



INITIATIVE FOR RESEARCH,
INNOVATION AND ADVOCACY
IN DEVELOPMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, JUNE 12, 2026

PUBLIC STATEMENT

27 YEARS OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA:

ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND THE ROAD AHEAD

As Nigeria marks 27 years of uninterrupted democratic governance since 1999, the nation stands at a defining moment where celebration must be matched by urgent reflection and action to strengthen the pillars of democracy ahead of the critical 2027 General Election.

As Nigeria commemorates 27 years of uninterrupted democratic governance since the return to civilian rule in 1999, the **Initiative for Research and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD)** and **The Electoral Hub** join millions of Nigerians in celebrating this significant national milestone. This year's Democracy Day theme, "**27 Years of Democratic Governance: Achievements, Challenges and the Road Ahead**," provides an important opportunity not only to reflect on the progress made but also to confront the realities that continue to challenge our democracy and democratic consolidation, and to chart a path toward a stronger, more inclusive, and more accountable democracy.

Democracy Day is more than a celebration of longevity in civilian rule; it is a moment for national reflection on whether democratic governance is delivering justice, accountability, inclusion, security, and development for all Nigerians. **What we Nigerians call 'Dividends of Democracy.** As the country moves deeper into this fourth republic seventh electoral cycle leading to the **2027 General Election**, Nigeria stands at a defining moment where democracy must be protected, strengthened, and reimagined with greater urgency and responsibility. With the **Ekiti Governorship Election just days away and the Osun Governorship Election around the corner**, the nation is already in a heightened electoral season that demands responsibility, accountability, restraint, and democratic integrity from all stakeholders. The strength of Nigeria's democracy will depend not only on free, fair, inclusive, and credible elections but also on the resilience of institutions, civic freedoms, respect for human rights, and the rule of law that sustain them.

Since the restoration of democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has maintained its longest period of uninterrupted civilian governance. This achievement reflects the resilience, sacrifices, and aspirations of millions of Nigerians who continue to believe that democracy remains the most legitimate pathway to peace, security, justice, and sustainable development. Over the past 27 years, the country has recorded notable democratic progress, including multiple electoral cycles, peaceful transfers of power between dominant parties (national and sub-national levels), and gradual improvements in electoral administration. Civil society organizations, the media, democratic institutions, and citizens have continued to defend

democratic values despite significant challenges. Youth engagement in governance and public discourse has also expanded, creating new opportunities for participation, innovation, and accountability.

These achievements demonstrate the endurance of Nigeria's democratic project. However, they are increasingly overshadowed by persistent and emerging challenges that threaten public confidence in democratic governance. Electoral malpractice and fraud such as vote trading, political violence, vote suppression, information disorder, exclusion/marginalization of vulnerable groups (women, youth, PwDs, ethnic minorities) and declining trust in public institutions continue to undermine the credibility of democratic processes. Similarly, corruption and lack of accountability remain a major obstacle to effective governance, equitable service delivery, and sustainable development.

Economic hardship in Nigeria remains severe from government structural reforms characterized by high inflation, currency devaluation, high unemployment, escalating fuel costs, rising food and transportation costs. Increase in minimum wages from N30,000 to N70,000, remains unrealistic response to economic hardship faced by millions of Nigerians daily with more Nigerians living in poverty. According to IMF and World Bank, 63% of Nigerians are living under multidimensional poverty. Meaning they cannot access basic necessities such as healthcare, adequate sanitation, clean water, shelter, energy et al.

Beyond these challenges, Nigeria must confront a deeply troubling reality: the worsening security situation across many parts of the country. Insecurity has increasingly eroded the freedoms that democracy is meant to guarantee. In many communities, citizens face threats of violence, kidnapping, and intimidation, making it difficult to move freely, speak openly, and participate meaningfully in social and public life. The cost of daily living now extends beyond economic hardship to include the growing burden of personal safety. As insecurity persists, democratic participation becomes constrained, civic space comes under pressure, and public trust continues to weaken. When citizens do not feel safe, democracy itself is diminished.

At the same time, women, young people, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups remain significantly underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making spaces. Political parties continue to struggle with internal democracy, transparency, and inclusivity, limiting opportunities for genuine representation and broader participation. As Nigeria enters another critical electoral phase, these challenges require urgent reflection, strategic reforms, and collective action.

As the nation prepares for the 2027 General Election, there is an urgent need to reinforce the fundamental pillars upon which every democracy rests: free and fair elections, citizen participation, protection of human rights, and the rule of law. These pillars must not only

be preserved but actively strengthened if Nigeria's democracy is to remain credible, inclusive, and responsive to the aspirations of its people.

Democracy matters because it places power in the hands of the people, guarantees participation, protects fundamental rights, promotes accountability, and provides mechanisms through which citizens can shape their collective future. For democracy to deliver meaningful outcomes, every vote must count, and every citizen must have confidence that electoral outcomes genuinely reflect the will of the people. Elections must be transparent, peaceful, inclusive, and free from violence, intimidation, manipulation, and vote trading. Citizens must be able to participate without fear, yet in many parts of Nigeria today, insecurity has made this increasingly difficult. The right to move freely, speak openly, and engage politically should not be a privilege enjoyed by a few; it must remain a guaranteed democratic standard for all.

Fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, association, religion, the press, and peaceful assembly, must be protected and defended at all times. No democracy can thrive where rights are selectively applied or where fear replaces freedom. Likewise, all citizens, public officials, institutions, and political actors must remain accountable under the law, while justice must be impartial, accessible, and independent.

As organizations committed to advancing governance, accountability, democratic participation, and inclusive development, **IRIAD and The Electoral Hub** remain steadfast in strengthening democratic culture and institutions in Nigeria. We will continue to promote electoral knowledge, accountability, inclusion and integrity through research, public education, advocacy, and citizen engagement. We will also advance inclusive civic participation, particularly among youth, women, PWDs, and other marginalized groups as well as support initiatives that protect human rights and democratic freedoms; encourage transparency and accountability in governance; foster dialogue among democratic stakeholders; and strengthen partnerships that build democratic resilience across all spheres and levels of society.

As Nigeria marks 27 years of uninterrupted democratic governance, this milestone should serve not only as a celebration of how far the nation has come but also as a reminder of the work that remains ahead. The road ahead requires fresh commitment to strengthening institutions, safeguarding freedoms, rebuilding public trust, improving security, and ensuring that democracy delivers tangible benefits for all citizens.

Only through collective action and sustained commitment can Nigeria build a democracy that is not merely measured by the number of years it has endured, but by the quality of governance it provides, the freedoms it protects, the opportunities it creates, and the dignity, justice, inclusion, and accountability it delivers to every Nigerian.

Call to Action

As Nigeria marks 27 years of uninterrupted democracy and moves deeper into the 2027 electoral cycle, this moment must serve not only as a celebration but as a national call to reflection, urgency, and strategic action to rebuild trust, strengthen institutions, and secure citizens' freedoms in a time of rising insecurity and democratic strain.

IRIAD and The Electoral Hub therefore call on all stakeholders to recommit themselves to the principles that sustain a functioning democracy:

- **Government at all levels** must urgently prioritize the protection of life and security as a foundation for democracy. Without safety, democratic participation becomes meaningless. Government must strengthen civic freedoms, restore public confidence in security institutions, address insecurity decisively, combat corruption, and ensure that public institutions operate with fairness, transparency, and accountability in service to all citizens.
- **Electoral institutions** must uphold the highest standards of professionalism, independence, transparency, and integrity throughout the electoral cycle. Citizens must be able to participate in elections without fear, coercion, or violence, and must trust that electoral outcomes genuinely reflect their will.
- **Political parties and political leaders** must commit to internal democracy, reject violence, vote buying, intimidation, and divisive rhetoric, and create genuine space for women, youth, and marginalized groups to participate meaningfully in leadership and decision-making.
- **Civil society organizations and the media** must continue to defend civic space through education, election observation, fact-checking, advocacy, and accountability reporting. A free and independent civic environment remains essential, especially at a time of rising insecurity and democratic pressure.
- **Citizens** must remain engaged, informed, and resilient in defending democracy. Despite insecurity and economic hardship, Nigerians must continue to demand accountability, reject electoral malpractice, participate peacefully, and defend the right to freedom of expression and association.

Together, we must strengthen the pillars of free and fair elections, citizen participation, protection of human rights, and the rule of law. Only through urgent collective action can Nigeria build a democracy that is not only sustained in years but strengthened in practice, one that guarantees safety, restores trust, protects freedoms, and delivers dignity, justice, inclusion, and accountability for all Nigerians.

Happy Democracy Day, Nigerians!

**#NigeriaDemocracyAt27 #AccountabilityAndIntegrityNow #EffectiveGovernanceNow
#CitizenParticipation #InclusiveGovernance #StrengtheningDemocracy**

Signed

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ABOUT IRIAD AND THE ELECTORAL HUB

The **Initiative for Research, Innovation, and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD)** is an interdisciplinary knowledge, policy, and advocacy hub committed to developing a critical understanding of governance processes and regimes through research, documentation, policy engagement, public education, and impact advocacy to inform policies, advocacies, and other forms of interventions. Whilst promoting and encouraging active citizenship through citizens' engagement, participation, and representation in democratic governance.

IRIAD is committed to strengthening democratic governance by advancing public accountability, citizens' participation, women's rights and gender justice, and strengthening the capacities of governance institutions to be responsive, responsible, accountable, effective, and ethical

The Electoral Hub is an interdisciplinary knowledge, policy, and advocacy hub committed to promoting electoral knowledge, inclusion, accountability, and integrity. We aim to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria by providing data, critical, and contextualized analysis, and solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process and governance.

Knowledge | Innovation | Inclusion | Impact

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...promoting electoral knowledge, accountability, inclusion, and integrity