WHAT THE ELECTORAL ACT 2026 IS ALREADY REVEALING

PLAC
POLICY AND LEGAL ADVOCACY CENTRE

ELECTION WATCH

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PART 1

PRIMARIES AND CANDIDATES: ARE THE NEW RULES IMPROVING CANDIDATE SELECTION?



Executive Summary

This first part of PLAC's Election Watch examines how political parties selected their candidates for the 2027 elections, from the conduct of primaries to INEC's publication of candidate lists. It assesses the early implementation of the Electoral Act 2026, the disputes that have emerged and their possible implications for the elections.

The evidence raises concerns about whether the new framework has improved internal party democracy and compliance. Reported irregularities and emerging court decisions have exposed problems with voting, aspirant participation, consensus arrangements and the submission of candidates' names. Disputes over membership registers, conflicting nomination records and INEC's handling of candidate lists have raised further questions about transparency and consistency. Although INEC monitoring, administrative reviews and judicial intervention have provided remedies in some cases, many outcomes remain unsettled.

The early picture is therefore mixed. The reforms have introduced new requirements and opportunities for accountability, but the available evidence does not yet establish that candidate selection has become fairer or more transparent. With several nomination disputes still before the courts and appeals likely to continue as polling approaches, an important question is whether the legal process can resolve these cases in time for effective remedies before the 2027 elections.

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1. How did the new Electoral Act change how parties choose and nominate candidates?

For voters, the choice of candidates begins long before election day. Political parties first decide who will represent them on the ballot, a process that has often been marked by disputes over the conduct of primaries, declared winners and the names eventually submitted to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The Electoral Act 2026 introduced significant changes to this process. It abolished indirect primaries, leaving parties to choose candidates through direct primaries or consensus. It also strengthened membership-register requirements while retaining mechanisms for INEC to monitor primaries, correct candidate lists and address disputed nominations through administrative and judicial processes.[1]

The early experience presents a mixed picture. Some safeguards have worked. In Yobe State, for example, the rejection of a proposed consensus candidate was followed by a direct primary. INEC's monitoring records have also helped courts resolve particular nomination disputes, while its review of complaints has resulted in changes to published candidate lists. These examples show that the law provides avenues for correcting problems, although they do not necessarily mean those problems are being prevented in the first place.

Indeed, many familiar problems have persisted. Reports and emerging court cases point to disputed voting figures, allegations of imposed candidates, restrictions on participation and disagreements over primary results. Some cases have also exposed troubling weaknesses in INEC's own monitoring and record-keeping. Conflicting results reportedly certified by the Commission, and instances where published candidate names differed from those recorded as winners, raise serious questions about the effectiveness of its internal checks. INEC should be able to identify and address such discrepancies before candidate lists are published, rather than leave aspirants to seek court orders to establish what its own monitoring records show.

A major concern is whether the new rules have strengthened internal party democracy or simply given party leaders greater control over candidate selection. The 2026 Act removed the detailed safeguards for direct primaries previously contained in **section 84(4) of the Electoral Act 2022,** leaving parties to conduct them under their own guidelines. The consensus option also remains open to manipulation where party officials can influence which aspirants are cleared to contest. Although many reported incidents remain contested, allegations of exclusion, forced consensus and manipulated results suggest that removing indirect primaries has not necessarily reduced the influence of party leaders.

The Supreme Court's decision in *INEC v. Zenith Labour Party (ZLP)* affirmed the validity of the new membership-register requirements and the National Assembly's power to regulate party primaries. However, it left questions about the treatment of nominations processed between **16 July and 24 September 2026,** when the Court of Appeal's decision invalidating some of these requirements was in force. The available evidence does not establish whether parties relied on that ruling to depart from the statutory requirements. It remains unclear how INEC would deal with proven non-compliance arising during that period and ensure that comparable nominations receive consistent treatment.

It is still too early to measure the overall impact of the reforms. Many disputes remain before the courts or may be subject to appeal, while relatively little is known about the experiences of ordinary party members or how many primaries were conducted without significant problems. Nevertheless, the evidence already points to weaknesses that deserve attention before the 2027 elections. This section examines what has happened so far, which safeguards have worked, where problems persist and what remains unresolved.

1 Electoral Act 2026, Official Gazette, ss. 29–34, 77, 82–88 and 138.

1.1. From party primaries to candidate lists

Under INEC's revised timetable of 26 February 2026, political parties were required to conduct their primaries and resolve related disputes between 23 April and 30 May 2026. A primary determines who a party chooses to sponsor for an election.[2] The party then formally submits that person's name and particulars to INEC, which publishes the candidate list. These are separate but connected stages, and problems can arise at any point. An aspirant may win a primary but find that the party submitted someone else's name. In other cases, a party may submit a candidate's name only for INEC to omit it from the published list. Understanding where things went wrong helps establish who was responsible and how the problem can be corrected.

Such disputes are not new. Ahead of the 2023 elections, INEC monitored 2,011 party primaries and was involved in 1,241 intra-party lawsuits as of 6 February 2023. Although these figures measure different things and do not establish how many primaries were conducted unlawfully, they show how frequently disputes over candidate selection have drawn INEC into litigation. The question now is whether the 2026 reforms have made the process more credible and reduced the problems that lead to these disputes.[3]

1.2. An election timetable tested in court

INEC's revised timetable scheduled the presidential and National Assembly elections for 16 January 2027, and governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections for 6 February 2027. Political parties were to conduct their primaries between 23 April and 30 May 2026, while the portal for submitting presidential and National Assembly candidates was scheduled to close on 11 July 2026.

The nomination deadline became a point of contention because it fell earlier than the latest date contemplated by the 120-day requirement in **section 29(1) of the Electoral Act 2026**. This raised a legal question – could INEC set earlier deadlines for parties when the Act appeared to allow more time?

The Youth Party and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) challenged different parts of the timetable, resulting in conflicting Federal High Court decisions that were eventually overturned on appeal.[4]

The Youth Party challenge – The party argued that INEC's authority to receive notices and monitor primaries did not include the power to determine when parties must conduct them. It also challenged the deadlines for submitting candidates, withdrawals, replacements and membership registers. On 20 May 2026, the Federal High Court in Abuja set aside the disputed deadlines. However, the Court of Appeal reversed that judgment on 16 July 2026, ruling that INEC had acted within its powers and that the party had not shown how the timetable affected its ability to conduct primaries. The Supreme Court struck out the party's further appeal on 24 September 2026 because it was filed one day late. The Court of Appeal's decision therefore remained in place.[5]

The SDP challenge – The SDP argued that INEC's timetable reduced the period allowed under **section 29(1)** for submitting candidates' particulars and **section 31** for notifying withdrawals. The Federal High Court agreed on 26 May 2026, but the Court of Appeal overturned that judgment on 20 July 2026. It found that the lower court had failed to address INEC's objection that the dispute was speculative and that the timetable did not conflict with the relevant provisions of the Act.

2 Electoral Act 2026. National Assembly Library Trust Fund, INEC releases revised timetable for the 2027 general election, reproducing INEC's announcement. PLAC, The 2027 Electoral Calendar – Legal Timelines, Administrative Choices and Implications, March 2026.

3 INEC, Report of the 2023 General Election, table 8.14. Punch, INEC seeks NBA's help in handling electoral cases, reporting the INEC chair's account of the 1,241 suits.

4 TheCable, Court nullifies INEC deadlines for party primaries, candidate nomination, 21 May 2026. TheCable, Appeal court dismisses judgment nullifying INEC deadlines for 2027 elections, 16 July 2026. PLAC, The 2027 Electoral Calendar.

5 TheCable, Federal High Court ruling, 21 May 2026. TheCable, Court of Appeal judgment, 16 July 2026. The Guardian, Supreme Court disposition, 24 September 2026.

On 24 September 2026, the Supreme Court dismissed the SDP's lead appeal and disposed of a related appeal accordingly. [6]

These decisions settled the immediate challenges to INEC's timetable, allowing the Commission to proceed with its scheduled activities. However, the disputes also exposed a need for greater clarity. Where INEC sets an administrative deadline earlier than the statutory limit, political parties should understand the legal basis and practical reasons for doing so before disputes arise.

The timetable also affects who can participate in party primaries. Under the new Act, parties must submit their membership registers ahead of each exercise, making the date of a primary important not only for INEC's preparations but also for determining who is eligible to vote or contest.

1.3. Membership registers – who can vote and contest?

Under **section 77 of the Electoral Act 2026**, political parties must submit their membership registers to INEC at least 21 days before holding a primary, congress or convention. Only members whose names appear on the submitted register can vote or contest in that exercise. A party that fails to submit its register as required cannot field a candidate for the election concerned. This introduces stronger consequences for non-compliance, addressing some of the weaknesses PLAC identified in its review of the 2023 election litigation. However, enforcing these requirements fairly depends on reliable records of party membership and proof of what was submitted to INEC and when.[7]

In May 2026, INEC announced that all 22 registered political parties had submitted their membership registers by 8 May 2026. However, submitting a register does not necessarily mean a party has met every requirement. A register may have been submitted late for a particular primary, a different version may have been used, or an aspirant's name may have been missing. These distinctions became important during INEC's October 2026 review of candidate lists. When a candidate is excluded, the reason should be clear because different violations require different evidence and may carry different legal consequences.[8]

The Rivers governorship nomination provides a useful example. Kingsley Chinda, a member of the House of Representatives who represents Obio/Akpor Federal Constituency and then Minority Leader on the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), won the All Progressives Congress (APC) governorship primary on 21 May 2026. His emergence raised questions about when he left the PDP, joined the APC and whether his name appeared on the membership register submitted for the primary.

On 2 June 2026, Speaker Tajudeen Abbas announced Chinda's resignation as Minority Leader and his defection to the APC, reading a letter dated 23 April 2026. Although the letter preceded the APC primary by almost a month, neither its date nor the subsequent announcement established when Chinda became an APC member or whether he was included in the relevant register. [9]

Two lawsuits subsequently challenged his eligibility. In **FHC/PH/CS/3/2026**, lawyer Samuel Amatonjie questioned Chinda's move to the APC, relying on **section 68 of the Constitution** (which restrictis legislator defections) and seeking relevant House records and the party's membership register. On 4 November 2026, the Federal High Court in Port Harcourt adjourned the case to 10 December 2026, leaving the issue unresolved at the time of this publication. [10]

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6 SDP v INEC, SC/CV/499/2026, Supreme Court, 24 September 2026, pp. 4–6, recounting the 26 May trial decision. Supreme Court of Nigeria, SDP v INEC, SC/CV/498/2026, 24 September 2026. The companion judgment in SC/CV/499/2026 records both dispositions. PLAC, The 2027 Electoral Calendar.

7 Electoral Act 2026. PLAC, From Ballot to the Courts, 2023 election petition litigation report, sections 3.4, 7.6 and 7.13. PLAC, Research Note. Section 77 of the Electoral Act 2026.

8 TheCable, All 22 political parties have submitted their membership registers, says INEC, 16 May 2026, reporting INEC's 15 May statement. INEC, 13 October clarification. INEC, 30 October complaints review.

9 Channels Television, Reps Minority Leader Kingsley Chinda defects to APC, resigns position, 2 June 2026. TheCable, Rivers APC guber candidate Kingsley Chinda resigns as reps minority leader, 2 June 2026.

10 *Nigerian Tribune*, Amatonjie's suit and the 30 September proceedings. *Channels Television*, documents sought and adjournment, 4 November 2026.

In a separate suit, **FHC/PH/CS/193/2026**, the Peoples Redemption Party and its Rivers governorship candidate, Kieghe Nature Dumale, alleged that Chinda's name was absent from the APC register submitted to INEC. They asked the court to prevent the APC from fielding him in the governorship election. [11]

These disputes highlight an important distinction – **changing political parties does not automatically disqualify an aspirant from contesting a primary**. What matters under section 77 is whether the aspirant satisfied the membership requirements, including appearing on the register submitted for that exercise. In Chinda's case, the competing claims cannot be settled without examining the relevant party and INEC records.

Beyond determining who can participate, the 2026 Act also changed how parties select their candidates. It permits only two methods – direct primaries and consensus. The next subsection examines how those options have worked in practice.

1.4. Direct primaries and consensus in practice

1.4.1 What changed under the law

The Electoral Act 2026 abolished indirect primaries, where delegates selected candidates on behalf of other party members. Under **section 84(2)**, political parties must now choose their candidates through direct primaries or consensus. However, the new Act also removed some important safeguards for direct primaries. **Section 84(4) of the Electoral Act 2022** prescribed more detailed procedures, including voting at ward level. Under **section 86 of the Electoral Act 2026**, parties now conduct direct primaries according to their own guidelines.

Although INEC's guidelines still require parties to give eligible members a fair opportunity to participate, the crucial practical details such as, where members vote, how they are admitted, how ballots are counted and how results are documented, now depend more heavily on party rules and the way those rules are applied.[12]

The consensus option retains safeguards from the previous law. Under **section 87**, every ***cleared aspirant*** must voluntarily agree in writing to the proposed consensus candidate, whose selection must also be ratified at the required convention or nomination congress. If any cleared aspirant refuses consent, the party must hold a direct primary. INEC's guidelines require its monitors to include the written consents in their reports.

This process should not be confused with the withdrawal of a candidate who has already been nominated for the general election. Such withdrawals are governed separately by **section 31**. [13]

The new rules were challenged in court by the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP). Although the Court of Appeal initially invalidated the restrictions on nomination methods and certain membership-register requirements on 16 July 2026, the Supreme Court restored them on 24 September 2026. The implications of that ruling for nominations already being processed are examined in Section 1.8.

1.4.2 What the 2026 primaries revealed

Political parties must still comply with their constitutions, electoral guidelines and the law when choosing candidates, as the Supreme Court emphasised in **APC v. Marafa**[14]. What has changed is that parties now have greater freedom to decide how direct primaries will be conducted. This raises concerns about whether their internal rules provide adequate safeguards against manipulation and unfair treatment.

11 PLAC, Research Note on Section 77. *Channels Television*, PRP and Dumale's suit challenging the APC nomination, 29 October 2026.
12 Electoral Act 2026. PLAC, Candidate Nomination by Political Parties under the Electoral Act 2026, Factsheet Part 8, March 2026. Electoral Act 2022, s. 84(4). INEC, Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties, 2026, Part 3, especially paragraphs 20–28.
13 Electoral Act 2026. PLAC, Candidate Nomination. INEC, Political Party Guidelines 2026.
14 (2020) 6 NWLR (Pt. 1721)

A particularly sensitive point is the phrase 'cleared aspirant' in the consensus rule. If screening is opaque or excludes an eligible aspirant without a fair process, collecting consent from those who remain may not answer the broader concern about fairness.

The Yobe APC governorship primary offers an example of the consensus safeguard working. Party stakeholders initially endorsed Baba Malam Wali as their preferred candidate. However, three other aspirants rejected the proposed consensus and demanded a vote.

The party subsequently conducted a direct primary, which Wali won. Although the preferred candidate still emerged, the party followed the required alternative when consensus could not be reached.[15]

Elsewhere, reports and complaints suggest that some parties continued to struggle with familiar problems. These included pressure on aspirants to accept consensus arrangements, refusal to sell nomination forms, failures to ratify consensus candidates and allegations that preferred candidates were imposed without valid primaries. Other complaints concerned voting conducted in only some wards, changes to announced venues, disputes over which party officials had authority to organise primaries and the submission of names different from those declared winners.

Many of these allegations remain contested, and the available evidence does not show how widespread the problems were. Nevertheless, they point to an important concern – **giving political parties greater control over their primaries does not necessarily make candidate selection more democratic.** The fairness of the process increasingly depends on how parties screen aspirants, apply their guidelines, conduct voting and document their results.[16]

1.5. What nomination disputes tell us

The disputes arising from the 2026 primaries reveal different problems. Some aspirants alleged that parties submitted names other than those of primary winners. Others challenged voting arrangements, internal appeal decisions or the eligibility of rival aspirants. In some cases, political parties accused INEC of omitting names they had submitted.

The cases below illustrate these problems and why they matter. Most allegations remain contested, and several disputes are still before the courts or subject to appeal. They should therefore not be treated as proven irregularities or evidence of how widespread these practices were. [17]

1.5.1 When the nominee differs from the reported winner

In ***Ihiala Federal Constituency,*** Anambra State, Joy Njideka Madubuike alleged that she won the APC primary held on 16 May 2026, which INEC monitored. She said she was still awaiting Forms EC9 and EC9A[18] when the party submitted Felix Ifeanyi Muo's name on 11 July 2026. The primary result, INEC's monitoring report and the party's nomination records would help establish whether the name submitted reflected the outcome of the primary.[19]

In ***Rijau State Constituency,*** Niger State, Jafar Ibrahim claimed that he won the African Democratic Congress (ADC) primary on 22 May 2026. He said the party's National Working Committee issued him nomination forms, including Forms EC13D and EC9, but later submitted Abdullahi Musa's name instead. The forms may support Ibrahim's account, but the declared primary result and the party's submission to INEC would also need to be examined.[20]

15 Punch, Yobe APC gov aspirants reject consensus candidate, demand direct primaries, 18 May 2026. Punch, Wali wins APC governorship ticket in Yobe, 22 May 2026. Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, Election News Trends, May 2026, on direct and consensus primaries.
16 PLAC, 2027 Election Watch research files, case summaries. Situation Room, May 2026.
17 The case accounts draw on PLAC's nomination summaries. Unless a judgment or official record is identified, the account remains a claimant's allegation.
18 Form EC9 (Affidavit of Personal Particulars); Form EC9A (Submission of Nominated Candidates / Personal Particulars Series)
19 Ihiala, FHC/ABJ/CS/1633/2026. PLAC, nomination case summaries.
20 Rijau, FHC/ABJ/CS/2121/2026. PLAC, nomination case summaries.

1.5.2 When voting or internal appeals are disputed

In ***Kogi Central,*** Mohammed Murtala Sani-Omolori challenged the ADC nomination of Ahmed Ogembe. He alleged that the party's appeal panel upheld his complaint and that its National Working Committee subsequently issued him nomination forms. Despite this, Ogembe was submitted as the candidate. The dispute raises questions about whether the party respected its internal appeal decision and who had authority to act on it.[21]

In ***Bosso/Paikoro Federal Constituency,*** Niger State, Yusuf Kure Baraje alleged that the APC primary held on 15 May 2026 took place in only a few wards, excluding supporters elsewhere, and that the announced vote totals were fabricated. He claimed that the party's Electoral Appeal Committee found merit in his complaint and recommended cancelling the result and awarding him the nomination. However, Dada Ibrahim's name was submitted to INEC. [22]

The Bosso/Paikoro dispute raises three important questions – whether eligible members were allowed to vote, whether the declared results were genuine and whether the party followed its appeal committee's recommendation. The available material does not establish a final court ruling on these allegations.

1.5.3 When membership or the validity of a primary is challenged

In ***Delta North,*** Senator Ned Nwoko challenged the APC nomination of Ifeanyi Okowa, a former Delta State Governor, questioning his party membership and eligibility to contest. On 20 July 2026, the Federal High Court in Abuja struck out the suit because it had been brought on Nwoko's behalf by Dr Mike Nwoko under a power of attorney. The court held that the right to challenge a primary belongs personally to the aggrieved aspirant and cannot be exercised through a power of attorney. It also refused an application to amend the suit. The ruling did not determine whether Okowa met the party's membership requirements. [23] Nwoko subsequently indicated his intention to appeal.

The case illustrates how procedural requirements can prevent a court from considering the underlying nomination dispute.

In Oyo State, ADC governorship aspirant Dr Azeez Popoola Adeduntan challenged the nomination of Adegboyega Taofeek Adegoke, a former PDP member. The party reportedly submitted Adegoke's name on 5 August 2026, and Adeduntan filed his suit in Abuja on 19 August 2026, arguing that the nomination did not follow a valid primary.

Another aspirant, Dr Gbemileke Alagbe, also known as Eleniyan, filed a separate suit at the Federal High Court in Ibadan. He claimed to have won the primary held on 22 May 2026, while Adegoke's representatives maintained that Adegoke was the rightful winner.

Adeduntan's Abuja suit was reportedly dismissed in September 2026, although the court's reasons have not been independently confirmed. The outcome of Alagbe's Ibadan suit also remains unverified. Adegoke's inclusion on INEC's candidate list establishes whose name was submitted and published, but does not settle the competing claims about the primary.24

1.5.4 When parties say INEC omitted their candidates

In Jigawa State, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and other claimants alleged that INEC failed to publish candidates the party had nominated for Jigawa North East Senatorial District and the Kaugama/

21 PLAC, nomination case summaries.

22 Bosso/Paikoro, FHC/ABJ/CS/1913/2026. PLAC, nomination case summaries.

23 Suit No. FHC/ABJ/CS/1062/2026, Federal High Court, Abuja, ruling of 20 July 2026. See Premium Times, "Delta North: Court rejects Ned Nwoko's suit challenging Okowa's candidacy," 20 July 2026, and TheNigeriaLawyer, report on the court's reasoning and refusal of the amendment, 20 July 2026. On Nwoko's stated intention to appeal, see Premium Times, "Delta North: Nwoko to appeal court decision on Okowa's candidacy," 21 July 2026. For the underlying membership allegation, see PLAC, nomination case summaries, and Electoral Act 2026, section 85.

24 Electoral Act 2026, section 29(1). For Adeduntan's Abuja suit, FHC/ABJ/CS/1948/2026, see PLAC, nomination case summaries, and Independent, "Adeduntan Confirms ADC Submits Adegoke's Name to INEC as Oyo Guber Candidate," 20 August 2026. For Alagbe's earlier Ibadan suit, FHC/IB/CS/67/2026, and Adegoke's response, see ThisDay, "Adegoke Remains Oyo ADC Guber Candidate, Says Media Team," 14 August 2026, and The Guardian, "Oyo 2027: Alagbe, Aborisade insist court will settle ADC ticket dispute," 21 September 2026. The reported dismissal of the Abuja suit is attributed to Alagbe's lawyer in Lift Media Reports, 24 September 2026.

Mallam Madori and Gwaram federal constituencies. A separate SDP suit raised similar complaints about omitted candidates across several senatorial and federal constituencies in Imo State. 25

Unlike disputes over who won a primary, these cases concern whether INEC published the names properly submitted by a political party. Resolving them requires evidence of when the nominations were submitted, whether they complied with the law and whether INEC accurately reflected them in the published lists.

1.5.5 Disputes over voting and declared results

Some disputes went beyond disagreements over who should be nominated. They challenged how the primaries themselves were conducted, including allegations of inflated voting figures, exclusion of eligible members and failures to hold voting in designated areas. These complaints are particularly important under the Electoral Act 2026, which leaves much of the procedure for direct primaries to political party guidelines.[26]

The Zamfara North APC senatorial primary is a striking example. Following a challenge by aspirant Dr Sani Abdullahi Shinkafi, the Federal High Court in Gusau nullified the primary held on 19 May 2026 and ordered a fresh exercise. The Court of Appeal upheld that decision on 20 October 2026. According to reports of the judgment, the court questioned how a constituency with approximately 26,000 registered party members could produce around 70,000 votes for one aspirant. The discrepancy raised serious concerns about verifiable membership, the credibility of the declared results and compliance with the party's rules.

The court-ordered rerun on 2 November 2026 did not settle the dispute. Different party officials announced conflicting results, declaring Senator Sahabi Ya'u and Tijjani Yahaya Kaura winners. [27] This raises fresh questions about the reliability of the voting records and the party's ability to conduct a credible primary even after judicial intervention.

In Plateau State, a dispute over the APC primary for ***Jos South/Jos East Federal Constituency*** raised concerns about whether voting had taken place in all the required wards. In October 2026, the Federal High Court ordered fresh voting in affected wards. The party subsequently held a rerun, after which Dachung Musa Bagos was declared winner. The case illustrates why a declared constituency-wide result is not enough if eligible members in some areas were denied the opportunity to vote.

These cases show that replacing delegate-based primaries with direct voting does not necessarily make candidate selection more democratic. Political parties must be able to show that eligible members voted, that the declared figures are supported by reliable records and that the rules were followed. The removal of detailed statutory safeguards makes these even more important.

1.6. INEC's monitoring role – How reliable are its records?

INEC does not choose political parties' candidates, but it has a responsibility to monitor how they are selected. Under **section 82 of the Electoral Act 2026**, parties must give INEC at least 21 days' notice of relevant conventions, congresses and meetings, stating when and where they will take place and who will organise them. Failure to give the required notice can invalidate the proceedings. **Sections 83 and 84** and INEC's 2026 Regulations for Political Parties also provide for monitoring and record-keeping, including primary results recorded on Form EC16B.[28]

These records provide an independent account of what happened at a primary. They can be compared with the candidate's name later submitted through INEC's nomination portal and the list eventually published. Differences may arise from disputed results, unauthorised party decisions or errors in submission or publication.

25 Jigawa: SDP, Muhammad Kabir and 5 Ors. Vs. INEC, FHC/ABJ/CS/1874/2026. Imo: SDP and 14 Ors. Vs. INEC, FHC/ABJ/CS/1906/2026. PLAC, nomination case summaries.
26 Electoral Act 2026, section 86, and INEC's 2026 Political Party Guidelines.
27 Shinkafi v. APC & Ors, FHC/GS/CS/6/2026; Radio Nigeria, 31 August 2026; ThisDay, 20 October 2026.
28 Electoral Act 2026. PLAC, Monitoring Political Parties and Jurisdictional Limits, Factsheet Part 7, March 2026. INEC, Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties, 2026, paras. 27–28.

This is why monitoring must mean more than attendance at a venue. INEC's report may help establish what happened at a primary, but it does not automatically settle whether the party's notice was validly authorised or whether subsequent nomination documents were properly submitted. The Commission should safeguard its records and use them consistently, while recognising that contested legal rights may ultimately require a court decision.

1.6.1 What the disputes are revealing about INEC oversight

The Accord Party dispute shows that problems can arise even before a primary is conducted and INEC deploys monitors. On 21 October 2026, the party's National Secretary, Adebukola Ajaja, filed a suit challenging notices of governorship and State House of Assembly primaries allegedly sent to INEC by National Chairman Maxwell Mgbudem without her involvement. She argued that this violated the party's constitution and INEC's guidelines. Accord challenged the court's jurisdiction and argued that the suit was filed out of time. The case therefore raised two questions – who was authorised to communicate with INEC, and whether the challenge could be heard on its merits.[29]

Ajaja maintained that the party's national chairman and secretary were required to sign the notices jointly. Mgbudem responded that the National Working Committee had authorised him and the national organising secretary to forward the documents. Resolving the disagreement would require examining the party's registered constitution, the authorisation given and the documents submitted to INEC. A monitoring report alone could not establish whether the notices were properly authorised.[30]

The ***Oshodi/Isolo Federal Constituency I dispute*** shows the value of INEC's monitoring records. Its report of the Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC) primary held on 29 May 2026 reportedly identified Olumuyiwa Owadara as the winner, yet Ibrahim Lukman's name appeared on the published candidate list. On 20 October 2026, the Federal High Court in Lagos relied on the monitoring report and ordered INEC to correct the list. The case raises an obvious question – why was the discrepancy not identified before publication? [31]

The Imo West senatorial dispute raises even more serious concerns**.** Former Imo State Governor Rochas Okorocha and Governor Hope Uzodimma presented conflicting records certified by INEC for the same APC primary held on 18 May 2026. In his judgment of 29 October 2026, Justice Obiora Egwuatu of the Federal High Court in Abuja examined the signatures and supporting result sheets. He found deficiencies in the documents supporting Uzodimma's claim, accepted the evidence that Okorocha won and ordered INEC to recognise him. Uzodimma still has the right to appeal the judgement up to the Supreme Court, if needed. [32]

The concern here goes beyond the competing claims of two aspirants. INEC should be able to establish and account for the official result of a primary it monitored. When conflicting records carry the Commission's certification, it undermines confidence in its record-keeping and leaves the courts to resolve discrepancies that its internal checks should have detected.

The NDC's Anambra State House of Assembly complaint raised a different concern about INEC's nomination portal. In August 2026, the party alleged that nine nominees it had submitted remained marked as "Pending" and that INEC had obtained nomination forms from other individuals. INEC denied changing the submissions, stating that the disputed names appeared on Form EC9E signed by the party's national chairman and secretary.[33]

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29 Suit No: FHC/ABJ/CV/2524/2026. Ajaja argued that Accord's constitution required the national chairman and national secretary to sign jointly. See: TheCable, "Accord national secretary asks court to disqualify party's 2027 candidates over 'usurpation of role'," 24 October 2026. TheCable, "Accord asks court to dismiss suit seeking disqualification of all its candidates for 2027 elections," 2 November 2026. www.thecable.ng

30 Mgbudem cited Article 18 of the Accord party constitution and Paras. 25(3) and 28(2) of INEC's political party guidelines.

31 Subair Mohammed, "Court Sacks Lukman, Orders INEC to Recognise Owadara as NDC Candidate," Nigerian Tribune, 29 October 2026; Ayoola Babalola, "Court Orders INEC to Replace NDC Candidate with Primary Winner," The Punch, 28 October 2026. Both report the Federal High Court judgment delivered by Justice Akintayo Aluko on 20 October 2026.

32 Okorocha v INEC & Ors, FHC/ABJ/CS/1854/2026, Federal High Court, Abuja, 29 October 2026, as reported by Premium Times, 29 October 2026 and summarised by TheNigeriaLawyer, 1 November 2026.

33 NDC's reported statement of 31 August 2026 and INEC's response of 1 September 2026

The competing accounts raise questions about who was authorised to submit candidates' names, whether changes were made and whether INEC can trace those changes. The signed forms and a dated record of portal activity would help establish what happened.[34]

Taken together, these cases reveal weaknesses in the management and verification of nomination records. INEC's monitoring reports can provide important evidence when disputes reach court, but their value is weakened when the Commission certifies conflicting records or publishes names that differ from its own reports.

This does not mean INEC should decide who a party's candidate ought to be. It means the Commission should have reliable records, effective internal checks and a clear account of how names move from monitored primaries to published candidate lists.

1.7. Why names changed on INEC's candidate lists

1.7.1 Corrections, withdrawals and substitutions

A revised candidate list does not necessarily mean that a party has chosen someone new. An entry may change because INEC corrects an omission, implements an order of court or processes a lawful substitution. **Section 32(1)** requires INEC to publish the nominated candidates at least 60 days before polling. Under **section 32(2)**, a party that finds its candidate omitted may complain in writing within 14 days, with the signatures of its national chairman and secretary and an affidavit. This is a specific administrative route for an omission, not an open-ended opportunity to change a party's preferred candidate.[35]

After submission of candidate lists under **section 29**, **section 33** allows substitution only following a candidate's death or withdrawal. Under **section 31**, a withdrawing candidate must personally give the party a signed notice and sworn affidavit, which the party must forward to INEC within the statutory deadline. Where **section 33** applies, the party has 14 days from the event to hold a fresh primary and nominate a replacement; INEC's guidelines prescribe notice of that exercise. An operative court order may require a different change. Each route demands its own documents.[36]

1.7.2 When courts ordered changes

The Oshodi/Isolo dispute discussed earlier provides an example of a court-ordered correction. On 20 October 2026, the Federal High Court reportedly ordered INEC to replace Ibrahim Alabi Lukman's name with that of Olumuyiwa Owadara, whom INEC's monitoring report identified as the winner of the NDC primary. The court reportedly found no credible evidence that a valid replacement primary had taken place. This was therefore a correction of a disputed nomination, rather than a routine substitution under **section 33.**[37]

The Accord presidential nomination dispute involved a different problem. On 5 October 2026, the Federal High Court in Abuja ordered Accord to submit Gbenga Olawepo-Hashim's name as its presidential candidate and directed INEC to recognise him. The court rejected the party's claim that no valid primary had taken place on 30 May 2026. It also noted that Accord had collected 50 million naira from Olawepo-Hashim for his expression-of-interest and nomination forms. The party's national chairman reportedly appealed the judgment on 8 October 2026.[38]

The two cases show how courts can intervene at different stages – where a party refuses to submit a candidate's name or where INEC publishes a name that does not match the recorded primary result. However, a favourable judgment does not necessarily mean that the correction has been implemented or that the dispute has ended, particularly where an appeal is pending.

34 Channels Television, NDC's statement, 31 August 2026. INEC, statement responding to the NDC allegations, 1 September 2026, as reported by Punch, 2 September 2026.
35 Electoral Act 2026.
36 Electoral Act 2026. Paragraph 22 (4), INEC, Political Party Guidelines 2026.
37 Nigerian Tribune, Court sacks Lukman, orders INEC to recognise Owadara as NDC candidate, 29 October 2026.
38 (FHC/ABJ/CS/1268/2026); Premium Times, "Court orders INEC to recognise Olawepo-Hashim as Accord Party presidential candidate; Osun Defender, "Accord Party Appeals Judgment Affirming Hashim As Presidential Candidate," 8 October 2026.

1.7.3 How INEC reviewed and corrected candidate lists

INEC published the governorship and State Houses of Assembly candidate lists on 10 October 2026 and gave political parties until 24 October 2026 to report omissions. Following its review, the Commission announced that it had upheld **41 of 69 governorship complaints and 25 of 61 State Assembly complaints**. The complaints covered different issues, including omitted candidates, disputed nominations and compliance with membership-register requirements. INEC also reported removing some names after checking the relevant registers and published updated lists on 31 October 2026.[39]

The review shows that INEC's administrative process can correct candidate lists before an election. However, the published figures do not explain how many complaints involved errors by INEC, failures by political parties or other legal issues. Without clear reasons for individual decisions, it is difficult to assess whether similar cases were treated consistently. Publishing the reason for each correction, removal or rejected complaint would make the process more transparent and allow parties, candidates and the public to understand why names changed.

The review produced different outcomes in three governorship disputes.

In Gombe State, former Minister Isa Pantami won a fresh PDP primary on 29 September 2026 after a court nullified the party's earlier exercise. INEC initially omitted his name from the candidate list but later accepted his complaint and included him, subject to pending litigation. [40]

In Ogun State, Ladi Adebutu, who emerged as the PDP's governorship candidate in May 2026, was also omitted from the list. INEC rejected the party's request for reconsideration, while the PDP maintained that Adebutu met the membership requirements. In a counter-affidavit subsequently filed before the Federal High Court in Abuja, INEC explained that its search of the PDP membership register found the name of Adebutu's running mate, Kolapo Lateefat Oyeyemi, but not Adebutu's. The Commission also alleged that the register later presented by the PDP in court differed from the version submitted to INEC.

In Kano State, former Deputy Governor Aminu Abdussalam Gwarzo, the Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC) governorship candidate, was also left off the published list. INEC accepted the party's complaint but could not include his name because of a Federal High Court order restraining publication of the party's nominees. The updated list therefore continued to omit Gwarzo, pending the court's decision.[41]

The three cases show that different legal issues can lead to the same outcome – a candidate's name missing from INEC's list. Pantami was eventually included, Adebutu's exclusion remained in place, while a court order prevented Gwarzo's inclusion despite INEC accepting his complaint. These differences do not necessarily show inconsistent treatment, but they underline the need for clear explanations of each decision.

The October review also followed a major Supreme Court decision on membership registers and nomination methods. The next subsection examines that judgment and the questions it left unresolved.

1.8. The ZLP Judgment – What Did It Settle and What Remains Unclear?

The Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) challenged the Electoral Act 2026 provisions restricting political parties to direct primaries or consensus and requiring them to use membership registers submitted to INEC. The Federal High Court dismissed the case on 5 May 2026, but the Court of Appeal overturned that decision on 16 July 2026, invalidating **sections 77(5)–(7) and 84(2)**. On 24 September 2026, the

39 INEC, Clarification on the omission of some candidates from the final list for the 2027 governorship election, 13 October 2026. INEC, Review of complaints relating to the final lists of governorship and State Houses of Assembly candidates, 30 October 2026. Premium Times, INEC reviews petitions, clears Pantami, rejects Adebutu's complaint over 2027 election list, 30 October 2026. INEC, 2027 General Elections Update, updated candidate lists, 31 October 2026.

40 Theophilus Adedokun, "INEC clears Pantami, Gwarzo for 2027 guber poll, rejects Adebutu's petition," TheCable, 30 October 2026.

41 "Court Order Backs INEC over Kano NDC Candidates' Omission," Punch, 5 November 2026. See also Theophilus Adedokun, "INEC Clears Pantami, Gwarzo for 2027 Guber Poll, Rejects Adebutu's Petition," TheCable, 30 October 2026.

Supreme Court restored the provisions, affirming the National Assembly's power under **section 228 of the Constitution** to regulate party primaries.[42]

The Supreme Court also clarified an important distinction. **Section 77(7)** penalises a political party that fails to submit its membership register as required, but does not introduce a new constitutional disqualification for individual aspirants. Whether a particular aspirant was eligible to participate still depends on the membership register submitted for that primary and the evidence of their membership.[43]

The timing of the judgments created a practical difficulty. Although most primaries had concluded before the July ruling, parties continued submitting candidates' names, processing withdrawals and making replacements while the Court of Appeal's judgment was in force. INEC also published the presidential and National Assembly candidate lists on 12 September 2026, before the Supreme Court restored the provisions. However, the available evidence does not establish whether any party relied on the July ruling to use a different register or depart from the statutory requirements.[44]

After receiving the Supreme Court's judgment on 6 October 2026, INEC said it applied the restored membership-register requirements when finalising the governorship and State Houses of Assembly candidate lists. It distinguished these from the presidential and National Assembly lists, which had already been published. However, the different treatment raised questions about how consistently the Commission applied the law to nominations processed at different stages.[45]

Public scrutiny also extended to candidates whose names INEC accepted. One example is Kingsley Chinda, the APC governorship candidate in Rivers State, whose party membership and eligibility are being challenged in court. His inclusion may reflect the fact that the APC submitted his nomination and no court had invalidated it. It does not, by itself, establish that INEC applied different standards. Nevertheless, the alleged contrasting treatment of disputed nominations raises a legitimate question about whether the Commission applied the same membership-register requirements and documentary checks consistently across political parties.[46]

The Supreme Court settled the validity of the law but did not determine the status of individual nominations processed during the intervening period. Nor does the earlier publication of a candidate list, by itself, establish compliance with the Act. What remains unclear is how INEC would lawfully address any defects subsequently established in those nominations and ensure that comparable cases are treated consistently. At the time of this publication, no court decision identified in this assessment had resolved that question in relation to a specific nomination said to have relied on the July ruling.

1.9. Has the new framework improved compliance?

The early experience of party primaries under the Electoral Act 2026 raises concerns about whether the reforms have strengthened internal party democracy. Although there is not yet enough evidence to assess the overall conduct of primaries, reported incidents and emerging court disputes suggest that familiar problems have persisted, particularly the influence of party leaders over candidate selection.

The removal of indirect primaries was intended to broaden participation by allowing ordinary party members to vote directly for candidates. However, the Act also removed important safeguards previously provided under **section 84(4) of the Electoral Act 2022**, including detailed procedures for ward-level voting. Under **section 86 of the Electoral Act 2026**, parties now conduct direct primaries according to their own guidelines. While this provides greater flexibility, it also leaves more control over voting arrangements, participation and the recording of results in the hands of party officials.

42 **INEC v Zenith Labour Party,** SC/CV/495/2026, Supreme Court, 24 September 2026, lead judgment of Agim JSC, pp. 22–35. PLAC, Research Note on Section 77.
43 Electoral Act 2026. INEC v Zenith Labour Party. PLAC, Research Note on Section 77.
44 INEC v Zenith Labour Party. PLAC, Research Note on Section 77. INEC, 13 October clarification. INEC, updated candidate lists. Channels Television, September candidate list.
45 INEC, Clarification on the Omission of Some Candidates from the Final List for the 2027 Governorship Election, 13 October 2026; Kenneth Eze, "INEC's Candidate List and the Question of Double Standards: A Credibility Test for Nigeria's Electoral Umpire," Speak Out Africa Initiative.
46 Qosim Suleiman, "2027: INEC Excludes Pantami, Adebutu, Clears Chinda in Final Governorship Candidates' List," Premium Times, 11 October 2026; Zayyad I. Muhammad, "INEC and the Back-and-Forth over Candidates' Lists," Blueprint, 6 November 2026.

A direct primary is not necessarily democratic or transparent simply because ordinary members are entitled to vote. [47]

Consensus presents similar concerns. Although **section 87** requires the voluntary written consent of all cleared aspirants and ratification of the consensus candidate, the safeguard depends on how fairly parties screen aspirants. Reports of alleged exclusion during screening raise concerns that party leaders could influence the outcome by determining who is allowed to contest. While the extent of this practice has not been established, it highlights a potential weakness in the protection against imposed candidates. [48]

There have been some positive developments. The legal framework provides opportunities for aspirants to challenge irregularities, while INEC's monitoring and administrative review processes have helped bring nomination discrepancies to light. Court decisions have also reinforced the obligation of political parties to comply with electoral laws and their own guidelines. However, the effectiveness of these safeguards will depend partly on whether the decisions are upheld and implemented.

Judicial remedies remain important but have limitations. Under **section 88(2)–(3)**, an aggrieved aspirant may challenge a primary that violates the Act, with exclusion of the party's candidate among the consequences of proven non-compliance. Yet, as the Ned Nwoko case illustrates, procedural requirements may prevent courts from considering the underlying complaint. A successful challenge also does not necessarily result in the claimant becoming the party's candidate.

Overall, removing indirect primaries has not necessarily reduced the influence of party leaders. That influence may instead have shifted to the design of party guidelines, control of membership and screening processes, and management of consensus arrangements. The emerging evidence does not yet establish how widespread these problems are. The conclusion of pending court cases and any appeals will provide a fuller picture, although litigation cannot capture irregularities that were never challenged.

1.10. Can Remedies Arrive in Time?

PLAC's review of the 2023 election litigation identified cases where claimants obtained favourable judgments too late to benefit from them at the ballot. The risk remains in 2027, particularly as the Electoral Act 2026 no longer recognises candidate non-qualification as a standalone post-election petition ground. Although **section 29(7)** provides a specific rerun remedy for qualifying false-information cases, other nomination disputes may present different remedial gaps. [49]

The Risk of Litigation Outlasting the Elections

The timing of pre-election judgments is becoming a major concern. Federal High Court decisions in several nomination disputes began emerging in September 2026, with further judgments in October and November. Many remain subject to appeal.

Under section 285(10)–(12) of the Constitution, trial courts have up to 180 days to determine pre-election matters, appeals must be filed within 14 days, and appellate courts have up to 60 days to deliver judgment. Where a further appeal lies to the Supreme Court, additional proceedings may follow. With the presidential and National Assembly elections scheduled for 16 January 2027 and governorship and State Assembly elections for 6 February 2027, several nomination disputes are likely to remain unresolved when voting begins.

This creates uncertainty for candidates, political parties and voters. A candidate may remain on the ballot while their nomination is under challenge, or a court may order a correction after INEC has

47 Nigerian Tribune, Owadara ruling. INEC, 30 October complaints review. INEC, updated candidate lists. Punch, Yobe consensus dispute. Punch, Yobe primary result.

48 Electoral Act 2026, **section 87**. See the Yobe example and the discussion of aspirant clearance earlier in this section. *Punch*, "Yobe APC gov aspirants reject consensus candidate, demand direct primaries," 18 May 2026.

49 Electoral Act 2026. PLAC, From Ballot to the Courts. PLAC, Candidate Qualification in the Electoral Act 2026, Factsheet Part 10, April 2026.

finalised important election preparations. Even a successful judgment may be of limited practical value if it comes too late to affect the election.

For election stakeholders, the key watchpoint is no longer just who wins or loses in court, but when each dispute is finally resolved and whether the remedy can still be implemented. This requires tracking appeals, INEC's compliance with court orders and the timing of final judgments.

> *"A court may correct a nomination, but a late decision may arrive after the ballot can be meaningfully changed."*

1.11. High-Profile Nomination Disputes – What Remains at Stake?

The following disputes illustrate important questions that remain unsettled ahead of the 2027 elections. Some have produced court judgments, while others await decisions or further appeals.

Dispute	Position at the time of this publication	What remains at stake
ADC national leadership and presidential nomination – David Mark / Atiku Abubakar	Federal High Court judgment of 5 November 2026 invalidated the disputed party leadership and nominations made under it. ADC announced plans to appeal.	Whether the ruling survives appeal and its implications for ADC candidates across elective offices.[50]
Adamawa ADC Governorship – Ambassador Omar Suleiman (Omarana) / Hamman Tukur Modibbo	The ADC primary committee declared Omar Suleiman winner on 26 May 2026. Following reports of plans to replace him, the party subsequently put forward Modibbo, who had placed second. Suleiman reported seeking a court order against his substitution	Whether Suleiman's reported substitution was lawful, what INEC's monitoring records establish, and whether the wider ADC leadership judgment affects the validity of the party's nomination process in Adamawa.[51]
Nasarawa ADC Governorship – Nuhu Angbazo / Mohammed Abdullahi	Federal High Court set aside Angbazo's nomination in November and ordered voting in Karu LGA, where the primary had not been completed.	Whether the ordered exercise is conducted and produces a valid nomination, subject to any appeal.[52]
Gombe PDP Governorship – Isa Pantami	Court nullified the earlier consensus process. Pantami won the September rerun and was included following INEC's October review, subject to litigation.	Whether the corrected nomination survives outstanding challenges.[53]
Ogun PDP Governorship – Ladi Adebutu	INEC excluded Adebutu over membership-register compliance and subsequently defended its decision in court.	Whether the submitted register establishes his eligibility and whether the exclusion is upheld.[54]

50 Falmata Daniel, "Court Nullifies Atiku's Candidacy, Sacks All ADC Candidates, Party Leadership," Premium Times, 5 November 2026.
51 Austin Ajayi, "Ex-NPA Boss Emerges ADC Guber Candidate in Adamawa," Nigerian Tribune, 26 May 2026; Jim Ochetenwu, "ADC Declares Ex-NPA MD, Omar Suleiman Adamawa Governorship Candidate," Daily Post, 26 May 2026; "Adamawa: ADC Gubernatorial Candidate Cries Out over Alleged Substitution, Heads to Court," Peoples Gazette, 2026.
52 "Court Sacks Nasarawa ADC Gov'ship Candidate, Angbazo, Orders Fresh Primary," Daily Trust, 4 November 2026
53 "INEC Reviews Petitions, Clears Pantami, Rejects Adebutu's Complaint over 2027 Election List," Premium Times, 30 October 2026.
54 Ikechukwu Nnochiri, "Ogun Gov Poll: PDP Candidate's Name Not in Party's Register, INEC Tells Court," Vanguard, 10 November 2026.

Dispute	Position at the time of this publication	What remains at stake
Rivers APC Governorship – Kingsley Chinda	INEC published Chinda's name. Pending litigation questions his defection and party membership; the Federal High Court has ordered production of relevant registers and documents.	Whether the nomination meets the applicable membership requirements.[55]
Delta Central NDC senatorial nomination – Ovie Omo-Agege / Alexander Akpodiete	The Federal High Court in Warri reserved judgment for 24 November 2026 in a dispute over Omo-Agege's departure from the APC and eligibility to contest the NDC primary.	Whether his party membership and participation complied with the law.[56]
Kogi West APC senatorial nomination – Samuel Bamidele Aro / Sunday Karimi	Federal High Court ordered recognition of Aro on 4 November 2026. Karimi announced his intention to appeal.	Whether the ruling stands and the candidate-list correction is implemented.[57]
Imo West APC senatorial nomination – Rochas Okorocha / Hope Uzodimma	Federal High Court recognised Okorocha on 29 October after examining conflicting INEC-certified records. Uzodimma indicated that he would challenge the judgment.	Whether the ruling survives appeal and how the conflicting official records are resolved.[58]

These cases show why initial judgments and published candidate lists cannot always be treated as the final position. Their outcomes will depend on pending proceedings, appeals and the implementation of enforceable court orders.

1.12. Key Findings and the Road Ahead

The early implementation of the Electoral Act 2026 reveals a mixed picture. The law has changed how political parties select candidates and strengthened some requirements for membership records and nominations. However, the disputes emerging from the 2026 primaries raise serious questions about whether these changes have improved internal party democracy, transparency and compliance.

Key Findings

a. **Direct primaries have not necessarily weakened the influence of party leaders.** Although delegate-based primaries have been abolished, the removal of detailed statutory procedures has given parties greater control over voting arrangements. This creates opportunities for manipulation where internal guidelines and safeguards are weak.

b. **Consensus remains vulnerable to manipulation at the screening stage.** Requiring the voluntary consent of all cleared aspirants is an important safeguard, but it offers limited protection if eligible aspirants are unfairly excluded before consent is sought.

c. **Membership-register requirements have become a major test of compliance.** The new rules provide a clearer basis for determining who may participate in primaries, but disputes over party membership, register accuracy and eligibility have exposed difficulties in their implementation.

55 "Court Orders INEC, National Assembly to Produce Documents in Suit Challenging Chinda's Candidacy," BusinessDay, November 2026.

56 "Warri Court Reserves Judgment on Omo-Agege's NDC Ticket Suit till Nov. 24," Vanguard, 23 October 2026; Suit No. FHC/WR/CS/120/2026.

57 Bolanle Olabimtan, "Court Nullifies Sunday Karimi's Nomination, Declares Samuel Aro APC Candidate for Kogi West," TheCable, 4 November 2026; Suit No. FHC/LKJ/CS/63/2026.

58 "Okorocha Chasing Shadows, Uzodimma Says, Vows to Appeal Court Judgement," Premium Times, 1 November 2026.

The consistency of INEC's application of these requirements has also come under scrutiny.

d. **INEC's monitoring and nomination records require stronger safeguards.** Cases involving disputed monitoring reports, conflicting certified documents and differences between primary results and published candidate lists have raised concerns about the reliability of official records. Clearer documentation, verification and explanations for candidate-list changes are needed.

e. **Administrative and judicial remedies have provided opportunities to challenge irregularities, but their effectiveness remains uncertain.** INEC's review of candidate lists and decisions by the courts have addressed some disputed nominations. However, several judgments remain subject to appeal, while other cases are still pending.

f. **The timing of pre-election litigation is a significant risk for the 2027 elections.** With judgments still emerging in the months before polling and further appeals possible, some disputes may remain unresolved when elections take place. This raises concerns about certainty over candidates' nominations and whether successful litigants can obtain meaningful remedies.

Conclusion

The experience so far suggests that changing the method of selecting candidates has not necessarily changed the political practices that shape their selection. Party leadership influence may simply have shifted from delegate selection to control over membership registers, screening, voting procedures and nomination submissions. The evidence already points to significant problems, although their full extent is not yet established. Pending judgments, appeals and the implementation of court orders will provide a fuller picture, although litigation alone cannot reveal irregularities that were never challenged.

With polling approaching, attention must now turn to the resolution of outstanding nomination disputes and the implementation of court decisions. INEC should ensure that any further changes to candidate lists are properly documented, publicly explained and supported by reliable records. The timely conclusion of pending cases and appeals will be particularly important in determining whether judicial remedies can still make a meaningful difference before polling.

Ultimately, **the real test of the Electoral Act 2026 is not simply whether political parties follow the required nomination procedures on paper, but whether those procedures produce credible candidates through fair, transparent and lawful processes – and whether violations can be remedied before they affect the ballot.**

Publication Note

The substantive assessment in this publication reflects developments identified up to the research cut-off date of 10 November 2026. During finalisation of the publication, further developments occurred in some of the pre-election disputes examined, the most significant of which are noted below.

On 13 November 2026, the Federal High Court in Abuja delivered judgment in FHC/ABJ/CS/2573/2026, arising from the exclusion of Ladi Adebutu from INEC's final list of candidates for the Ogun State governorship election. The Court ordered INEC to publish his name as the PDP governorship candidate, holding that the Commission could not unilaterally disqualify a validly nominated candidate and that his exclusion without an opportunity to be heard breached his right to fair hearing.[59]

INEC also continued to revise published candidate lists, including updated State Houses of Assembly lists released on 14 November 2026, reflecting the continuing resolution of nomination and omission disputes.[60]

On 20 November 2026, the Federal High Court in Abuja delivered judgment in FHC/ABJ/CS/1751/2026, nullifying the substitution of Omar Suleiman with Tukur Ribadu as the ADC governorship candidate for Adamawa State. The Court found no valid basis for replacing Suleiman, who had won the party's primary, and ordered his restoration as the party's candidate.[61]

On 24 November 2026, the Federal High Court in Warri delivered judgment in FHC/WR/CS/120/2026, nullifying Ovie Omo-Agege's nomination as the NDC candidate for Delta Central Senatorial District over non-compliance with the Electoral Act 2026. The Court ordered INEC to remove his name from the candidate list. Omo-Agege subsequently indicated his intention to appeal.[62]

These developments do not materially alter the broader analysis but reinforce a central finding – that administrative review and pre-election litigation can continue to affect candidate lists after their initial publication. The assessment incorporates selected subsequent developments up to 24 November 2026, while recognising that judicial decisions may remain subject to appeal or further proceedings.

59 Channels Television, 2027: Court Orders INEC To Publish Adebutu's Name As Ogun PDP Gov Candidate, 13 November 2026.
60 INEC, Updated List of Candidates for 2027 State Houses of Assembly Elections, 14 November 2026.
61 Ndidiamaka Ede, Court orders removal of Tukur Ribadu as ADC governorship candidate, Premium Times, 21 November 2026.
62 Akombo Aondona, Court nullifies Omo-Agege's NDC nomination, orders INEC to delist him, BusinessDay, 24 November 2026. See also Omo-Agege rejects Warri Court judgment, heads to Appeal Court over NDC ticket, 24 November 2026.

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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.

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