to conduct elections is restored, while trust in the credibility of elections is re-established."¹⁵

Although trust in Nigeria's electoral institutions and process has consistently declined since the 2015 general election, the 2023 general election pushed it to the lowest level. Anecdotal evidence and Afrobarometer surveys indicate

¹¹ Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, Report of Nigeria's 2023 General Election, Abuja: Situation Room, p. v.

¹² Ibid, p. viii

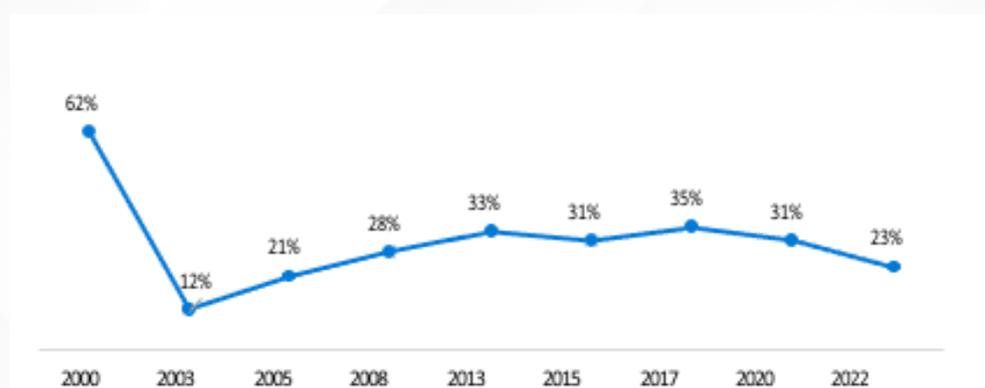
¹³ Ibid, p. 76

¹⁴ Ibid, p. vi

¹⁵ Ibid, p. viii

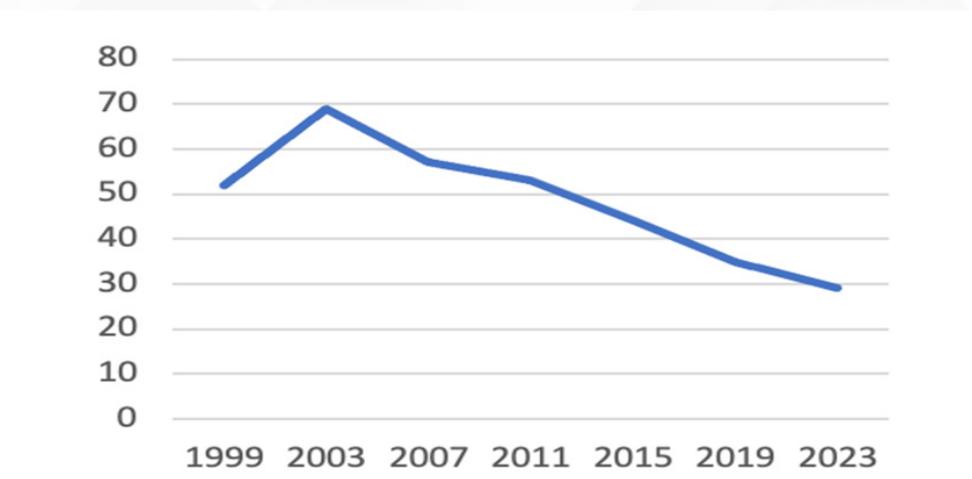
a steady loss of confidence by the electorate in the past two general election cycles - 2019 and 2023 (see Figure 1 below). The loss of public confidence in elections is also reflected in the alarming levels of voter apathy in Nigeria. Voter turnout has steadily declined since the 2003 presidential election (see Figure 2 below). In the last four presidential elections, for instance, turnout declined continuously: from 54 percent in 2011 to 44 percent in 2015 and then down to 35 percent in 2019. The 2023 elections not only produced an abysmal 29 percent turnout but also the lowest since the inception of the country's Fourth Republic in 1999. This trend indicates a frightening threat that Nigerians may outrightly abandon future elections if remedial measures are not taken.

Figure 1: Trust in the Electoral Commission 2000 - 2022



Source: Afrobarometer Survey February 2023¹⁶

Figure 2: Voter Turnout in Nigeria's Presidential Elections 1999-2023



Source: Acheampong 2023¹⁷

¹⁶ <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/R9-News-release-Nigerians-want-competitive-elections-but-dont-trust-INEC-Afrobarometer-2feb23.pdf>.

¹⁷ Acheampong, M. Overpromising and Underdelivering? Digital Technology in Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Elections. (GIGA Focus Afrika, 2). Hamburg: German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) - Leibniz-Institut für Globale und Regionale Studien, Institut für Afrika-Studien, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.57671/gfaf-23022>.

Based on the analysis of the 2023 general election and the subsequent off-cycle elections, the Situation Room members recognized that the main contribution of the Platform in the post-2023 period would involve dedicating attention and resources to re-establishing public trust in the electoral process. In rebuilding trust in electoral institutions and processes ahead of the 2027 general election, it is essential to identify the nature of the trust violation that has occurred and the measures needed to achieve the expected change.

Generally, Nigerians have experienced two major forms of trust violations in the electoral process: integrity (“didn’t want to”) and competence (“couldn’t”) violations. Integrity violations occur when the trustee intentionally engages in actions that violate the trustor’s expectations for ethical and fair engagement.¹⁸ These violations can manifest through electoral fraud, irregularities, lack of transparency, and partisan bias. Conversely, competence violations arise when the trustee unintentionally acts in a way that reflects a lack of ability (e.g., making a mistake).¹⁹ Examples of competence violations include operational failures, logistical issues, organizational flaws, and poor conduct by election officials. While competence-based trust pertains to one’s ability to perform tasks- developed through consistent successful task completion and eroded by repeated errors, integrity-based trust focuses on the intentions and objectives of the trustee, including their character and motives. This type of trust can be cultivated through consistent displays of care and concern or well-intentioned behaviours and can be damaged through dishonesty.²⁰

To rebuild trust in Nigeria’s electoral process, six critical issues must be addressed. These are:

1. **Electoral reforms:** Much of the challenges affecting Nigeria’s electoral process and institutions can be addressed simply by genuine electoral reforms. Electoral reforms can occur at two levels: legal and administrative. While the legislature retains the power to effect legal reforms, INEC and other authorities involved in elections have the power to initiate administrative reforms. Competence trust violations can be addressed by developing the institutional capacity of INEC, reorganizing the Commission, and optimizing its workload. On the other hand, confronting integrity trust violations will require changes in the mode of appointment of INEC officials, establishing strict public accountability mechanisms in the electoral process, and fixing the role of political parties, security agencies, and civil society groups in elections.

¹⁸ Kinshuk Sharma, F. David Schoorman, and Gary A. Ballinger, “How Can It Be Made Right Again? A Review of Trust Repair Research,” *Journal of Management*, 49(1), pp. 363–399, 2023.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Kramer, Roderick M. and Lewicki, Roy J. “Repairing and Enhancing Trust: Approaches to Reducing Organizational Trust Deficits,” *The Academy of Management Annals*, 4(1), pp. 245-277, 2010.

- 2. Adherence to electoral laws and regulations:** A major dent in the credibility of Nigerian elections stems from the extent to which election officials failed to abide by the laws, regulations, and guidelines for the conduct of elections. In some cases, election officials have been seen to have jettisoned, misinterpreted, or misapplied electoral laws and regulations due to a clear lack of capacity. However, in other cases, officials appeared to be working in collusion with partisan interests to contravene electoral laws and regulations. Yet, in other cases, officials are coerced by politicians to flout laws and regulations. Regardless of the manner it occurs, a bold stand against the breach of electoral laws and regulations must be taken by all election stakeholders to preserve the credibility of elections in Nigeria.
- 3. Gaps in preparation:** Although INEC has adopted a more systematic and professional approach to election preparation, the organizational pitfalls and operational and logistical failures observed in recent elections question the adequacy of the reform. Ahead of the 2027 general election, the Commission must review its systems, structures, and processes to ensure that it eliminates gaps in election preparations and revive public confidence in its capacity to deliver credible elections. Gaps in election preparation may provide a basis to dispute election outcomes and question the credibility of elections.
- 4. Deployment of technology:** There is no doubt that technological advancement holds strong possibilities for tackling many of the challenges impeding the electoral process in Nigeria, and it appears that INEC has recognized the critical role that technology can play in elections. Since 2002, the Commission has progressively embraced technology in its operations. Although the deployment of technology has helped INEC to improve the quality of its electoral services, poor management of election technology has raised doubts about the integrity and professional capacity of the Commission. Ahead of the 2027 general election, INEC must ensure that it has the professional, as well as financial, capacity to manage its technological infrastructure. Election stakeholders should come up with plans to observe and scrutinize the deployment of technology by the Commission. Furthermore, the National Assembly must ensure that adequate legal backing is provided to support any meaningful technological innovation introduced by the Commission.
- 5. Internal party democracy:** Nigeria's electoral legal framework is sufficient to promote internal party democracy and ensure that political parties run like responsible and credible organizations. However, those legally

responsible for implementing the laws have failed in their duties. The consequence of this is that the party system has been hijacked and used to pursue personal and sectional interests. Several studies show that Nigerian political parties lack internal democracy. One study noted that “many political parties are operated by political ‘godfathers,’ who use money and violence to control the political process. They decide party nominations and campaign outcomes, and when candidates try to steer an independent course, they use their preferred instruments to deal with them. As a result, they raise the level of electoral violence and make free and fair elections difficult. Although parties have formal procedures for the election of their leaders, these procedures are often disregarded; when they are adhered to, the godfathers have a means of determining the outcomes. Many political parties, especially parties of incumbents, rely on electoral fraud rather than popularity to stay in power.”²¹

Erosion of internal democracy in political parties often leads to the collapse of the party governance structures, hinders the emergence of credible candidates, triggers internal crises with high levels of violence and protracted litigation, and leads to the exclusion of vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and People With Disabilities (PWDs). INEC’s report of the 2019 general elections identified the numerous pre-election litigations arising from poor conduct of political party activities as one of the major issues that affected the Commission’s preparations and conduct of the 2019 general election.²² The lack of internal party democracy must be addressed to rebuild trust in Nigeria’s electoral process. There is no evidence that the situation will improve before the 2023 general election. Consequently, INEC must step up its engagement with the political parties by intensifying its political party monitoring activities and encouraging relevant agencies to strictly enforce the laws relating to the regulation of political parties.

6. Monitoring of campaigns: Regarding the monitoring of campaigns, three issues are critical:

1. Monitoring of election expenses,
2. Regulating the utterances and behaviour of politicians, and
3. Providing a level playing ground for all contestants to canvass for vote.

Due to Nigeria’s geographic and population size as well as the socio-economic and cultural realities, contesting for elective positions in the country is an extremely expensive venture. This has forced those with genuine intentions, but limited financial means to exit the political process, abandoning it to those

²¹ Jibrin Ibrahim, Nigeria’s 2007 Elections: The Fitful Path to Democratic Citizenship, USIP Special Report 182, January 2007, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/sr182.pdf>.

²² Independent National Electoral Commission, Report of the 2019 General Election, Abuja: INEC, 2020, p.41.

who can mobilize the resources to mount a political campaign.²³ Money is a significant factor in Nigerian politics. In addition to using it for legitimate purposes, money is also deployed to bribe officials and induce voters to support particular candidates.²⁴ The issue of vote buying has become a major concern in recent elections.²⁵ To stem the abuse of money in the electoral process, strict regulations on election spending and contributions to political parties have been enshrined in the Electoral Act.²⁶ However, the implementation of the regulations has been generally weak. Although INEC has made some progress with monitoring election expenses (the Commission has reviewed its strategy by creating an interagency platform and has forged collaboration with development partners and civil society organizations to improve its monitoring capacity), the Commission needs to devote more resources and efforts to election expense monitoring ahead of the 2027 general election.

While some progress has been made with election expense monitoring, similar headway has not been achieved regarding regulating the utterances and behaviour of politicians as well as providing a level playing ground for all contestants to canvass for vote. In its report on the 2019 general elections, INEC admits that its capacity to effectively monitor the activities of political parties is essentially weak,²⁷ and this has not improved since then. Gaps in the Commission's regulatory capacity have allowed hate speech, fake news, and misinformation to reach disturbing levels. Presently, there is an absence of an effective framework to monitor and regulate misinformation and disinformation. Furthermore, the Commission has not demonstrated the capacity to guarantee fairness by protecting opposition candidates and parties from abuse of state resources by incumbent candidates and parties. Monitoring of campaigns is a critical aspect of the electoral process that must be addressed if Nigeria must rebuild trust in the electoral process.

The specific measures needed to rebuild trust in Nigeria's electoral institutions and process can be organized around the idea of pillars of trust in elections developed by Peter Wolf and Therese Pearce Laanela.²⁸ For this analysis, we have adapted Wolf and Laanela's four pillars into three pillars. Ahead of the 2027 general elections, the three relevant pillars of trust in elections include integrity, delivery, and engagement.

23 Cyril Obi, *No Choice, But Democracy: Pricing the People out of Politics in Africa?* Claude Ake Memorial Paper Series No. 2, Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2008.

24 PLAC, *Political Finance and Women's Political Inclusion in Nigeria*, Abuja: PLAC, 2024.

25 Hoffmann, Leena Koni and Raj Navanit Patel. 2022. *Vote-selling Behaviour and Democratic Dissatisfaction in Nigeria: Is Democracy Really for Sale?* London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://doi.org/10.55317/9781784135348>.

26 See Electoral Act 2022, Sections 88 (1-11) imposes limitations on election expenses and contributions to a political party.

27 Independent National Electoral Commission, *Report of the 2019 General Election*, Abuja: INEC, 2020, p.13.

28 Wolf, Peter and Therese Pearce Laanela, "Pillars of Trust in Elections," *A-WEB India Journal of Elections*, Volume II, Issue No 2 (October 2022-March 2023).

Pillar 1: Integrity Trust

Integrity trust, which is rooted in the ethics and character projected by election officials and other authorities, is fundamentally different from the other pillars of trust, which are essentially transactional and can be built incrementally. This form of trust can be partially built by the Election Management Body (EMB) through its conduct, by demonstrating adherence to ethical behaviour in the conduct of its work, embodying and displaying ethical values, and by fair and inclusive dealings with all parties, candidates, and voters. Ultimately, integrity trust is related to the formal and practical independence of the EMB and whether the electoral institution is perceived as a legitimate and impartial defender of electoral democracy. However, it is pertinent to note that trust of integrity depends greatly on the democratic setup in which the EMB is embedded. In contexts like Nigeria, with severe democratic deficits, it is expected that the EMB will struggle, maybe find it impossible, to gain integrity trust that may be absent in other institutions.

Pillar 2: Delivery Trust

Delivery trust demonstrates that the EMB has the resources, competence, and capacity to deliver an election that meets stakeholder needs and legal requirements. Voters and stakeholders will be reluctant to trust an EMB that is not seen as competent to deliver in the future or has failed to deliver in past elections. Similar concerns may arise if EMBs are perceived as not having a complete understanding and oversight of systems in use, which may be the case after significant changes in the electoral setup or the increasing digitalization of elections. Delivery trust is typically put at risk in situations where the EMB is not issued with sufficient resources for delivering elections, where electoral reforms are legislated without allowing for the required timeframes, and in cases of shortcomings in training and professional development.

Pillar 3: Engagement Trust

Engagement trust is rooted in disclosure, community building, and communication. Disclosure requires developing an institutional culture of openness and accessibility, including ensuring that key steps of the electoral process are transparent and verifiable. Community building entails inclusive, proactive, and strategic communication and information-sharing with stakeholders, including parties, candidates, civil society, domestic and international election observers, and citizens. Establishing engagement trust will enable EMBs to avoid distrust before it occurs and foster a network of potential allies should the EMB come under unjustified attack. Improving engagement trust may require significant changes for the EMB, such as cultural shifts and strengthened communication modalities.

Credibility Threshold for the 2027 General Election

Nigeria's 2027 general election offers a pivotal opportunity to restore trust in the ballot and deepen democratic consolidation. Drawing on lessons from 2015–2023, comparative international standards, and the lived realities of Nigerian voters, the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Situation Room) sets out the following **Credibility Threshold**. It outlines non-negotiable minimum actions that each stakeholder must fulfil for the elections to meet the test of being **free, fair, inclusive, peaceful and technologically secure**. Situation Room will benchmark progress against these standards and publicly report compliance in the run-up to, during and after the 2027 polls.

Guiding Principles

- 1. Independence & Impartiality:** Institutions must act without political, financial or sectarian influence.
- 2. Transparency and Accountability:** Decisions, data and finances must be open to public and legislative scrutiny.
- 3. Inclusivity and Equality:** All Nigerians, including women, youth, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and marginalised communities, must enjoy equal participation.
- 4. Rule of Law and Due Process:** Electoral actors are bound by the Constitution, Electoral Act 2022 and international obligations.
- 5. Technology and CyberSecurity:** Digital tools should increase—not undermine—integrity, privacy and trust.
- 6. Sustainability and Cost Effectiveness:** Election delivery should be environmentally responsible and fiscally prudent.
- 7. Civic Dialogue and Information Integrity:** Freedom of expression and responsible, fact-based public discourse are essential to democratic choice.

1. INEC Institutional Integrity

The Situation Room hereby outlines the following minimum expectations regarding improving the integrity of elections:

i. Appointment of INEC Chairman and Commissioners

The appointment of INEC Chairman and Commissioners has been marred by allegations of partisanship, nepotism, and lack of transparency, leading to the emergence of individuals seen to be partisan and/or incompetent. This has further eroded the credibility of the electoral process, leading to doubts about the fairness and capacity of officials.

The Situation Room expects that the appointment of the INEC Chairman and other Commissioners will be done in line with the spirit and letters of the Nigerian Constitution and according to the international best practice that guarantees neutrality and competence. The Constitution requires that the INEC Chairman and Commissioners "be non-partisan" and persons of "unquestionable integrity" and be not less than 40 years of age in the case of the Chairman and not less than 35 years of age in the case of the National Commissioners and the Resident Electoral Commissioners.

In line with this, it is important that the following principles apply with respect to INEC appointments of Chairman, National Commissioners and State Resident Electoral Commissioners:

- **Merit-based, participatory selection** in line with Sections 153 and 154 of the 1999 Constitution.
- Nominees **must not** have held partisan political office or being members of any political party, at least 10 years prior to nomination as Chair or National and Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs).
- **Public asset and interest disclosure** of ties to politically exposed persons (PEPs).
- Minimum experience of work: **15 years** (Chair) / **10 years** (Commissioners) in related or relevant fields.
- **Open Senate confirmation hearings** with live broadcast, a 14day petition window and written reasons for decisions.

Furthermore, NASS will be expected to:

- Adopt a process of screening INEC nominees that will guarantee the neutrality and competence of the officials.
- Issue guidelines for submitting petitions against nominations of INEC officials to promote effective public participation.
- Thoroughly and satisfactorily consider and investigate petitions or complaints against nominees for positions in INEC.

- Subject nominees for positions in INEC to rigorous public scrutiny before confirming their nominations.

ii. Election Legal Framework

Nigeria's election legal framework suffers three main shortcomings. Firstly, despite several innovations and reforms, there are still some gaps requiring further reforms.

Secondly, election stakeholders, including political parties, candidates, and electoral officials, often fail to comply with electoral laws and regulations.

Thirdly, the implementation of the electoral laws and regulations is sometimes weak and inconsistent, leading to impunity for those who violate the rules. All these gaps undermine the credibility of the electoral process. Situation Room hereby outlines steps needed to be taken on this, as follows:

- *Timeline certainty: All constitutional and Electoral Act amendments or reforms will need to be completed at least **12 months** before polling day.*
- *Close extant gaps on results transmission, campaign finance ceilings and disclosure, electoral technology accreditation, etc.*

iii. Public Accountability by Institutions Involved in Elections

Public accountability by institutions involved in elections is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the electoral process. The Situation Room is concerned that these institutions, especially INEC and the Police, have failed to fully demonstrate accountability in their actions. Public accountability in elections involves measures such as:

1. Transparency,
 2. Establishment of oversight and accountability mechanisms,
 3. Compliance with laws and regulations,
 4. Reporting and audit, and
 5. Engagement with stakeholders.
- National Assembly (NASS) to institute **post-election independent performance audits** within two weeks of every general election.
 - INEC to issue **Guidelines** and an e-portal for complaints against officials, with status-tracking for petitioners.
 - Annual **Joint Oversight Hearings** of INEC, Police, all security services, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and other relevant stakeholders, on election readiness.

iv. Election Result Management

The problem with election results management in Nigeria is multifaceted, including

1. Lack of transparency of the results transmission and collation process;
2. Allegations of political interference in the election results management process, including pressure on electoral officials to manipulate results in favour of certain candidates or parties;
3. Lack of necessary capacity to effectively manage election results by some collation and returning officers;
4. Security lapses leading to violence, intimidation of officials, and disruption of the election results management process;
5. Inadequate legal framework governing election results management in Nigeria.

Situation Room expects INEC to implement the following:

- Mandatory **digital upload of Polling Unit results to the IReV portal within two hours** of declaration at the Polling Unit.
- Uninterrupted public livestream of collation at RA, LGA, State and National levels.
- Legal protection for accredited observers and party agents to record and broadcast proceedings.
- Statutory *24-hour collation-pause* clause where violence, intimidation or systemic device failure is certified by INEC.

v. **Management of Election Security**

Election security in Nigeria is undermined by the following challenges:

1. Failure by security agencies to mitigate electoral violence, intimidation, and other forms of malpractices;
2. Concerns about political interference in the security arrangements for elections, which have compromised the neutrality and effectiveness of security agencies;
3. Lack of trust in the security agencies responsible for providing election security;
4. Lack of the necessary training, equipment, and resources to effectively secure elections by security personnel.

Accordingly, Situation Room expects the implementation of the following security arrangement:

- Integrated Election Security Framework (IESF) led by the Inspector-General of Police, published six months before the polls.
- Pre-deployment briefing emphasising human-rights-based policing, signed Rules of Engagement and individual body-cam use where available.
- Real-time citizen hotline and incident-mapping dashboard shared with CSOs and the media.

vi. Prosecution of Electoral Offences

Prosecution of electoral offences is vital for addressing impunity and restoring confidence in the electoral process. However, the Situation Room is worried about the failure of INEC and relevant agencies to resolve the challenges that have affected the prosecution of electoral offences in Nigeria. Some of the key challenges include:

1. Lack of political will to prosecute electoral offenders, especially when the offenders are politically connected or influential individuals;
2. Inadequate legal framework for prosecuting electoral offences, making it difficult to effectively hold offenders accountable;
3. Lack of the necessary resources, such as funding, manpower, and technical expertise, to effectively investigate and prosecute cases by INEC and other agencies responsible for prosecuting electoral offences;
4. The legal process in Nigeria can be slow and inefficient, leading to delays in the prosecution of electoral offences.
 - The Situation Room expects the Enactment and operationalisation of the **Electoral Offences Commission Act** by December 2025.
 - Dedicated Special Electoral Offences Courts with 180-day trial completion target.
 - Public quarterly scorecard of arrests, prosecutions and convictions, disaggregated by offence type, location, sex and party affiliation

vii. Electoral Dispute Resolution

The electoral dispute resolution process in Nigeria is limited by several challenges, such as:

1. The process is often seen as lacking independence and fairness, with allegations of political interference and bias affecting its credibility;
2. Electoral disputes in Nigeria are often prolonged due to lengthy legal processes, which can undermine the legitimacy of election outcomes and erode public confidence in the electoral process;
3. The legal framework has inconsistencies and loopholes making it insufficient to address the complexities of the modern electoral process;
4. The judiciary lacks adequate personnel, expertise, training, and resources, which impedes its capacity to effectively and efficiently handle election petitions and cases;
5. Political actors exert significant influence on the process, leading to allegations of bias, manipulation, and lack of accountability.

The Situation Room expects:

1. That the judiciary will comply strictly with provisions of the electoral laws and regulations in handling pre-election cases and election petitions;
2. That a Bill seeking completion of pre-election disputes well in advance of the election day will be passed by NASS and assented to by the President to ensure swift delivery of justice and certainty of candidates;
3. That the Bill seeking completion of election petitions before swearing-in will be passed by NASS and assented to by the President to boost the legitimacy of electoral mandate;
4. Civil society organizations and media organizations will monitor and observe the handling of election petitions by courts and report on the credibility of the process.

viii. Role of Political Parties

Political parties play a crucial role in the electoral process by helping to mobilize and organize the citizens around common policy platforms. However, in Nigeria, the role of political parties in elections leaves much to be desired. Nigerian parties are often criticized for their lack of internal democracy. Party leaders often impose candidates without allowing for fair and transparent primaries, leading to divisions within the party and weakening its credibility. In addition, political parties rely heavily on funding from wealthy individuals, leading to a system where money plays a significant role in determining election outcomes rather than the will of the people. Another major failing of Nigerian political parties is that they lack clear ideological differences, making it difficult for voters to make informed choices based on policy differences. Instead, the parties often capitalize on ethnic and religious divisions rather than a clear policy agenda to gain support. This has engendered polarization and conflict among different groups and undermined the democratic process and national unity.

The Situation Room expects that political parties will conduct their affairs in line with the provisions of the electoral laws and regulations and their constitutions and guidelines and particularly, that.

- Internal party primaries should be broadcast live, with certified participant party membership or delegates register published 48 hours prior.
- Parties to submit detailed campaign finance pre-budget and **real-time expense dashboard** capped at statutory limits.
- Parties and candidates to sign a **Peace & Issue-Based Campaign Accord** monitored by the National Peace Committee.

ix. Monitoring of Campaigns

There are three critical aspects of election campaign monitoring –

1. Monitoring of election expenses,
2. Regulating the utterances and behaviour of political actors, and
3. Providing a level playing ground for all contestants to canvass for vote.

Strict rules and regulations have been made in the electoral laws to govern the campaign process in Nigeria, and INEC is the agency responsible for implementing the regulations. Unfortunately, the implementation of campaign regulations has been generally weak, allowing political actors to flout rules and regulations with impunity.

The Situation Room expects that INEC and other agencies involved in election campaign monitoring will strictly implement the provisions of the electoral laws and regulations relating to campaigns, applying sanctions for misconduct as required by the law.

In addition, the Situation Room expects:

1. That INEC will strictly monitor political party primaries and election expenses of candidates and parties and produce and disseminate a report at the end of the monitoring exercise as required by the law;
2. That INEC will work with relevant agencies to address any complaint of abuse of state resources by candidates and political parties during elections;
3. That INEC will ensure that party agents are properly accredited and fully trained on electoral procedures and regulations;
4. That incumbent federal and state governments will not inhibit or prevent campaigns and the movement of candidates and party officials ahead of and during elections;
5. That incumbent federal and state governments will not unfairly restrict or deny access to the use of public facilities against opposing political parties.

Specific action that needs to be taken, include:

- INEC, National Broadcasting Commission and the National Communications Commission, to deploy a **Joint Monitoring Hub** tracking media airtime, hate speech, offline & online abuse of state resources.
- Impose graduated sanctions, including fines, equal-time remedies and disqualification for egregious violations.
- Guarantee opposition access to public venues and state-owned media on a non-discriminatory basis.

x. **Role of Civil Society Organizations**

Civil society organizations play a crucial role in elections by promoting transparency, accountability, and participation in the electoral process. However, the role of civil society in Nigerian elections is greatly limited. Often, Nigerian CSOs face pressure and intimidation from political actors who seek to influence or undermine their work during elections. In addition, many CSOs struggle with limited financial resources, which hinders their ability to effectively carry out election monitoring and advocacy activities. Some CSOs also lack the necessary expertise and resources to effectively monitor elections and hold political actors accountable. Furthermore, there is often a lack of coordination and collaboration among civil society organizations, leading to duplication of efforts and inefficiencies in their election monitoring and advocacy activities. Importantly, the Nigerian civic space has been infiltrated by some organizations with partisan interests.

The Situation Room expects that CSOs will conduct their observation, analysis, and reporting on the general election credibly, professionally, and timeously. In addition, the Situation Room expects that INEC and the security agencies will guarantee the freedom of CSOs to observe elections without hindrance or political interference.

- CSOs to follow the **Situation Room Code of Conduct for Observers**—covering impartiality, data protection and timely reporting.
- Government to guarantee visa-free entry and protection of accredited regional/international observers.
- Establish a **Civil Society Protection Hotline** with rapid response by security agencies.

2. Delivery of Elections

The Situation Room has the following minimum expectations regarding improved delivery of elections:

i. Reorganization of INEC

The 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) and the Electoral Act 2022 assigned several functions to INEC, including organizing, undertaking, and supervising elections; registration of political parties, monitoring of political parties, registration of voters, monitoring of campaigns, and conduct of voter and civic education. INEC is also expected to perform other responsibilities such as prosecution of electoral offenders. Over time, the Commission has maintained that its workload is enormous making it difficult for it to effectively discharge these responsibilities within the available means. This has led to calls for the unbundling of the Commission to optimize its workload. It is believed that reorganization of the Commission by reassigning some of its responsibilities to other agencies will improve its capacity to deliver elections.

The Situation Room expects that the Bills seeking to unbundle INEC through reallocation of some of the functions of the Commission to other agencies will be passed by NASS and assented to by the President.

- To Pass 'Unbundling INEC' legislation to create:
 - **Political Parties & Campaign Finance Commission**
 - **Electoral Offences Commission**
 - **National Elections Logistics Agency.**
- Complete institutional transition plan by June 2026.

ii. Election Management

INEC is responsible for managing Nigeria's general elections. However, the capacity of the Commission to manage elections has been questioned on several occasions. The Commission struggles with ensuring timely delivery of election materials to polling units across the country, leading to late commencement of voting. The Commission also struggles with providing voters access to polling units as well as managing and implementing technological solutions to the electoral process. Lastly, INEC often faces budget constraints, which impacts its ability to effectively manage elections and implement the necessary reforms.

The Situation Room expects:

1. That the federal government will approve and release adequate funds to INEC to enable the Commission to embark on early preparation for elections;

2. That INEC will commence the procurement and distribution of electoral materials early enough to avoid a last-minute rush;
3. That INEC will ensure timely opening of polling units and commencement of voting across the country;
4. That INEC will activate the newly created polling units to reduce overcrowding at polling units and improve access to polling units;
5. That INEC will ensure that polling units are more accessible for People with Disability;
6. That INEC will relocate polling units in inappropriate locations such as those situated within private residences, political parties' offices, markets, and those that do not provide adequate latitude for secrecy of vote to more appropriate locations.

iii. Training of Election Officials

The capacity of INEC to deliver free, fair, and credible elections is limited by inadequate training of election officials. Poor training of election officials reflects on mismanagement of election procedures, voter disenfranchisement, organizational failure, inaccurate result collation, and poor handling of election technology. The challenge with the training of election officials in Nigeria stems from a lack of adequate resources, inadequate training facilities, insufficient funding, political interference, and corruption by INEC officials.

The Situation Room expects

- INEC to revamp INEC Electoral Institute curriculum; make *micro-learning modules* and manuals open access.
- Deploy a minimum **1 RATECH per 4 PUs**, trained on biometric device maintenance, cyber-hygiene and data privacy.
- Mandatory *code-signed oath* for adhoc staff with sanctions for breach.

iv. Voter Registration

Voter registration is a crucial aspect of the electoral process because it helps ensure that only eligible individuals can participate in the electoral process. However, the ability of INEC to manage the voter registration process and the Voter Register is limited by several factors. The Commission is unable to conduct continuous voter registration (CVR) as envisaged by the Electoral Act. Similarly, the Commission is unable to establish sufficient registration centers in many areas, making it difficult for eligible voters to register. Furthermore, prospective registrants sometimes face serious difficulties as problems with voter registration equipment, such as biometric capture machines, can lead to delays and errors in the registration process. The Commission has not been able to efficiently manage the process of issuing permanent voter cards (PVCs), making it difficult for registered voters to collect the cards. There have

been reports of political actors manipulating the voter registration process to gain an advantage in elections. More so, some citizens lack awareness about the importance of voter registration and the process involved, leading to multiple registrations or low registration rates. Lastly, INEC has not been able to adopt an effective method of cleaning up the register by removing multiple registrations, deceased, and under-aged voters.

The Situation Room expects:

1. That INEC will resume the continuous voter registration early enough to register those that turned 18 years since the last registration, those who have not registered before, and to attend to request for transfer and update of registration data;
2. That INEC will establish sufficient registration centers across the country to make it easier for eligible voters to register;
3. That INEC will ensure that voter registration equipment, such as biometric capture machines, function optimally to reduce delays and errors in the registration process;
4. That INEC will adopt measures to ensure that eligible voters who are amputees and those affected by leprosy can register as voters and vote;
5. That INEC will improve the system of issuing citizens with Permanent Voter Cards (or any other valid means of identification during voter accreditation) after registration;
6. That INEC will conduct a thorough audit of the voter register to remove multiple registrations, deceased, and under-aged voters..

v. Accreditation and Voting

Voter accreditation is crucial for protecting the integrity of the electoral process. By verifying the identity of voters through accreditation, the electoral commission can prevent fraud and ensure that only eligible individuals participate in the voting process. In other words, voter accreditation helps in upholding the principle of "one person, one vote," ensuring that each eligible voter has an equal opportunity to participate in the election. However, the process of accreditation and voting in Nigerian elections is often plagued by several challenges, including technical glitches with the accreditation devices, lack of proper training for election officials, instances of voter intimidation or suppression, and inadequate voter education.

The Situation Room expects:

1. That INEC will procure and distribute a sufficient number of functional electronic accreditation devices to ensure that faulty devices are quickly replaced if they cannot be repaired;

2. That INEC will recruit, train, and mobilize a sufficient number of Registration Area Technical Assistants (RATECHs) to deal with complaints of malfunctioning devices on election day;
3. That INEC will ensure that the Voter Register is displayed in a manner that gives access to persons with mobility challenges on election day.

3. Stakeholders' Engagement

The Situation Room has the following minimum expectations regarding improved stakeholders' engagement:

i. Voter and Civic Education

Voter and civic education is critical to elections since it empowers citizens by providing them with accurate and relevant information about the electoral process, their rights as voters, and the candidates and issues at stake. This knowledge enables citizens to make informed decisions when casting their votes. Ultimately, voter and civic education strengthens democracy by promoting an informed and engaged electorate. INEC is the agency responsible for conducting voter and civic education in Nigeria. However, the content, reach, and effectiveness of INEC's voter and civic education programmes are limited due to inadequate funding, manpower, expertise, and poor coordination. In addition, low literacy levels in the country make it challenging to effectively educate citizens about their civic duties and the electoral process. There is also the problem of poor infrastructure, such as lack of internet connectivity and electricity, which hinders efforts to disseminate civic and voter education materials.

The Situation Room expects:

- INEC and NOA to run a **24-month integrated civic education plan** using local languages, sign language and community radio.
- Leverage youth influencers, schools and faithbased networks; address gender equality, PWD and anti-disinformation themes.

ii. Communication Strategy

The adoption of an effective communication strategy can help build trust in the electoral process. Clear and effective communication helps in fostering transparency in the electoral process. Effective communication also plays a key role in managing crises and maintaining the integrity of the elections. An effective communication strategy should be rooted in disclosure, community building, and information sharing. Disclosure requires developing an institutional culture of openness and accessibility, including ensuring that key steps of the electoral process are transparent and verifiable. Community building entails inclusive, proactive, and strategic information-sharing with stakeholders. Adopting an effective communication strategy will enable INEC to avoid distrust before it occurs.

The Situation Room expects:

- INEC to maintain **24/7 Election Information Centre** with daily situation briefs during critical phases.
- Publish datasets (turnout, PU-level results, logistics deployment) in machine-readable formats (CSV/JSON) under open licence.
- Collaborate with factchecking coalitions and socialmedia platforms to flag, contextualise or remove election related disinformation consistent with human-rights standards.

Conclusion

In outlining the credibility threshold for the 2027 general election, the Situation Room has taken into account Nigeria's realities and circumstances, international election standards as well as the experience gained from observing elections. The Situation Room will hold stakeholders accountable for the delivery of the expectations outlined above and will make statements on the level of credibility of the 2027 general election based on the threshold it has established.

Situation Room will—

1. **Publish quarterly scorecards** tracking stakeholder compliance against this Threshold.
2. **Convene high-level dialogues** with INEC, security agencies, NASS leadership, political parties, the judiciary and the media.
3. **Activate an Early-Warning and Rapid Response Hub** to escalate urgent risks to election integrity.
4. Issue a **Pre-Election Credibility Report (January 2027) and Election Day & Post-Election Statements**.
5. An accompanying **Operational Guide** (to be released Q4 2025) will set detailed indicators, timelines and verification modalities.

Acknowledgments

Situation Room deeply appreciates the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) for its continued support for democratic development in Nigeria.

Situation Room also appreciates its member organisations for sustaining the engagement of the electoral process and the commitment to a strengthened democratic environment in Nigeria

About Situation Room

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Situation Room) comprising more than 100 civic groups provides a coordinating platform for civil society engagement on governance issues. It is also a platform for information sharing amongst civil society groups working on elections and topical national issues. It intervenes in the electoral process by promoting collaboration, proactive advocacy, and rapid response to crisis in the electoral process.

The Situation Room was set up in 2010, ahead of the 2011 General Elections, to harness and coordinate civil society groups' resources in response to persistent democratic challenges and ensure constructive and proactive engagement in the electoral process. Since the 2011 General Elections, the Situation Room has continued to evolve, contributing to the improvement of the electoral and governance process in the country through information sharing and peer collaboration amongst CSOs, periodic dialogue with election stakeholders, as well as policy analysis and reform advisories to government institutions. The benefit is that CSOs can work in synergy in support of good governance and credible elections.

The Situation Room works to achieve the following:

- Improve the quality of the electoral process;
- Strengthen the role of civil society to engage and monitor the electoral process;
- Undertake regular analysis and dissemination of information on major developments and events in the preparations and conduct of elections in Nigeria;
- Support coordination and synergy amongst election stakeholders and

- Foster collective action by civil society to promote advocacy for transparency and accountability of public institutions.

Situation Room’s Secretariat is hosted by the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), and is governed by a Steering Committee made up of the representatives of the following organizations:

YZ Ya’u	<i>Convener and Executive Director of Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD)</i>
Action Aid Nigeria	<i>Institutional Memory</i>
Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD)	<i>Institutional Memory</i>
CLEEN Foundation	<i>Institutional Memory</i>
Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC)	<i>Secretariat and Institutional Memory</i>
Emma Ezeazu Centre for Good Governance and Accountability (formerly Alliance for Credible Elections)	<i>Gender Representative</i>
Rule of Law and Accountability Advocacy Centre (RULAAC)	<i>Security</i>
Kimpact Development Initiative	<i>Youth</i>
Democratic Action Group (DAG)	<i>Grassroots</i>
Women’s Rights to Education Programme	<i>Environment</i>
Joint National Association of Persons with Disability (JONAPWD)	<i>Disability/ Social Inclusion</i>
DIG Ebonyi	<i>South-East Zonal Co-ordinator</i>
Life And Peace Development Organization (LAPDO)	<i>South-West Zonal Co-ordinator</i>
Rural Youth Initiative	<i>North-West Zonal Co-ordinator</i>
Challenged Parenthood Initiative (CPI)	<i>North-Central Zonal Co-ordinator</i>
Centre for Health and Development in Africa (CHEDA)	<i>North-East Zonal Co-ordinator</i>
Josemaria Escrava Foundation	<i>South-South Zonal Co-ordinator</i>

ABOUT

PLAC hosts the secretariat of the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room and is a member of its steering committee. The Situation Room provides a co-ordinating platform for civil society engagement on governance issues. It is also a platform for information sharing among civil society groups working on elections and topical national issues. It intervenes in the electoral process by promoting collaboration, proactive advocacy and rapid response to crisis in the electoral process. The Situation Room provides a forum of advance planning, scenario building, evidence based analysis, constructive engagement with various stakeholders in the electoral process and observation of elections.

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