

NIGERIA
YOUTH
FUTURES
FUND



2026 DEMOCRACY INDEX FINDINGS REPORT

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON PROGRESS,
PARTICIPATION AND THE FUTURE.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym	Full Meaning
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
HND	Higher National Diploma
ICPC	Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
NCE	Nigeria Certificate in Education / National Certificate in Education (confirm the intended wording)
NYFF	Nigeria Youth Futures Fund
PVC	Permanent Voter Card
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

Note: JAPA also appears in the report, referring informally to emigration or leaving Nigeria for opportunities abroad.

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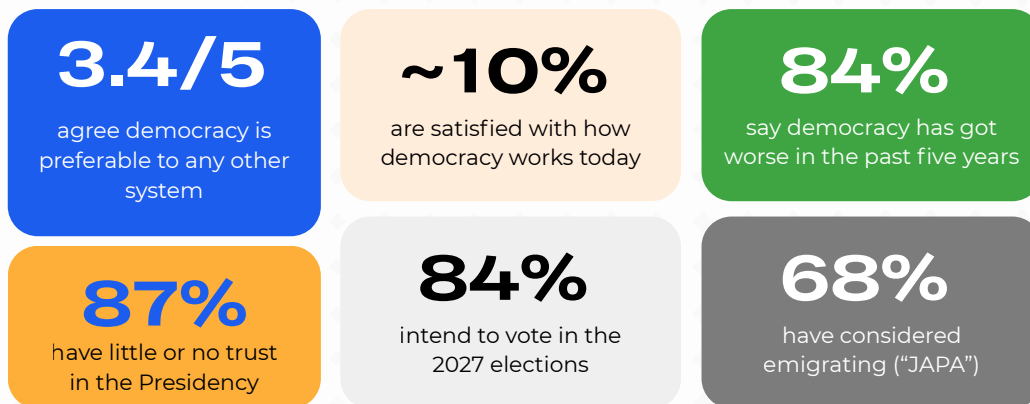
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Executive summary and key findings

In June 2026, Nigeria marked 27 years of uninterrupted democratic governance, its longest stretch of civilian rule since independence. As the country moves toward the 2027 General Elections, the Nigeria Youth Futures Fund (NYFF) conducted the 2026 Youth Democracy Index to capture how young Nigerians see democracy, governance, and their own place in it.

The headline finding is a widening gap between belief and experience. Respondents still prefer democracy to any other system of government, yet only about one in ten is satisfied with how it works in practice. Trust in public institutions is low across the board. And despite this, young people remain determined to participate: most intend to vote in 2027 and believe young people can bring about meaningful change.



Summary of findings

- **Strong democrats, deeply dissatisfied.** Respondents back democracy in principle (3.43 out of 5), but 78% are dissatisfied with how it works today, 84% say it has worsened over five years, and 81% do not consider elections free and fair.
- **A deficit of institutional trust.** Every institution assessed scored below the midpoint of the trust scale. The Presidency, INEC, and the National Assembly are the least trusted; youth-led organisations and civil society are the relative bright spots.

- **The Federal Government is rated most poorly.** 72% rate federal performance over the past 12 months as poor or very poor, compared with 31% for state governments and 52% for local governments. 69% say Nigeria is heading in the wrong direction.
- **Engaged despite disillusionment.** 84% intend to vote in 2027 and 86% are registered or hold a PVC. Respondents believe young people can bring about meaningful change (3.79 out of 5), even though they feel poorly represented in political leadership (2.03 out of 5).
- **Corruption is seen as worsening.** 90% say corruption has increased over the past five years, 42% report paying a bribe for a service in the past year, and trust in the EFCC and ICPC is low.
- **The pull to leave is strong.** 68% have considered emigrating and 16% are actively planning to leave, driven mainly by jobs and economic opportunity (49%) and insecurity (24%).
- **Values over identity.** Integrity (44%) and strong policy ideas (44%) dominate what respondents look for in a leader; ethnicity, religion, and party endorsement together account for under 5%.
- **Information risks.** Facebook is the leading source of political news (37%), 76% encounter false or misleading political news at least sometimes, and many self-censor their views online.

About the Study

Why young people, and why now

Nigeria returned to democratic rule on 29 May 1999, ending decades of military government. Twenty-seven years on, the country has sustained successive elections, expanded civic freedoms, and constitutional governance. Yet persistent challenges around corruption, insecurity, unemployment, and weak institutional accountability continue to test public confidence in what democracy delivers.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 63% of Nigeria's population is under the age of 30. Young people are the country's largest demographic, and also the group most consistently under-represented where decisions are made. The Youth Democracy Index is designed to put evidence of their views in front of the people and institutions making those decisions, ahead of the 2027 General Elections.

How the survey was conducted

The survey was administered online in June 2026 and mobilised through youth and civic organisation networks in all six geopolitical zones, with partner organisations in the North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South, and South West. It generated 247 valid, consenting responses. Questions covered attitudes to democracy and elections, government performance, institutional trust, youth voice and participation, emigration, corruption and accountability, media and information, and leadership preferences.

Who responded

Respondents were slightly more likely to be male (56%) than female (43%), with under 1% preferring not to say. Most lived in urban areas (62%), with 25% semi-urban and 13% rural. Educational attainment was high: 56% held a Bachelor's degree or HND, 15% a postgraduate qualification, 15% a National Diploma or NCE, and 13% senior secondary education. By religion, 70% identified as Christian and 29% as Muslim. The largest state shares were Anambra (27%), Taraba (13%), Akwa Ibom (9%), Ebonyi (9%), and Gombe (5%). In the 2023 elections, 76% voted, 9% were registered but did not vote, and 7% were not registered.

Table 1. Respondents by age

Age range	Share of respondents
18–24	19%
25–29	28%
30–35	35%
Over 35	19%

Figures are rounded and may not sum to exactly 100%. Respondents over 35 are retained in totals alongside the 18–35 youth cohort.

How to read these findings

This is a non-probability sample mobilised through civic and youth networks. The findings are not statistically representative of all young Nigerians and should be read as an indicative, cross-regional account of youth sentiment rather than a precise national estimate.

The sample leans toward young people who are urban, tertiary-educated, and already civically connected, a group likely to be more politically engaged than the youth population as a whole. Responses are also concentrated in a small number of states.

Percentages exclude blank responses, so the number answering varies by question. Where respondents could choose more than one option, shares can add up to more than 100%.

Findings

1. Democracy and Elections

Respondents draw a clear line between democracy as an idea and democracy as they experience it. Agreement that democracy is preferable to any other system of government averages 3.43 out of 5. Satisfaction with how democracy works today averages just 1.89.

Table 2. Attitudes to democracy and elections

Statement (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree)	Mean	Read
Democracy is preferable to any other system	3.43	Mostly agree
Satisfied with how democracy works today	1.89	Dissatisfied
Democracy is better than 5 years ago	1.63	Disagree
Elections are free and fair	1.74	Disagree
My vote makes a real difference	2.9	Not sure

Belief in democracy vs. experience of it

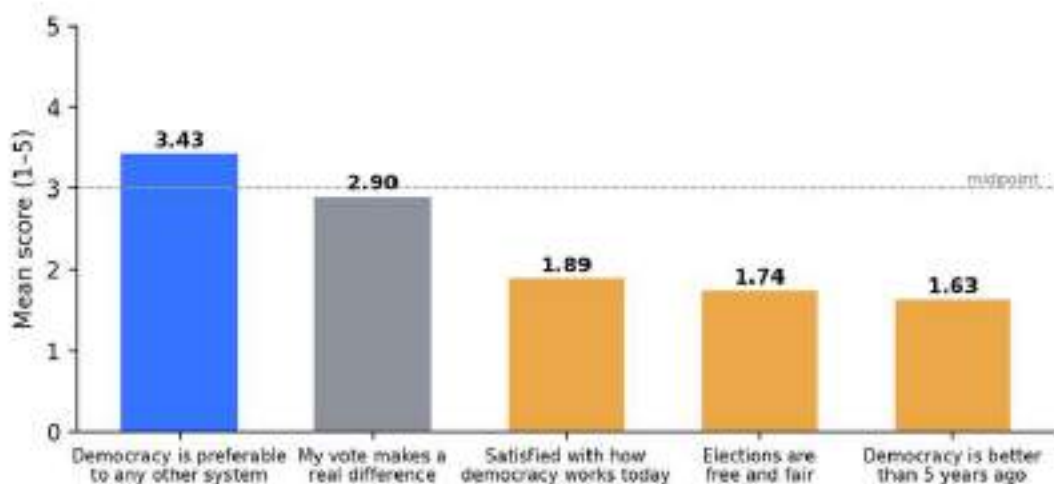


Figure 1. Mean agreement with statements on democracy and elections (1-5 scale)

Dissatisfaction is widespread: 78% of respondents are dissatisfied with how democracy is working in Nigeria today, against 10% who are satisfied, and 84% believe it has got worse over the past five years. Asked what matters most in a functioning democracy, respondents pointed first to free and fair elections (47%), followed by citizens holding the government accountable (19%) and a government that delivers basic services (13%). This suggests that dissatisfaction is rooted less in the idea of democracy than in its delivery against these expectations.

The outlook is pessimistic. Over the next five years, 36% expect democracy to get much worse and a further 16% expect it to worsen, compared with 23% who expect improvement. Elections are a particular source of distrust: 81% describe them as not free and fair, and 41% see campaigns as negative and conflict-driven. The leading fears associated with voting are election rigging (50%), election violence (27%), and a belief that one's vote does not count (21%).

2. Government Performance & Direction

Respondents were asked to rate the performance of federal, state, and local government over the past 12 months. The Federal Government is rated most poorly: 72% rate its performance as poor or very poor, and only 9% as good or very good. State governments receive the most favourable ratings, with 31% rating them poor or very poor, 44% average, and 25% good or very good. Local governments sit between the two, with 52% rating them poor or very poor.

Performance rating, past 12 months

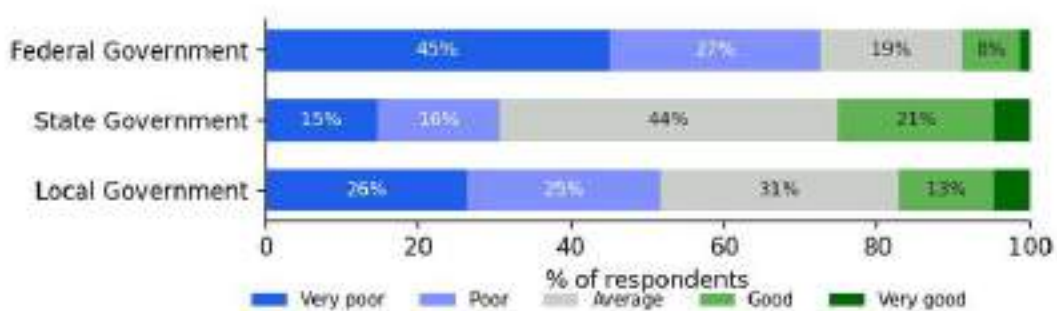


Figure 2. Rating of government performance over the past 12 months, by tier (% of respondents)

Table 3. Government performance rating by tier (% of respondents)

Rating (past 12 months)	Federal	State	Local
Very poor / poor	72%	31%	52%
Average	19%	44%	31%
Good / very good	9%	25%	17%
Number responding	237	238	238

This pattern aligns with a broader sense of national direction: 69% say Nigeria is heading in the wrong or mostly wrong direction, against 8% who say it is heading in the right or mostly right direction.

3. Institutional Trust

Every institution assessed scored below the midpoint of the 1–5 trust scale. Trust is lowest in the Presidency and the core institutions of electoral and legislative democracy, and highest, relatively, in youth-led organisations and civil society.

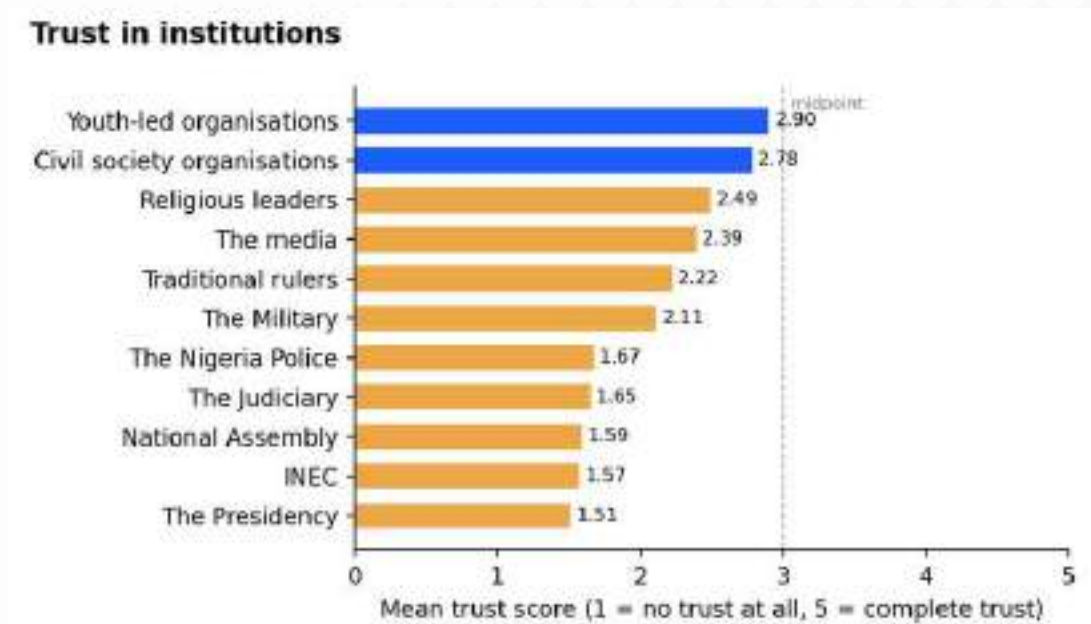


Figure 3. Mean trust in institutions (1 = no trust at all, 5 = complete trust)

Table 4. Trust in institutions

Institution	Mean trust (1–5)	% little/no trust
The Presidency	1.51	87%
National Assembly	1.59	87%
The Judiciary	1.65	86%
INEC	1.57	86%
The Nigeria Police	1.67	85%
The Military	2.11	66%
Traditional rulers	2.22	66%
Religious leaders	2.49	54%
The media	2.39	59%
Civil society organisations	2.78	39%
Youth-led organisations	2.9	36%

With more than eight in ten respondents expressing little or no trust in INEC ahead of the 2027 elections, electoral credibility is a clear priority. Anti-corruption agencies also score poorly (see Section 4).

Note:

The 2026 Index measured trust in federal-level and national institutions. Trust in state and local governments was not measured separately; the performance ratings in Section 2 offer the closest available indication. Future editions of the Index will extend the trust measure to state governments and local government councils.

4. Corruption & Accountability

Perceptions of corruption have worsened sharply: 90% of respondents say corruption has increased or increased significantly over the past five years. At the household level, 42% report paying a bribe for a service in the past 12 months, 43% say they did not, and 15% preferred not to say.

Trust in the two agencies specifically tasked with fighting corruption is low. The EFCC scores 1.97 out of 5, with 78% reporting little or no trust, and the ICPC scores 2.04, with 72% reporting little or no trust. Belief in citizens' ability to hold officials accountable is lukewarm rather than collapsed, averaging 3.08 out of 5. Civil society and youth-led organisations are seen as the most effective accountability actors (3.72 out of 5), well ahead of the media (3.03).

Asked what would most increase accountability, respondents pointed first to stronger anti-corruption institutions (32%), followed by a more independent judiciary (20%), more active civil society and youth organisations (15%), and citizen oversight tools such as budget tracking and Freedom of Information requests (8%). Awareness of existing tools is mixed: 57% know of the Freedom of Information Act and 48% know of the Public Complaints Commission, but 15% are aware of none of the tools listed.

5. Youth Voice, Participation and Emigration

Respondents largely feel unheard. Agreement that government decisions reflect the views of young Nigerians averages 2.19 out of 5, and that young Nigerians are adequately represented in political leadership averages 2.03. Yet this sense of exclusion coexists with a strong belief in their own agency: agreement that young people can bring about meaningful change averages 3.79, with 64% agreeing, and agreement that visible results from advocacy would boost participation averages 4.00.

This readiness to engage shows up in stated intentions and past behaviour. 84% intend to vote in 2027 and 86% are already registered or hold a Permanent Voter Card. Over the past year, 62% attended a community or town hall meeting, 55% volunteered with a civil society or youth organisation, and 41% took part in a community accountability initiative.

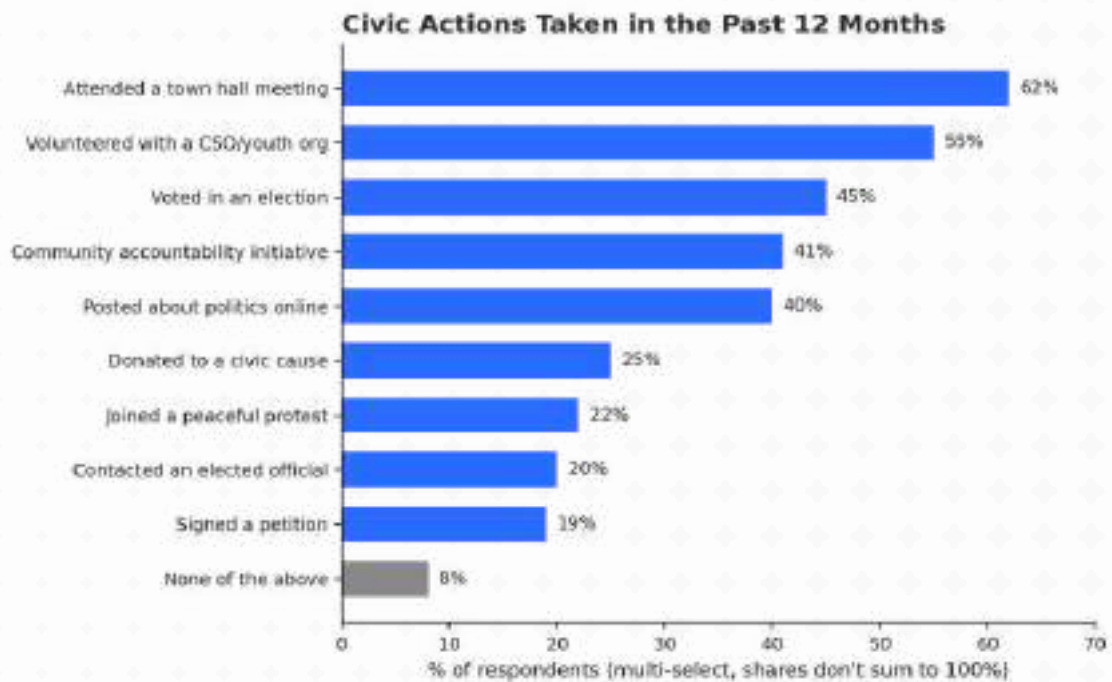


Figure 4. Civic actions taken in the past 12 months (% of respondents)

At the same time, the pull to leave the country is strong. 68% have considered emigrating (“JAPA”) and 16% are actively planning to leave, driven mainly by economic opportunity and jobs (49%) and insecurity (24%).

6. Media, Information and Debates

Facebook is by far the leading source of political news among respondents (37%), ahead of newspapers (15%), radio (11%), and X/Twitter (9%). This reliance on social media carries real information risks: 76% encounter false or misleading political news always, often, or sometimes. Many respondents also self-censor their political views online (mean agreement 3.65 out of 5). Candidate debates are rated poorly on every dimension assessed, including the number organised, their quality and depth, candidates’ willingness to participate, and citizen viewership, all averaging between 2.2 and 2.4 out of 5.

7. Choosing a Leader

Integrity (44%) and strong policy ideas regardless of background (44%) dominate what respondents look for in a leader. Identity-based factors, including ethnicity, religion, and endorsement by a political party, account for under 5% combined. Among these respondents, at least, leadership choice is framed around values and competence rather than identity.

What the Findings Mean

Taken together, the findings describe young Nigerians who have not given up on democracy but are losing patience with how it is delivered. Their commitment to the democratic idea remains intact; their confidence in the institutions responsible for making it work does not.

The gap between willingness to participate and trust in institutions is the central risk and the central opportunity. Respondents say they will vote, they already take part in civic life, and they believe their generation can bring change. They also say that visible results would draw them in further. Where institutions respond, the evidence suggests young people are ready to meet them. Where they do not, the strong pull toward emigration shows what the alternative may be.

With the 2027 General Elections approaching, the credibility of the electoral process, the fight against corruption, and meaningful youth inclusion in decision-making stand out as the areas where action would most directly address what young people are saying.

Recommendations

To government

- Create structured, ongoing channels for youth participation in governance and decision-making, rather than one-off consultations.
- Sustain investment in transparency, accountability, and service delivery at federal, state, and local levels, and communicate results visibly to citizens.
- Strengthen the independence and effectiveness of anti-corruption institutions and the judiciary, the reforms respondents rank most highly for improving accountability.

To INEC and electoral stakeholders

- Prioritise visible measures that build confidence in the integrity of the 2027 elections, given that 81% of respondents do not consider elections free and fair and 86% have little or no trust in INEC.
- Support more, and better, candidate debates, and encourage candidates to take part.

To civil society, media and development partners

- Invest in civic education, youth leadership, and sustained, not one-off, opportunities for participation, with deliberate inclusion of young women, Persons with Disabilities, and rural youth.
- Expand awareness of accountability tools such as the Freedom of Information Act and the Public Complaints Commission.
- Tackle political misinformation, particularly on Facebook and WhatsApp, where most respondents get their news.

To young people

- Stay informed, stay registered, and stay engaged beyond election periods. Speak up, participate, and help shape Nigeria's democratic future.

Looking Ahead

NYFF intends to conduct the Youth Democracy Index as a recurring measure of youth sentiment. Future editions will extend the institutional trust measure to state governments and local government councils, and will seek a broader and more balanced sample across states, rural areas, and educational backgrounds, so that trends can be tracked with growing confidence over time.

Acknowledgements

NYFF thanks the 247 young Nigerians who shared their views, and the partner organisations that mobilised participation across the six geopolitical zones: Policy Alert (South South), FactCheckAfrica (South West), Bridge Connect Africa Initiative (North West), Spotlight for Transparency & Accountability (North East), Promad Foundation (North Central), and Catch Them Young Community Initiative (South East).

About the Nigeria Youth Futures Fund

The Nigeria Youth Futures Fund (NYFF) is a collaborative initiative funded by the MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Luminate Group and implemented by LEAP Africa. NYFF is committed to strengthening, supporting, and enabling youth leadership, activism, and social change through outcome-driven policy engagement and inclusive resourcing for medium- and long-term national development in Nigeria.

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