
NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

Nigeria



In Nassarawa state, Nigerian women display their permanent voter cards while in line to vote in the 2015 national elections.

In the months leading up to the March 28, 2015 presidential poll, Nigeria was widely believed to be on the brink of disaster. Africa observers predicted violence as the likely outcome of the election, in a context of deep political and regional polarization combined with ongoing attacks by Boko Haram insurgents. There was broad concern that a failed election in Nigeria would destabilize the entire West Africa region. Nevertheless, Nigeria held an historic and closely contested election, which peacefully transferred power from one political party to another for the first time since independence. The Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) efforts to increase transparency and curb election irregularities through new anti-fraud technologies were augmented by live announcement of the results on radio, television and social media. A well-publicized, civil society-led parallel vote tabulation (PVT), or quick count, provided real-time verification of the election results and held election authorities more accountable.

The conduct of the presidential election increased the perception among Nigerians and citizens across Africa that credible elections matter and that leaders can be held accountable. However, Nigeria's significant governance challenges, including economic hardship, citizen dissatisfaction with public services, deeply rooted corruption, political tensions and a fragile security situation, still need to be addressed in the post-election period. Additionally, women's representation in parliament has been in steady

decline since 2007, with women currently constituting only 4 percent of the House of Representatives, 6 percent of the Senate and 6 percent of the State Houses of Assembly, and with 11 state houses having zero representation.

Despite these issues, continued quick counts and data-driven observation of the electoral cycle will reinforce successes from the 2015 polls and further enhance the role of citizens in promoting credible, peaceful elections. Increased citizen engagement through advocacy also provides an opportunity for Nigerians to hold newly elected officials to account and build upon the democratic advances of 2015. Women's political representation in Nigeria would be strengthened if elected women were more effective, representative legislators, serving as powerful role models for other women; stereotypes of women in politics were challenged; and internal party processes that block women's meaningful participation were addressed, including creation of a more inclusive party nomination process.

Since Nigeria's 1999 transition from military to civilian rule, NDI has supported civil society organizations (CSOs), legislatures, and political parties to increase transparency and inclusivity in government, build citizen confidence in the electoral process, and increase the political participation of marginalized groups.

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In Lagos, a young Nigerian shows his support for the Vote Not Fight campaign

Data-Driven Citizen Observation of Electoral Process

In 2015 and 2011, NDI supported citizen election observer groups to conduct PVTs which were the largest ever conducted in the world. In addition to collecting and sharing data in real-time on election day processes, both PVTs verified the election outcome as reported by INEC. Prior to the 2015 election, starting in November 2014, NDI's PVT partner also undertook a [unique pre-election observation reporting project](#), marking the first time a citizen observation group collected systematic data in the pre-election phase.

Non-Violent Citizen Participation in Elections

For the 2015 presidential poll and the off-cycle gubernatorial elections in Kogi and Bayelsa states, NDI partnered with the Youngstars Development Initiative (YDI) and Nigerian musician 2face Idibia to launch "[Vote Not Fight](#)," to encourage youth's peaceful participation in elections. Most past peace initiatives in Nigeria were driven by elite actors. Vote Not Fight instead targeted individuals, particularly youth, who were historically affected by election violence either as perpetrators or as victims. YDI replicated the initiative during the gubernatorial elections in Kogi and Bayelsa states and plans to continue implementation during future elections.

Advancement of Women's Political Participation

In September 2015, as part of NDI's global "Votes Without Violence" campaign, NDI and the

International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) launched the "[Stop Violence Against Women in Elections](#)" (Stop-VAWIE) campaign to raise awareness and mitigate election motivated attacks against Nigerian women. NDI and FIDA implemented the pilot program during the gubernatorial elections in Kogi and Bayelsa states in late 2015 and will continue the campaign during upcoming elections. The project collected information on the number and nature of incidents of violence against women through focus group discussions and calls to a citizens' hotline.

Women in Nigeria are severely underrepresented in legislatures. To address both informal and formal barriers to women's political participation, NDI is working with political parties to make candidate nomination systems more inclusive and transparent. The Institute is also partnering with female legislators to strengthen their ability to be effective, representative leaders by improving their capacity to respond to constituents' needs.

Advocacy Campaigns for Political Interests of Marginalized Groups

Currently, NDI is assisting CSOs representing marginalized populations to improve polling unit accessibility for people with disabilities, mainstream gender in local government councils and development projects, and support legislation to lower the age limit of political candidates. Through strategic planning sessions and thoughtful advocacy guidance, NDI is supporting each CSO's campaign to voice their political interests and demand actions by government duty bearers.

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