

Nigeria Program Summary

Nigeria returned to civilian government in 1999 after nearly four decades of brutal and debilitating military regimes. The 2003 and 2007 elections ranked among the most violent and least credible in the world. However, in April 2011, Nigeria held legislative, presidential and gubernatorial elections that domestic and international observers overwhelmingly determined to be the most open, transparent and credible in the nation's nascent democratic history.

Home to Africa's largest population and third largest economy, Nigeria is culturally diverse and endowed with vast natural resources. However, years of economic, social and political misrule under military dictatorships have prevented the country from realizing its full potential. Nigeria has a history of election violence and pervasive corruption has crippled the government's ability and will to provide many of the basic needs of its citizens. However, credible elections in April 2011 have made many Nigerians optimistic about the country's future. President Goodluck Jonathan appears sincere in his rhetoric to improve governance, reduce corruption and ensure government is accountable to its citizens. However, much work remains to be done.

Building upon the success of its pre-election programming, the International Republican Institute (IRI) will continue its work with disenfranchised groups such as women, youth and persons with disabilities, improve internal political party structures and internal party democracy, increase communication between parties, elected officials and constituents, and empower local citizens to hold their leaders to account.

Political Parties

To better enable Nigeria's political parties to address citizen and community needs IRI will provide them with public opinion data on the top priorities of constituencies and the demographics of its key supporters. Based on this information, parties will be able to improve voter outreach and develop issue-based platforms that reflect the needs of their constituency.

Enhancing the Role of Media

IRI recognizes that a vibrant and active media is a powerful and influential tool in Nigeria's continuing democratic development. In addition to playing a critical role in ensuring a legitimate, participatory and transparent electoral process, it can also greatly influence public perception of government officials and political parties. IRI will work with local Nigerian media and international media experts to ensure that reporters have the skills and support to carry out their duties.

Marginalized Groups

Youth, women and people with disabilities have traditionally been disenfranchised at all levels of politics and civic debate. Through fostering civil society development and supporting already flourishing advocacy groups, IRI works to expand access to politics, leadership and government to everyone regardless of gender, physical ability or age.

Promoting Stakeholder Dialogue on the Electoral Process

Currently, no space exists for key stakeholders to engage one another in discussion, information sharing and conflict resolution to promote the development of consensus and increase mutual confidence. IRI's support in this regard enables Nigerian organizations to take the lead in bringing together electoral officials, political parties and civil society. IRI fosters the long-term sustainability of such institutions with the goal of expanding the political space to all citizens.

Election Observation

To assist the Nigerian effort to promote integrity, validity and voter confidence in the 2011 elections, IRI deployed a 57-member delegation composed of electoral and political experts from around the world to observe the nation's fourth presidential election. IRI's delegation observed across 12 states and in all six of Nigeria's geopolitical zones. IRI also observed Nigeria's 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections.

