

## THE 2027 ELECTORAL CALENDAR: Legal Timelines, Administrative Choices and Implications

**ABRIDGED VERSION**


### This factsheet:

- Summarises the principal findings of PLAC's analysis of the 2027 electoral calendar.
- Examines how the Electoral Act 2026 reshapes key election timelines and how these interact with INEC's election timetable.
- Identifies points where legal deadlines and operational scheduling create tighter timelines for political parties and citizens.

### Key Highlights

#### I. Early INEC Timetable Compresses Elections Timeline

The Constitution provides that elections shall be held not earlier than 150 days and not later than 30 days before the expiration of the relevant term of office (for executive offices) or dissolution of the legislature (for legislative elections). This places the presidential election window between 30 December 2026 and 29 April 2027. However, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has scheduled elections toward the earliest end of this window:

- 16 January 2027 - Presidential & National Assembly
- 6 February 2027 - Governorship & State Assembly

While this early scheduling may provide the commission with additional administrative time, it effectively shortens the adjustment period for political parties and other stakeholders – especially as new compliance requirements under the Electoral Act 2026 were introduced shortly before the election cycle.

#### *Constitutional Election Windows (1999 Constitution — ss. 76, 116, 132 & 178)*

The Constitution requires that elections be held not earlier than **150 days** and not later than **30 days** before the expiration of the relevant term of office (Presidential/Governorship) or dissolution of the legislature (NASS/ State Assemblies). This creates a window for elections.

##### **Executive Offices (President & Governors)**

Term ends: **29 May 2027** (based on the start of the current tenure on 29 May 2023)

Election window: **30 December 2026 – 29 April 2027**

##### **Legislature (National Assembly)**

Term ends: **12 June 2027** (based on the inauguration date of 13 June 2023)

Election window: **13 January 2027 – 13 May 2027**

## **2. Statutory Deadlines vs Operational Scheduling**

Although the Electoral Act sets maximum legal deadlines for key activities, INEC's timetable determines when those steps actually occur in practice. In the 2027 election calendar, several activities are scheduled earlier than the latest dates allowed by law. This suggests that INEC is not using the full flexibility provided by the 2026 Act, but it is instead adopting an early schedule. The Commission has cited that this is to allow for extra administrative time for key operational activities such as voter registration, nominations list finalisation, ballot production, and the printing and distribution of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs). However, the compressed sequencing may place additional pressure on political parties during the first election cycle under the new law.

### **Key Deadlines Adjusted in the Electoral Act 2026**

The new law adjusts several statutory timelines, including:

- **Nomination deadline:** reduced from **180 days** to **120 days** before election day
- **Final candidate list publication:** reduced from **150 days** to **60 days** before election
- **Release of funds to INEC:** reduced from latest **one year** before the election to **6 months** before the election
- **Notice of election:** reduced from not later than **360 days** to not later than **300 days** to the election

## **3. Election Cycle Starts Before Funding Deadline**

The Electoral Act 2026 reduces the deadline for releasing election funds to INEC from one year to six months before the election. This gives the government more time legally to fund the election, but it also means that key stages of the electoral process may begin before the deadline for funding has even arrived. Under the current timetable, party primaries are scheduled for **April–May 2026**,

while the six-month deadline for release of funds falls around **July/August 2026**, depending on the election. This creates a mismatch between the legal funding timeline and the practical start of the election cycle. In effect, critical pre-election activities may already be underway before INEC receives the full election funding needed for later stages of preparation.

#### 4. Sequencing Issue: Campaigns can now begin before Nominations close

Under the new framework:

- Campaigns begin **150 days before election**
- Nominations close **120 days before election**

This means campaigns can legally begin before the nomination process has fully closed, creating a sequencing inconsistency that did not exist under the 2022 Electoral Act.

INEC has fixed campaigns to begin on **19 August 2026** (Presidential/NASS elections) and **9 September 2026** (Governorship/State Assemblies elections), while the last day for submitting nomination forms is **29 August 2026** and **26 September 2026**. So campaigns open **10 days** before nominations fully close for Presidential/NASS elections and **17 days** before nominations fully close for Governorship/State Assemblies elections.

#### 5. Increased Compliance Burden on Political Parties

Political parties must rapidly adjust to stricter requirements, including compiling digital membership registers, submitting them earlier – about **21 days** before their primaries – and organising compliant primaries within a short timeframe. Although legally backed, these new obligations place additional pressure on parties who are just getting accustomed to the new Act.

#### 6. The Timetable Compresses Flexibility Allowed by the Act on Nominations

The Electoral Act 2026 appears to provide greater flexibility in nomination timelines by reducing the deadline for submission of party nominations from **180 days to 120 days** before election day. In principle, this should allow parties more time for primaries and for submitting their candidate lists, which, counting back from election day, would fall around **18 September 2026** at the latest.

However, INEC’s timetable schedules earlier operational dates and staggers the nomination process. The portal for uploading candidates’ names after primaries closes **11 July 2026** for Presidential/ National Assembly elections and **8 August 2026** for Governorship/State Assembly elections, while the formal final submission deadlines remain **29 August and 26 September 2026**, respectively (these later dates allow for withdrawals/substitutions and corrections). In practice, parties must complete most nomination processes earlier than the law’s outer/statutory deadline suggests, effectively tightening the electoral calendar and shortening the operational window.

*Gaps between statutory deadlines and INEC’s actual nomination deadlines*

Election	Election Day	120-day statutory deadline	INEC formal nomination deadline	Gap
Pres./NASS	16 Jan 2027	18 Sept 2026	29 Aug 2026	20 days earlier
Gov./State Assembly	6 Feb 2027	9 Oct 2026	26 Sept 2026	13 days earlier

## 7. Primaries Will Trigger Early Litigation

Party primaries scheduled for **April - May 2026** are likely to trigger an earlier wave of pre-election disputes. However, the resolution of these disputes may still extend close to election day due to existing constitutional timelines for determining such cases.

Under the 1999 Constitution:

- Pre-election cases may last **180 days** at trial stage, and
- Appeals may take **60** additional days at each appellate level (Court of appeal and Supreme Court)

As a result, disputes arising from early primaries may still remain unresolved until late in the electoral cycle, even when parties comply with earlier timelines. This suggests that earlier sequencing alone may not resolve the problem of prolonged election litigation. The real solution lies not in earlier primaries, but in shortening constitutional timelines for resolving pre-election disputes. Constitution amendment proposals to amend these timelines are currently under consideration by the National Assembly, and their adoption would address the persistence of late-stage election litigation.

## 8. Shorter Window for Voter Registration and PVC Collection

Just as parties face compressed preparation timelines, citizens may also experience a shorter practical window to register and obtain their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs). INEC has indicated that the third phase of Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) will end on **17 August 2026**, even though the Electoral Act allows registration up to **90 days** before election day (around **18 October 2026** for Presidential/National Assembly elections and **8 November 2026** for Governorship/State Assembly elections). Closing CVR earlier allows INEC to finalise and clean the voter register ahead of the legal deadline and begin PVC production and distribution sooner. However, it also shortens the practical period available for citizens to register, update their details, or collect their PVCs before the elections.

## 9. Political Debate and Perceptions of Institutional Bias

The compressed 2027 election timeline has generated political debate. Several opposition parties have argued that the combination of new compliance requirements under the Electoral Act 2026 and the early sequencing of activities in the 2027 timetable may place smaller or less institutionally prepared parties at a disadvantage.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the requirement to compile and submit detailed digital membership registers before primaries creates a significant administrative burden within a relatively short adjustment period. Critics argue that this could inadvertently favour certain parties.<sup>2</sup>

While some others have argued that the timetable was not designed to benefit any political actor, the controversy highlights a broader governance issue, which is that **in electoral administration, even technically lawful timelines can generate perceptions of bias if they significantly shape the competitive environment among political parties.**

For electoral management bodies like INEC, maintaining not only neutrality but the perception of neutrality is critical to sustaining public confidence in the electoral process.

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1 Olufemi Adediran and Dare Akogun, "On Your Marks, Set, Go: Parties Race Against May Deadline for Primaries," The Punch, 28 February 2026, <https://punchng.com/on-your-marks-set-go-parties-race-against-may-deadline-for-primaries/>.

2 Taofeek Oyedokun and Iwok Iniobong, "Opposition Calls INEC Timetable Plot to Favour APC, Exclude Others," BusinessDay Nigeria, 3 March 2026, <https://businessday.ng/news/article/opposition-calls-inec-timetable-plot-to-favour-apc-exclude-others/>.



### **About PLAC**

Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) is a non-governmental organization committed to strengthening democratic governance and citizens' participation in Nigeria. PLAC works to enhance citizens' engagement with state institutions, and to promote transparency and accountability in policy and decision-making process.

The main focus of PLAC's intervention in the democratic governance process is on building the capacity of the legislature and reforming the electoral process. Since its establishment, PLAC has grown into a leading institution with capacity to deliver cutting-edge research, policy analysis and advocacy. PLAC receives funding support from donors and other philanthropic sources.

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