

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

FULL ANALYSIS



This Factsheet:

- Explains how the Electoral Act 2026 reshapes key electoral timelines and how those statutory changes interact with INEC's operational timetable.

Using the 2027 election calendar as a reference point, it:

- Maps the major statutory deadlines introduced or modified by the Electoral Act 2026;
- Places these timelines alongside INEC's published timetable for the 2027 general elections;
- Highlights areas where timelines compress or overlap, particularly around nominations, campaigns, and pre-election disputes; and practical implementation risks.

Introduction

Nigeria's Electoral Act 2026 does more than change election procedures; it also redraws the electoral calendar. The timetable for the 2027 general elections issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) adopts a much earlier sequencing of activities than the law strictly requires. By scheduling elections at the earliest edge of the constitutional window and fixing early deadlines for primaries, nominations, and other pre-election activities, the Commission has effectively compressed the transition period for stakeholders adapting to the new legal framework.

Understanding Nigeria's Electoral Timing Framework

Nigeria's electoral calendar is shaped by three timing frameworks:

- **Constitutional clock:** The Constitution sets the tenure for political office, the election window and timelines for election litigation.
- **Statutory clock:** The Electoral Act, drawing from the Constitution, establishes legal deadlines for nominations, substitutions, campaigns, and other key stages.
- **Administrative timetable:** Within constitutional and statutory limits, INEC publishes a timetable that sequences electoral activities.

INEC's timetable does not exist as an independent legal clock but operationalises the legal framework by selecting specific dates within the limits permitted by law. 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, INEC has scheduled elections toward the earliest end of this window:

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

When INEC schedules activities far earlier than the legal outer limits or statutory deadlines, the practical electoral calendar can become compressed, shaping how much time political parties and other stakeholders, including INEC itself, have to prepare.

Key Insights from the 2027 Electoral Calendar

1. The Electoral Act 2026 changes several key deadlines.

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 one year to 6 months before the election
- **Notice of election:** reduced from 360 to 300 days before election

These changes collectively alter how key stages of the process interact.

2. Election Activities Precede the Legal Funding Deadline

The revised funding timeline is misaligned with the practical election cycle. While the law permits the release of funds up to six months before the election (around July/August 2026), critical pre-election activities, particularly **party primaries (April–May 2026)**, occur earlier, meaning key stages of the electoral process may begin before the legal funding deadline arrives.

3. A Campaign–Nomination Sequencing Gap Persists

The Act introduces a misalignment between campaigns and nominations:

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

This allows campaigns to start before the nomination process is fully concluded, reversing the more coherent sequencing under the 2022 Act.

In practice, INEC's timetable narrows, but does not eliminate, this gap: Campaigns begin **10–17 days before nomination deadlines close**.

Although early primaries mean likely candidates are known in advance, the legal sequencing inconsistency remains, creating potential ambiguity in campaign legitimacy.

4. Compressed Compliance Window for Political Parties

The transition to the new legal framework is tightly sequenced. Parties must:

- Compile and submit digital membership registers.
- Conduct primaries within a short timeframe.
- Meet earlier compliance deadlines.

Given the proximity of these requirements to the enactment of the law, parties face a compressed adjustment period, particularly those with weaker institutional capacity.

5. INEC Has Adopted an Early, Front-Loaded Timetable for Nominations

Despite some flexibility in the Act, INEC has scheduled key activities earlier than the statutory limits allow. This likely reflects administrative considerations, such as allowing time for verification and scrutiny, candidate substitutions and ballot production and logistics. However, this front-loading places additional operational pressure on political parties, especially during the first election cycle under the new law.

For example, while the Electoral Act 2026 extends the nomination deadline from 180 to 120 days before election day, INEC's timetable effectively narrows this flexibility. The portal for uploading candidates closes much earlier – **11 July 2026** (Presidential/NASS) and **8 August 2026** (Governorship/State) – even though the formal submission deadlines remain **29 August and 26 September**. In practice, parties must complete key nomination processes well before the statutory deadline, compressing the operational timeline.

6. 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 PVCs. INEC has indicated that **Continuous Voter Registration (CVR)** will end on **17 August 2026**, even though the law allows registration up to **90 days before election day**. While this allows INEC to finalise the voter register and begin PVC production earlier, it also shortens the practical time available for citizens to register, update their details, or collect their PVCs.

7. Early Primaries Trigger Earlier but Extended Litigation Timelines

Once primaries begin, pre-election litigation may start immediately and earlier compared to the 2023 election cycle. However, under the 1999 Constitution:

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

As a result, disputes arising from early primaries may still extend close to election day, overlapping with campaign and preparation phases.

This suggests that earlier sequencing alone will not resolve the problem of prolonged election litigation, as disputes are still governed by lengthy constitutional timelines. A more effective solution would require reforms to litigation timelines rather than simply moving primaries earlier. 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 pre-election disputes.

8. Timeline Compression Raises Political and Perception Risks

The 2027 timetable has generated debate among political actors. Critics argue that compressed timelines, particularly for membership register compliance and early primaries, may disadvantage smaller or less-prepared parties. While the rules apply uniformly, the situation underscores a broader institutional risk: even legally valid timelines can generate perceptions of bias if their practical effects appear uneven.

For electoral management bodies, maintaining both actual neutrality and perceived fairness is essential to sustaining public trust.

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 (Pres./Gov.) or dissolution of the legislature (NASS/State Assemblies).

Executive Offices (President & Governors)

Term ends: **29 May 2027**

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

Legislature (National Assembly)

Term ends: **12 June 2027**

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

Within these constitutional windows, INEC has scheduled:

- **16 January 2027 — Presidential & National Assembly Elections**
- **6 February 2027 — Governorship & State Houses of Assembly Elections**

These dates serve as the **reference points for calculating statutory timelines under the Electoral Act 2026.**

The New Electoral Calendar: Changes and Implications

S/N	Issue	EA 2022	EA 2026	Actual INEC dates/ operative timeline	Implications
1.	Issue of Notice of Election by INEC	Not later than 360 days before the election (s.28(1))	Not later than 300 days before the election (s.28(1))	13 Feb 2026	INEC had already issued notice under the repealed 2022 Act, then adjusted the timetable after the signing of the 2026 Act. This shows the transition to the new Act happened mid-stream. The date falls earlier than the new 300-day statutory deadline/outer limit.
2.	Release of election funds	Not later than 1 year before the general election (s.3(3))	Not later than 6 months before the general election (s.3(3))	No separate INEC date stated. 16 July 2026 (Pres./NASS) and 6 Aug 2026 (Gov./State), counting back from election dates.	The 2026 Act relaxes the statutory deadline. That gives the government more time legally, but also narrows the financial preparation window.
3.	Deadline for registration/update/revision of voters' register	Not later than 90 days before the election (s.9(6))	90 days retained (s.9(6))	No separate INEC date stated. But INEC had indicated that the third phase of Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) will end on 17 August 2026, which is earlier than the statutory outer limit of 90 days before election day (18 Oct 2026 for Pres./NASS; 8 Nov 2026 for Gov./State Assembly). This suggests the register could be finalised well ahead of the legal deadline.	The law keeps this stable. Any operational pressure here will come from implementation choices, not from a new legal deadline.

S/N	Issue	EA 2022	EA 2026	Actual INEC dates/ operative timeline	Implications
4.	Deadline for issuance of replacement Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs)	Not later than 90 days before the election (s.18(1) & (3))	90 days retained (s.18(1) & (3))	Not separately dated in the timetable. Based on the 3rd phase of CVR ending on 17 August 2026, PVC replacement is likely to close well before the statutory 90-day deadline (18 Oct 2026 for Pres./NASS; 8 Nov 2026 for Gov./State Assembly).	Again, no legal compression here. The risk is administrative, especially if voter register updates are delayed.
5.	Submission of parties' register of members to INEC	Not later than 30 days before primaries/congresses/conventions (s.77(4))	Not later than 21 days before primaries/congresses/conventions (s.77(4))	1–21 Apr 2026.	The statutory gap is shorter, but the compliance burden is heavier because parties now have stricter register obligations, e.g., digital version, expanded members' data, and submission before primaries. In a transition year, this compresses party preparation.
6.	Conduct of party primaries, including resolution of disputes	No fixed calendar date, but must fit before the 180-day nomination deadline	No fixed calendar date, but must fit before the 120-day nomination deadline.	23 Apr–30 May 2026.	INEC chose an early primary window. This reduces uncertainty later but gives parties limited time to adjust to new rules. It also shifts potential pre-election litigation earlier (as early as May/June 2026).

S/N	Issue	EA 2022	EA 2026	Actual INEC dates/ operative timeline	Implications
7.	Submission of parties' list of candidates to INEC	Not later than 180 days before the election (s.29(1))	Not later than 120 days before the election (s.29(1))	INEC split this into stages: Nomination portal opens/closes: 27 Jun–11 Jul 2026 (Pres./NASS) and 18 Jul–8 Aug 2026 (Gov./State). Last day for submission of nomination forms: 29 Aug 2026 (Pres./NASS) and 26 Sep 2026 (Gov./State)	One of the most significant statutory changes: nominations now close 120 days before election day (instead of 180). While this theoretically gives parties more time to finalise candidates, the current timetable schedules primaries much earlier in the cycle, meaning the flexibility is not fully reflected in practice.
8.	Publication of personal particulars of candidates (EC9) by INEC	Must be published within 7 days of receipt. (s.29(3))	Must be published within 21 days of receipt. (s.29(3))	1 Aug 2026 (Pres./NASS) and 29 Aug 2026 (Gov./State).	This is an important checkpoint because the public can see candidate details before the final list is published.
9.	Publication of the final list of nominated candidates by INEC	At least 150 days before the election (s.32(1))	At least 60 days before the election (s.32(1))	12 Sep 2026 (Pres./NASS) and 10 Oct 2026 (Gov./State Assembly).	This is a major compression. INEC now has much more legal room to publish later, which could help parties but also leaves less certainty for voters and stakeholders.
10.	Withdrawal/replacement/substitution of candidates	Not later than 90 days before the election (s.31)	90 days retained (s.31)	22 Aug 2026 (Pres./NASS) and 19 Sep 2026 (Gov./State Assembly).	The legal deadline stays the same, but because nominations now close later than under the 2022 Act, the substitution process sits in a tighter political environment.

S/N	Issue	EA 2022	EA 2026	Actual INEC dates/ operative timeline	Implications
11.	Notification to INEC of missing candidate names on published nominations list	Not later than 90 days before the election (s.32(2))	Within 14 days after publication of nominations (s.32(2))	Not separately itemised. Since section 32(2) links the notification window to the publication of the final list of nominated candidates, the practical 14-day period would run to 26 September 2026 (after the 12 September 2026 publication for Pres./NASS) and 24 October 2026 (after the 10 October 2026 publication for Gov./State Assembly).	The trigger has changed from a fixed election-based deadline to a publication-based correction window. That is more flexible in form, but less straightforward for parties and observers to track.
12.	Commencement of campaign by political parties	150 days before polling day (s.94(1))	150 days retained (s.98(1))	19 Aug 2026 (Pres./NASS) and 9 Sep 2026 (Gov./State Assembly).	This now starts before the last nomination deadline. This is the most obvious sequencing problem in the 2026 Act.
13.	Last day of campaigns	24 hours before polling day (s.94(1))	24 hours retained (s.98(1))	14 Jan 2027 (Pres./NASS) and 4 Feb 2027 (Gov./State Assembly).	No change here. The issue is not campaign closing, but campaign opening too early relative to nominations.
14.	Deadline for INEC to invite parties to inspect ballot paper samples	Not later than 20 days before the election (s.42(3))	Not later than 60 days before the election (s.42(3))	No separate INEC date stated. So the last lawful date back-calculated from the election dates would be 17 Nov 2026 (Pres./NASS) and 8 Dec 2026 (Gov./State Assembly).	This gives INEC a much earlier compliance checkpoint and more time to correct ballot design issues.

Source: PLAC's compilation from the Electoral Act 2022, Electoral Act 2026, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), and the INEC Timetable and Schedule of Activities for the 2027 General Elections.

Notes:

- Election dates used for calculations are **16 January 2027** (Presidential & National Assembly) and **6 February 2027** (Governorship & State Houses of Assembly).
- Where INEC's timetable does not specify an exact date, the statutory outer limit (i.e., the latest date permitted by law) is calculated by counting backwards from election day.
- Form EC9 refers to the affidavit in support of personal particulars and credentials of a candidate, often listing contact details, academic qualifications, work history, etc.



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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