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Strengthening Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Citizen Engagement, Participatory Governance, and Institutional Trust

Issues in the News

- Tinubu to Intervene With Executive Order on LG Autonomy
- Detained Nigerian Air Force Crew Released by Burkina Faso
- Push For State Police Grows Stronger
- Foreign Cards to Work Smoothly at ATMs, POS

Regional Update

- President Talon Promulgates Benin's Constitutional Reform
- Chad Unveils 2026 Budget Amid Declining Revenues
- Cameroon's Economy Slows Amid Regional Weakness
- Niger Celebrates Republic Day

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Our mission is to conduct rigorous research and provide evidence-based recommendations that contribute to the development of a prosperous and forward-looking society in Nigeria.

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Cover Image: Voters cheer as ballot papers are counted at a polling station in Abuja during Nigeria's presidential election, 25 February, 2023.

Photograph by: Michele Spatari/ AFP

Executive Summary

Nigeria's democratic consolidation is constrained by weak citizen engagement and declining trust in formal channels, producing low electoral legitimacy, policy capture, and social unrest. Voter participation fell to a post-1999 low in the 2023 general elections (26.7 per cent turnout), undermining representation and the strength of the mandate. However, previous reforms – such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), expanded civic education, and donor-funded participation programmes – improved electoral administration but did not succeed in reversing distrust or increasing regular civic participation owing to uneven implementation, security challenges, and limited local-level inclusion.

This study finds that Nigerians remain willing to engage, yet channel their energy into protests or apolitical survival strategies when formal avenues feel unresponsive. Afrobarometer's 2025 analysis shows sustained civic intent but fragile institutional confidence.

The policy recommendations include

- (i) institutionalising participatory budgeting and ward-level deliberative councils;
- (ii) strengthening INEC's transparency and local outreach while expanding secure, accountable digital feedback platforms;
- (iii) empowering LGAs with ring-fenced engagement funds and civic-education mandates; and
- (iv) coordinating donor support towards capacity-building for civil society and local government.

The above recommendations, when implemented, will raise electoral and civic participation, rebuild trust, and improve Nigeria's Voice and Accountability governance indicators, advancing democratic consolidation and policy responsiveness.

The Participation Challenge in Nigeria

Since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, the country has sustained regular elections and constitutional continuity. Yet electoral persistence has not translated into democratic legitimacy. [Voter turnout has declined steadily](#), reaching historic lows in recent cycles—from 34.75 per cent in 2019 to 26.7 per cent in 2023. This pattern reflects not voter apathy, but a growing perception that elections seldom produce responsive governance or meaningful policy change.

Available evidence suggests that the challenge is structural and multi-dimensional. Governance indicators place Nigeria below regional averages on Voice and Accountability (World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators, 32.4 percentile in 2023), pointing to institutional constraints on citizens' ability to influence public decision-making. While willingness to engage remains evident, participation has increasingly shifted toward [protest and episodic activism](#), particularly among young people and low-income groups, when formal channels appear ineffective. Declining participation by women and youth in conventional mechanisms—such as voting, party politics, and local deliberative forums—has coincided with [recurrent demonstrations and localised disruptions](#), often triggered by perceived policy capture or accountability failures. Low electoral participation is frequently interpreted as political withdrawal. Evidence indicates the opposite. Nigerians, especially younger citizens, remain politically active through protests, digital advocacy, litigation, and community-based mobilisation. These forms of engagement signal continued demand for voice rather than disengagement from public life.

At the same time, protest-centred participation underscores institutional weakness. When formal mechanisms fail to respond, citizens turn to alternative forms of expression. While protest can catalyse reform, it cannot substitute for routinised systems of accountability. Democracies reliant on episodic mobilisation, without durable participatory institutions, remain vulnerable.

This gap persists despite the presence of policy interventions, including electoral reforms, the rollout of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), and donor-supported civic programmes. The Independent National Electoral Commission's [2023 report](#) highlights persistent constraints: uneven implementation, limited local government capacity, insecurity that restricts civic space, and weak mechanisms for sustained citizen feedback and participatory budgeting. Together, these factors continue to reproduce exclusion and elite dominance rather than broaden deliberation.

The implications cut across multiple domains. Socially, declining intergenerational civic norms and persistent gender gaps weaken participation. Politically, low turnout erodes electoral legitimacy, increases post-election litigation, and shifts contention toward protest politics. Economically, weak participation undermines public-service accountability and distorts resource allocation. Psychologically, sustained institutional unresponsiveness fuels civic cynicism and declining trust. From a research perspective, gaps remain in understanding effective sub-national participatory mechanisms and in evaluating the impact of past interventions.

Addressing these challenges requires a systematic diagnosis of institutional bottlenecks, clearer stakeholder mapping, and the design of actionable, scalable participatory reforms capable of strengthening democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Why Citizen Engagement Matters

The Participation Payoff	
The Promise: When Participation Works	The Peril: When Participation Fails
 <p>Sustained Legitimacy Builds trust between election cycles</p>	 <p>The Cynicism Trap Public hearings that alter nothing</p>
 <p>Empowered Citizenship</p>	 <p>Elite Insulation Confirms perception of a closed system</p>
 <p>Enhanced Political Efficacy and strengthens accountability</p>	
 <p>Disciplining Power Embeds restraint, fosters cumulative trust</p>	



Participation is not symbolic,
it is a mechanism for
disciplining power

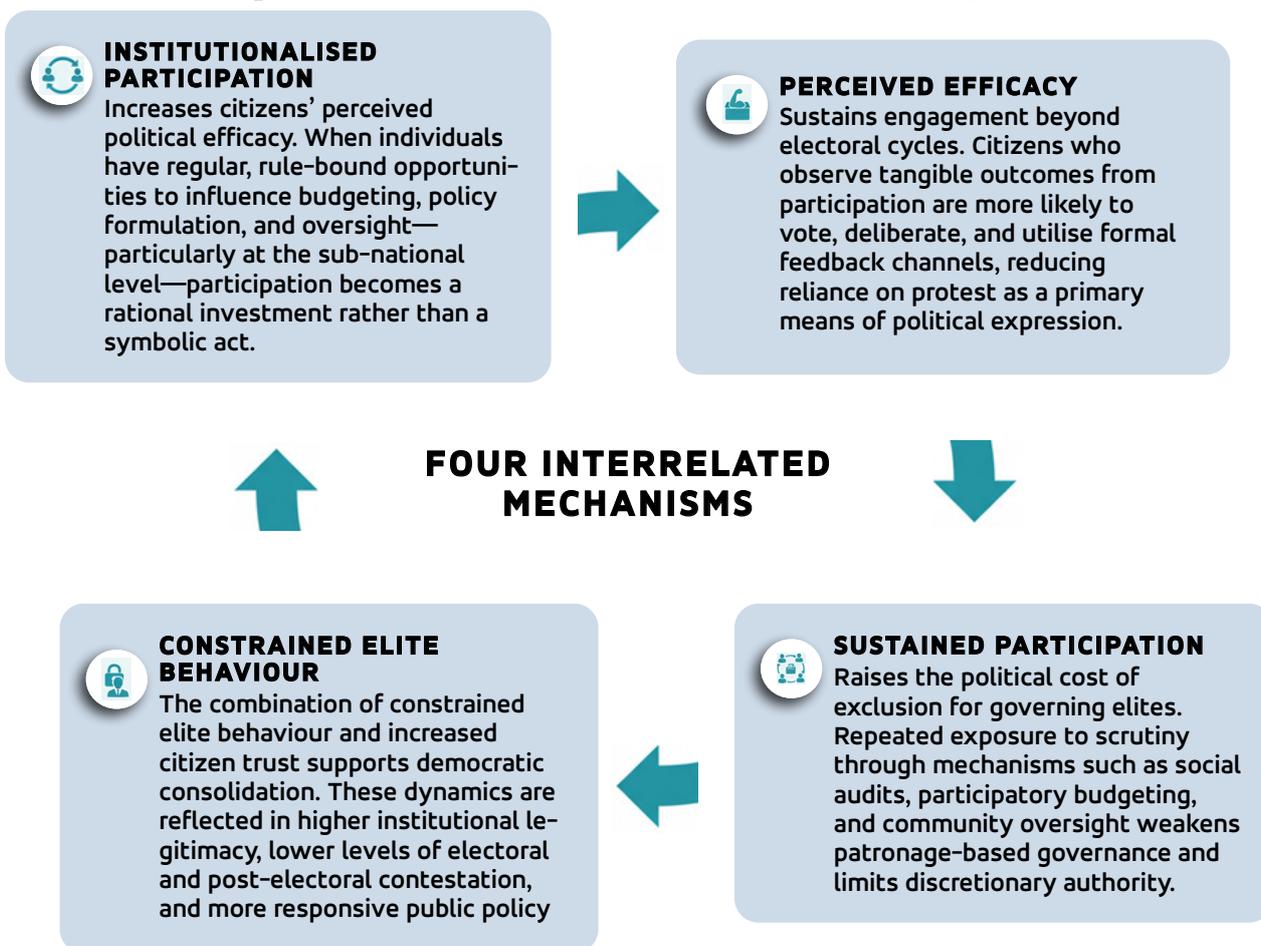
Conditions for Democratic Payoff

 <p>LEGAL GROUNDING</p> <p>Participation must be anchored in law, not discretion.</p>	 <p>POLITICAL CONSEQUENCE</p> <p>Citizen input must alter decisions, priorities, or allocations.</p>	 <p>INSTITUTIONAL DURABILITY</p> <p>Participatory channels must endure beyond administrations and personalities.</p>
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Pathways From Engagement to Consolidation

Nigeria's democratic deficits are not limited to electoral performance; they are rooted in institutional design and practice. This policy brief proceeds from the premise that democratic consolidation depends on the institutionalisation of meaningful citizen influence over public decision-making, rather than on the conduct of periodic elections alone. Participation contributes to democratic outcomes only when it reshapes incentives, constrains elite discretion, and results in observable policy responsiveness. The theory of change underpinning this analysis rests on four interrelated mechanisms.

From Participation to Democratic Consolidation: A Theory of Change



In the absence of these linkages, participatory initiatives risk devolving into procedural compliance or consultative symbolism, with limited democratic effect.

Barriers to Effective Participation

Constitutional and Legal Constraints

Nigeria's participatory deficit cannot be addressed without confronting constitutional realities. While this paper proposes reforms across federal, state, and local levels, implementation must navigate existing legal constraints.

Local Government Autonomy (Section 7 of the 1999 Constitution) recognises LGAs but subordinates them to state governments fiscally and administratively. Participatory budgeting and ward councils, therefore, require state-level enabling laws and conditional federal incentives, rather than direct federal mandates.

Similarly, INEC's constitutional authority is limited, restricting its engagement beyond elections without legislative backing. Proposed LGA liaison offices and outreach functions must be grounded in amendments to the Electoral Act or INEC regulations approved by the National Assembly.

Similarly, legal protections for civic participation must align with constitutional guarantees of peaceful assembly, requiring statutory safeguards against arbitrary restriction by security agencies.

Accordingly, this paper recommends a layered legal strategy: federal guidelines and incentives, state legislation, and administrative regulations—rather than wholesale constitutional revision.

Institutional Capacity and Security Challenges

Weak administrative capacity at subnational levels undermines participatory initiatives. Insecurity further restricts civic space, particularly in conflict-affected regions, limiting physical participation and discouraging sustained engagement.

Political Economy Barriers

Participation redistributes discretion, and discretion underpins patronage. Political elites benefit from opacity in budgeting, candidate selection, and policy formulation. Resistance to participatory reform is therefore predictable and rational from an elite perspective.

Likely sources of resistance include state governors (loss of LGA control), local government chairpersons (reduced procurement discretion), political parties (erosion of gatekeeping power), and security agencies (constraints on informal influence over civic space).

Rather than frontal confrontation, this paper recommends sequencing incentives before enforcement, tying participatory performance to conditional fiscal rewards, and embedding reforms gradually to normalise compliance. Elite resistance is not a design flaw; it is evidence that reforms matter.

Nigeria's Participation Deficit – Constraints and Mitigation Pathways

Constraint	Why it Matters	Mitigation Pathway
Limited local government autonomy	Section 7 of the Constitution recognises LGAs but subordinates them fiscally and administratively to state governments, constraining direct citizen influence at the local level	Enact state-level enabling legislation for participatory budgeting and ward councils, supported by conditional federal fiscal incentives rather than direct mandates
Narrow constitutional mandate of INEC	INEC's authority is largely confined to electoral administration, limiting its capacity for sustained civic engagement beyond elections	Amend the Electoral Act or adopt National Assembly-approved INEC regulations to authorise LGA liaison offices and structured civic outreach functions
Weak legal protection for civic participation	Constitutional guarantees of peaceful assembly are vulnerable to discretionary restriction by security agencies, undermining participation	Introduce statutory safeguards that clarify permissible limitations and constrain arbitrary enforcement while remaining consistent with public order provisions
Low subnational administrative capacity	Many local governments lack the personnel, systems, and resources required to sustain participatory mechanisms	Phase implementation, prioritise capacity-building support, and align participation requirements with existing administrative structures
Insecurity and shrinking civic space	Conflict and violence restrict physical participation and discourage sustained citizen engagement, particularly in affected regions	Adapt participatory models to local security conditions, including smaller-scale forums and non-physical engagement where feasible.
Elite resistance rooted in patronage	Participation redistributes discretion, threatening entrenched interests that benefit from opacity in budgeting and decision-making	Sequence incentives before enforcement, link participatory performance to conditional fiscal rewards, and embed reforms gradually to normalise compliance

Global Lessons for Nigeria

Across cases, the lesson is consistent: authority, not novelty, determines impact. Across regions, declining routine civic engagement and distrust in formal channels have prompted a range of policy responses, from deepening local participatory institutions to adopting digital voting and deliberative assemblies.

The comparative cases below were selected because they address the same problems Nigeria faces (low turnout, elite capture, weak local deliberation) and provide evidence about what works, what stalls, and which stakeholders are essential.

Brazil – Porto Alegre: Participatory Budgeting to Reallocate Resources to the Poor

The [Brazil's experience with participatory budgeting](#) demonstrates that participation strengthens legitimacy when citizens control real fiscal decisions. Where political commitment weakened and authority was diluted, gains eroded.

Problem and Policy: In the late 1980s, municipal disenchantment and clientelism led Porto Alegre to adopt participatory budgeting (PB), citizen assemblies that directly prioritise and select municipal investments. [The municipality ceded a portion of the investment budget to deliberative forums and neighborhood delegations](#)

Outcomes and Lessons: Multiple studies link PB to increased municipal spending on basic sanitation, street paving, and local infrastructure in poorer districts, as well as to improvements in some social indicators (e.g., localised reductions in infant mortality when PB redirected resources to sanitation). However, long-run effects depend on sustained political will; PB can be tempered when municipal administrations change or when formal channels for accountability remain weak.

Key Stakeholders: [Municipal government/treasury, neighborhood associations, civil-society networks, academia, and international agencies \(World Bank/IBP\).](#)

Ireland – Citizens' Assembly: Deliberation Linked to Major Constitutional Reform

Ireland's citizens' assemblies illustrate the importance of institutional linkage. Deliberation enhanced legitimacy because recommendations were formally connected to legislative and referendum processes.

Problem and Policy: Ireland faced polarised public debate and institutional gridlock on sensitive social issues. The government convened a randomly selected Citizens' Assembly (2016–2018) to deliberate on issues including abortion and aging. [The Assembly produced evidence-based recommendations that fed directly into parliamentary debate and a 2018 referendum.](#)

Outcomes and Lessons: Ireland The Citizens' Assembly recommended repealing the Eighth Amendment; the subsequent referendum passed by 66% (reflecting strong alignment between assembly recommendations and broader public outcome). This shows that deliberative mini-publics can depolarise debate, produce credible policy options, and build legitimacy for contentious reforms, but success requires high-quality expert inputs, transparent process design, and explicit government follow-through.

Key Stakeholders: [Government \(Oireachtas\), assembly secretariat, civil society, media.](#)

South Africa – Experiments in Local Participatory Budgeting; Limited Scale-up

South Africa's post-apartheid decentralisation created formal spaces for citizen input at the municipal level, but the promise of participatory governance has been unevenly realised.

Problem and Policy: Post-apartheid decentralisation created formal spaces for public input, and several municipalities tested participatory budgeting and ward committees. However, implementation has been uneven; capacity constraints, elite capture, and weak monitoring have limited PB's transformative potential. Evaluations call for stronger institutionalisation, legal backing, and capacity building at the municipal level.

Key Stakeholders: [Municipal councils, provincial departments, civil society, and donors.](#)

Estonia: E-governance and Internet Voting to Lower Participation Barriers

Estonia’s digital governance shows that technology can lower access barriers but does not resolve trust deficits without transparency, safeguards, and offline inclusion.

Problem and Policy: [Estonia pursued systemic digitalisation of public services](#), including Internet voting (i-voting) from 2005, to reduce logistical barriers and make voting convenient for dispersed populations (valimised.ee).

Outcomes and Lessons: By 2019–2023, internet-voting constituted a large share of advance votes (e.g., internet-votes were ~27.9% of eligible voters in the 2019 parliamentary election; in 2023, internet-voters constituted 32.5% of eligible voters, and internet-votes made up 68.9% of advance votes). Studies show I-voting improves convenience and access, particularly for diaspora and mobile populations, but does not automatically resolve deeper trust deficits or inequality in political voice; it must be paired with transparency, cybersecurity assurance, and inclusion strategies.

Key Stakeholders: National Electoral Commission, Ministry of Justice, digital identity authorities, cybersecurity agencies, and civil society (valimised.ee).

Comparative Summary Table

Country/ City	Core Problem Addressed	Policy Measure Adopted	Measured Outcome /Metric	Key Stakeholders
Brazil (Porto Alegre)	Elite capture of local budgets; poor neighborhood neglect	Participatory budgeting (citizen assemblies; budgetary control)	Increased investment in sanitation/infrastructure in poor areas; associated localized improvements in some health indicators (e.g., infant mortality declines reported in PB adopters).	Municipal treasury; neighborhood forums; CSOs; World Bank/ IBP
Ireland	Polarized, gridlocked policy on sensitive issues	Citizens’ Assembly (randomly selected deliberative body)	Assembly recommendation - 2018 referendum: repeal of Eighth Amendment (66% Yes). Demonstrated transfer of legitimacy from deliberative process to national vote.	Oireachtas; Assembly Secretariat; civil society; media
Estonia	Low convenience / geographic barriers to voting	Internet voting (I-voting), digital ID	Internet-voting grew to 32.5% of eligible voters (2023 Riigikogu); internet-votes comprised 68.9% of advance votes (2023). Increased convenience, esp. for diaspora and mobile voters.	National Electoral Committee; e-ID authorities; cybersecurity agencies
South Africa	Weak local oversight; unequal local service delivery	Participatory budgeting pilots; ward committees	Mixed/limited results; early studies note potential but call out capacity and sustainability gaps.	Municipalities; provincial government; CSOs; donors

Source: see [World Bank](#), [citizenassembly.ie](#), [valimised.ee](#), [idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org](#)

Cross-cutting Lessons for Nigeria

- **Design Matters:** Institutions that transfer real budgetary/practical power (Porto Alegre, PB) or that are explicitly linked to formal decision-making (Ireland's Citizens' Assembly → referendum) produce tangible legitimacy gains; token consultations do not.
- **Sustained Political Commitment and Capacity are Essential:** PB and ward-level mechanisms require stable financing, municipal administrative capacity, and legal backing; without these, gains erode when political leadership changes.
- **Digital Methods Lower Access Barriers but Don't Replace Trust-building:** Estonia shows i-voting increases convenience and uptake, but must be paired with transparency and outreach to avoid exacerbating digital divides.
- **Mixed Portfolios Work Best:** Combining deliberative bodies (to frame hard choices), local participatory budgeting (to allocate resources visibly), and inclusive digital feedback (to expand access) offers a robust route to rebuild participation and accountability.



Anticipating Resistance and Sequencing Reform

Participation reforms redistribute discretion. Discretion sustains patronage. Patronage underwrites political survival. Any serious reform must therefore anticipate resistance.

Likely sources of resistance include state governors (loss of LGA control), local government chairpersons (reduced procurement discretion), political parties (erosion of gatekeeping power), and security agencies (constraints on informal influence over civic space).

Rather than frontal confrontation, this brief recommends sequencing incentives before enforcement, tying participatory performance to conditional fiscal rewards, and embedding reforms gradually to normalise compliance. Elite resistance is not a design flaw; it is evidence that reforms matter.



Policy Options for Institutionalising Participation in Nigeria

Outlined below are the proposed policy options:

Policy Theme 1: Participatory Local Governance

Pilot participatory budgeting and ward-level deliberative councils in selected local governments, supported by state legislation, public reporting, and independent social audits.

Timeline - Short term: guideline and pilot design, facilitator training (0–12 months). **Medium term:** Scale to 150 LGAs, state-level legislation where pilots succeed (12–36 months).

KPIs and Evaluation: Targets 30 functioning PB LGAs (12m); ≥300 PB-funded projects (36m); +10 percentage points in local satisfaction surveys. Evaluation via baseline/midline citizen surveys, CSO social audits, and annual financial audits.

Risks/Challenges: Elite capture; political rollback with administration changes; weak audit capacity.

Mitigation: Legalise PB elements in state fiscal rules; require independent CSO audits; link PB performance to conditional grants (see Theme 4).

Policy Theme 2 – Electoral Transparency and Citizen Engagement

Strengthen polling-unit result transparency, expand accredited community observation, and establish structured local interfaces between electoral authorities and citizens.

Actions/Programmes: INEC establishes permanent LGA Electoral Liaison Offices; publishes polling-unit (PU) returns and BVAS logs on open portals and trains/accredits 5,000 local community observers.

Timeline - Short term: 36 LGA pilot liaison units; open-results portal MVP (0–12 months).

Medium term: Nationwide liaison units; integrated annual outreach plan (12–36 months).

KPIs and Evaluation: Targets — PU returns published within 48 hours ≥95 per cent; 5,000 accredited observers trained (24 months); improved perceived electoral integrity +8pp. Evaluation via portal analytics, independent PU audits, and observer post-election reports.

Risks/Challenges: Data manipulation risks; insufficient INEC funding; security during publication of local returns.

Mitigation: Secure open-data architecture; donor bridging finance; legal protections and redaction protocols for sensitive data; close CI/SEC (community-security) coordination.

Policy Theme 3 – Hybrid Civic Engagement Platforms

Deploy integrated digital and offline engagement systems—web platforms, USSD, SMS, and physical kiosks—to ensure inclusion across socio-economic divides, supported by robust data protection safeguards

Actions/Programmes: INEC Develop a federated platform with web API for LGAs, USSD/SMS channels for low-connectivity users, and 50 ward kiosks in pilot phase; publish monthly response/closure rates.

Timeline - Short term: MVP web + USSD; 50 kiosks (0–12 months). **Medium term:** Integrate with NBS reporting; scale to 500 kiosks (12–36 months).

KPIs and Evaluation: Targets — per cent reports responded within 30 days ≥80 per cent; MAU = 200,000 (12 months); 30 LGAs integrated (12 months). Evaluation via platform analytics, independent accessibility audits, and annual inclusion reports.

Risks/Challenges: Digital divide; cybersecurity threats; low trust in government platforms.

Mitigation: USSD/SMS + offline kiosks to reduce exclusion; implement NITDA security standards and independent security audits; partner with trusted CSOs for moderation and outreach.

Data Governance and Citizen Protection: All digital participation mechanisms must comply with the Nigeria Data Protection Act, ensure anonymisation of sensitive submissions, prohibit political profiling, and establish citizen redress mechanisms. Independent data audits are mandatory. Participation without protection invites fear, not trust.

Policy Theme 4 – LGA Capacity Building + Performance-Linked Participatory Governance Funds

Introduce performance-linked participatory governance funds that reward verified citizen engagement and demonstrable responsiveness rather than symbolic compliance.

Actions/Programmes:

Create a ring-fenced Participatory Governance Fund disbursed on verified civic-engagement performance (PB adoption, meeting frequency, transparency score); pair with capacity grants for procurement and budgeting.

Timeline - Short term:

Design scorecard & first-tranche pilot (0–12 months). **Medium term:** Annual cycle institutionalised; scale to 150 LGAs (12–36 months).

KPIs and Evaluation:

Targets — 30 LGAs receive tranche (first cycle); ≥60 per cent LGAs meet criteria by Year 2. Evaluation via an independent verification unit, audited scorecards, and donor midline reviews.

Risks/Challenges: Misuse of funds; weak verification; donor dependence.

Mitigation: Independent verification (academics/CSOs), public dashboards of transactions, phased co-financing to build fiscal ownership.

Policy Theme 5 – Protecting Civic Space

Clarify legal protections for peaceful assembly, establish independent oversight of crowd management, and formalise engagement protocols between security agencies and civil society.

Actions/Programmes: Develop SOPs with Police/NS-CDC for civic events, establish community rapid-response teams (100 trained), and enact legal protections for peaceful assembly and accredited observers.

Timeline - Short term: SOPs + pilot trainings in 10 LGAs (0–12 months). **Medium term:** Legislate protections and nationwide roll-out (12–36 months).

KPIs and Evaluation: Targets — 100 rapid-response teams trained (12 months); 30 per cent reduction in civic-event security incidents (36 months). Evaluation by the incident reporting system integrated with INEC logs and independent human rights monitoring.

Risks/Challenges: Data Security agency resistance; politicisation of community networks.

Mitigation: Multi-stakeholder drafting (police, civil society, community leaders); clear non-partisan legal mandates; oversight by an independent committee.

Policy Theme 6 – Civic Education, Inclusion and Gender-Responsive Outreach

Tie public party funding and regulatory privileges to transparent primaries, citizen consultation, and internal accountability mechanisms.

Actions/Programmes: Develop National civic curriculum for schools and adult modules; targeted women & youth participation grants (10,000 beneficiaries over 24 months); radio and faith-leader partnerships for rural outreach.

Timeline - Short term: Curriculum and grant pilot states (0–12 months). **Medium term:** National roll-out; scale grants (12–36 months).

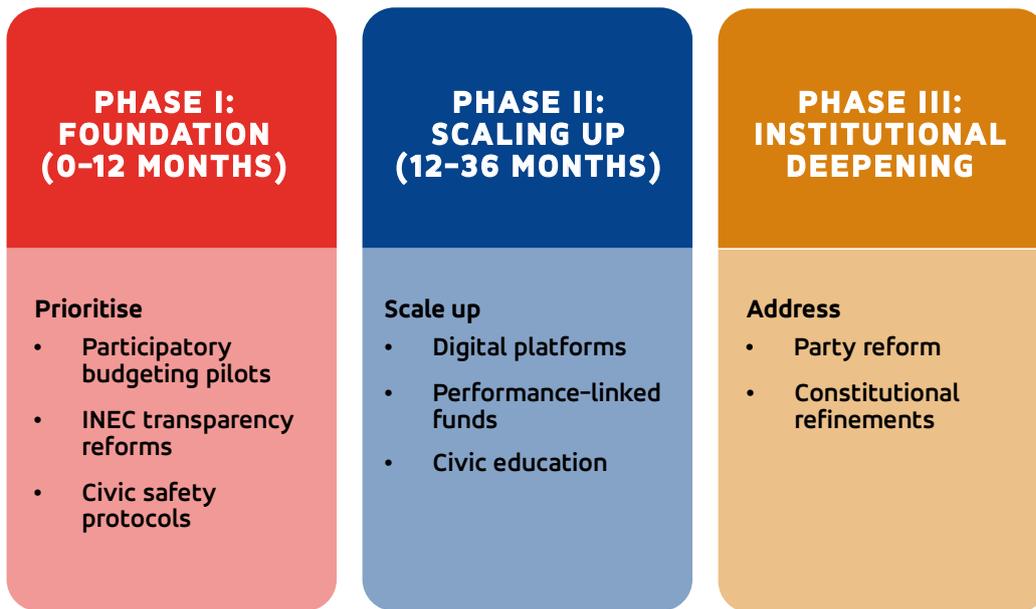
KPIs & evaluation: Targets — +10 percentage points in self-reported institutional engagement among youth/women; 10,000 grant beneficiaries (24 months). Evaluation by pre/post surveys, grant performance reviews, and Afrobarometer rounds.

Risks/challenges: Cultural resistance; tokenistic short-term campaigns.

Mitigation: Co-design with community leaders/faith networks; multi-year funding; link grants to measurable engagement outputs.

Reform Sequencing and Priorities

A Phased Approach to Democratic Consolidation



Attempting simultaneous rollout risks dilution and institutional fatigue.

Indicative Costing and Financing Strategy

Preliminary estimates suggest participatory budgeting pilots entail low-to-moderate facilitation and audit costs; INEC LGA liaison units require moderate recurrent funding; digital platforms involve higher upfront capital costs with declining marginal costs at scale; civic education and grants demand predictable medium-term funding.

Financing should combine federal allocations, state co-financing to ensure ownership, and time-bound donor bridging support. Sustainability depends on progressively shifting costs to domestic budgets by Year Three.

Create an external monitoring and evaluation (M&E) unit (academics, CSOs, donor reps) to verify fund disbursements, PB social audits, and portal metrics; publish midline (18 months) and endline (36 months) evaluations. For transparency, require open dashboards for all KPIs and public financials to reduce corruption risks and build trust.

Policy Recommendations

To consolidate democracy and expand meaningful citizen influence, these recommendations propose a phased, legally grounded, and institutionally feasible approach to participatory governance.

1. Institutionalize Participatory Local Governance: Develop a federal guideline to legally establish participatory budgeting (PB) and ward-level deliberative councils. Pilot PB in 30 Local Government Areas (LGAs), incorporating mandatory public budget dashboards and independent social audits to ensure direct citizen influence over local fiscal decisions

2. Strengthen Electoral Administration and Local Outreach: Establish permanent INEC LGA Electoral Liaison Offices to extend oversight beyond election periods. Publish polling-unit results within 48 hours via an open-access portal and accredit 5,000 community election observers to rebuild credibility and transparency in electoral processes.

3. Deploy a Hybrid Digital Civic Engagement Platform: Implement an interoperable web and USSD/SMS platform, complemented by ward-level kiosks, connected to LGA portals. Enable citizens in low-connectivity areas to report issues, monitor government responses, and access monthly published closure rates, ensuring accountability and inclusive engagement.

4. Build LGA Capacity with a Performance-Linked Participatory Governance Fund: Establish a ring-fenced fund, disbursed conditionally on verified civic-engagement performance metrics—such as PB adoption and transparency scorecards. Pair disbursements with targeted capacity grants for budgeting and procurement to strengthen institutional readiness.

5. Adopt Safe Participation Protocols and Legal Protections: Publish standard operating procedures in collaboration with security agencies, train community rapid-response teams, and enact statutory protections for peaceful assemblies and accredited observers to safeguard civic spaces and reduce security-driven suppression.

6. Scale Civic Education and Inclusive Outreach: Implement a national civic curriculum and provide targeted women- and youth-participation grants. Complement these with radio programming and faith-leader outreach to convert willingness to engage into routine, institutionalised participation.

Conclusion

Nigeria's democratic consolidation hinges on restoring meaningful citizen voice. Current evidence indicates that participation and institutional trust remain fragile. Voter turnout in the 2023 general elections was only 26.7 per cent, reflecting severe disengagement that undermines electoral legitimacy. National governance metrics corroborate this trend: Nigeria's voice and accountability scores remain below regional and global medians, highlighting structural barriers to effective citizen input.

Survey evidence suggests that Nigerians are willing to engage, yet formal channels often fail to accommodate their participation. Citizens increasingly resort to protests or informal mechanisms, with notable gender and youth gaps in conventional participation. Observers and civil society reviews of the 2023 process further document administrative and security constraints that curtailed credible, widespread engagement.

This brief has argued that reversing democratic erosion requires a codified, multi-pronged reform package, comprising:

- 1. Citizen Empowerment:** Transfer real decision-making authority to citizens through participatory budgeting and ward-level deliberation.
- 2. Electoral Administration and Outreach:** Strengthen INEC's capacity with LGA liaison units and enhanced transparency measures.
- 3. Inclusive Feedback Channels:** Expand interoperable digital platforms and offline reporting mechanisms.
- 4. Local Government Capacity:** Introduce performance-linked participatory governance funds paired with capacity-building support.
- 5. Safe Civic Spaces:** Establish legal protections and operational protocols to safeguard participation.
- 6. Civic Education and Outreach:** Scale structured programmes targeting youth, women, and marginalised communities.

Implementation must be joint and coordinated, involving federal and state ministries, INEC, LGAs, civil society organisations, and development partners. Comparative experience and domestic evaluations suggest that an integrated approach is the most plausible pathway to increase participation, rebuild institutional trust, and improve policy responsiveness.

Ultimately, Nigeria's democratic consolidation will not be secured by electoral mechanics alone, nor by episodic protest born of frustration. It will be achieved when citizens possess durable, institutionalised means to influence decisions and when political power is routinely constrained through scrutiny. Participation reforms are not mere administrative conveniences; they are instruments of political discipline. Implemented with legal grounding, fiscal realism, and sequenced policy design, they offer Nigeria a credible route from democratic survival to democratic stability.

Author

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Tinubu to Intervene With Executive Order on LG Autonomy

President Bola Tinubu warned state governors on December 19 said he may issue an Executive Order to enforce direct allocations to local governments if they fail to comply with a Supreme Court ruling on their financial autonomy.

He issued the caution during the 15th National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting of the All Progressives Congress at the State House Conference Centre, Abuja.

Tinubu told NEC members, including governors and party leaders: “The Supreme Court has capped it for you again, saying, ‘give them their money directly.’ If you wait for my Executive Order, because I have the knife, I have the yam, I will cut it.”

The warning stems from the July 11, 2024, Supreme Court judgment, which declared it unconstitutional for states to manage local government funds via joint accounts, ordering direct payments from the Federation Account per Section 162(5-8) of the 1999 Constitution.

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/12/lg-autonomy-tinubu-threatens-direct-faac-allocations-executive-order/amp/>

Detained Nigerian Air Force Crew Released by Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso, on December 17, released 11 Nigerian Air Force personnel who had been detained after their aircraft made an emergency landing in the Sahelian country. The personnel, detained on December 8, comprised two flight crew members and nine passengers.

The Nigerian Air Force said the aircraft had been en route to Portugal for scheduled maintenance when it was forced to make an emergency landing in western Burkina Faso. It added that the landing was carried out in accordance with international guidelines and standard safety procedures.

The personnel were released by Burkina Faso’s military junta, led by Ibrahim Traoré, following meetings with a Nigerian delegation headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yusuf Tuggar.

<https://apnews.com/article/nigeria-burkina-faso-air-force-emergency-landing-597d108812af4468090fd364c2c7c145>

Push For State Police Grows Stronger

President Bola Tinubu has renewed his push for the creation of state police, assuring the United States and European partners that Nigeria will adopt the system to tackle growing insecurity. Speaking at the APC National Caucus meeting in Abuja, Tinubu said state police “must happen” and expressed confidence that his party would support the required legislation.

“I had a very long discussion with the U.S. and European governments. I was bragging to them that we will definitely pass the state police to improve security. They asked me if I’m confident, and I said yes. I have a party to depend on, a party that will make it happen. And if

at this level we fail, God forbid, we will not fail,” stated Mr Tinubu.

<https://punchng.com/insecurity-tinubu-pledges-state-police-to-us-european-allies/>

Foreign Cards to Work Smoothly at ATMs, POS

Rivers State Governor Simi The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has issued a directive requiring all banks and non-bank financial institutions to configure ATMs, point-of-sale, and virtual payment terminals to seamlessly accept international cards, ensuring uninterrupted access to cash withdrawals, payments, and transfers for tourists and Nigerians returning from the diaspora. The circular, signed by the Director of the Financial Policy and Regulation Department, emphasised compliance with global card association standards and maintaining high system availability to avoid transaction disruptions.

To enhance security and user confidence, the CBN also mandated multi-factor authentication for foreign card transactions above specified thresholds: \$200 per day, \$500 per week, and \$1,000 per month.

<https://www.thisdaylive.com/2025/12/21/to-ensure-seamless-use-of-foreign-cards-cbn-directs-banks-to-configure-atms-pos-terminals/>



President Talon Promulgates Benin's Constitutional Reform

President Patrice Talon has promulgated a law enacting a major constitutional revision, extending elected terms from five to seven years and establishing a Senate. Law No. 2025-20, promulgated on December 17, 2025, gives legal force to this far-reaching reform, which substantially amends the Constitution of 11 December 1990.

The Beninese leader informed a cabinet meeting that the Constitutional Court had ruled, on December 12, that all amendments adopted by the National Assembly on November 14 were consistent with the fundamental law.

The reform introduces seven-year terms for the president, members of parliament, and local elected officials. It also creates a Senate, formalising Benin's transition to a bicameral parliamentary system alongside the National Assembly. The upper chamber is expected to comprise between 25 and 30 members, in accordance with appointment procedures to be defined by law.

<https://apanews.net/president-talon-promulgates-benins-constitutional-reform/>

Chad Unveils 2026 Budget Amid Declining Revenues

Chad's Parliament began scrutiny of the draft 2026 finance bill on Wednesday, December 17, 2025, with total projected revenues of 2,275 billion FCFA, down six per cent from 2,420.8 billion FCFA in 2025.

Non-oil revenues are forecast at 1,094 billion FCFA, oil revenues at 780 billion FCFA, and grants at 401 billion FCFA.

The government emphasises continuity in fiscal policy, prioritising economic modernisation, administrative simplification, and digitalisation of private-sector interactions. These measures support the Chad Connection 2030 National Development Plan, which aims to make tax policy more attractive to foreign investors.

<https://fr.apanews.net/news/tchad-le-projet-de-la-lfi-2026-en-etude-a-lassemblee-nationale/>

Cameroon's Economy Slows Amid Regional Weakness

Officials from the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) met in Yaoundé on December 17, 2025, to address a weakening regional economy, when new data showed that Cameroon's economic growth had slowed sharply. The Bank of Central African States (BEAC) reported that, by late December 2025, growth across the CEMAC zone had fallen to 2.4 per cent in 2025, down from 2.7 per cent in 2024, with Cameroon—long the region's largest economy—particularly affected by a contraction in its hydrocarbon sector and sluggish non-oil revenue performance.

<https://cemac-eco.finance/beac-announces-growth-backslide-of-2-4-in-2025>



Niger Celebrates Republic Day

Niger marked Republic Day on December 18, a national public holiday commemorating the establishment of its republican form of government in 1958. The country became a republic even before achieving full independence.

The Sahelian nation received messages of goodwill from countries around the world, including from the United States Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, who said, "We value our 65 years of partnership with Niger and will continue advancing our shared interests, including economic prosperity and counterterrorism. The United States remains a committed partner with Niger in its efforts to promote security and economic growth for the benefit of all Nigeriens, as well as the broader Sahel region."

<https://www.state.gov/releases/2025/12/niger-republic-day>

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