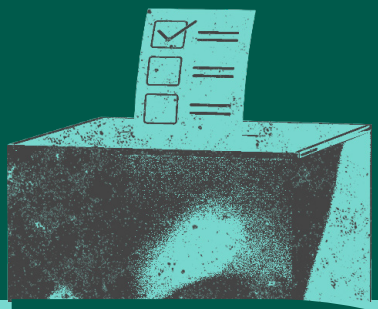






YOUTH VOTER REGISTRATION COSTS & CHALLENGES

NIGERIA

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Under the project
WYDE
Civic Engagement

Elections are fundamental for democracies as they enable citizens to choose and change their leaders without conflict. This is the primary form of public engagement in a democracy. In countries such as Nigeria that use the active model, voter registration is the essential first step for citizens in exercising their right to vote.[1]

Voter registration also serves as a tool for verifying voter identity and eligibility as well as for preventing electoral fraud and protecting electoral integrity.[2] Voter registration, especially when not integrated with population registration, accounts for a significant percentage of the overall costs associated with administering elections.[3]

Voter registration is a crucial element in ensuring democratic inclusiveness. Barriers to registration, especially those affecting specific groups in society, must be eliminated, and voter outreach initiatives should be strengthened to empower underrepresented groups such as ethnic minorities, youth and marginalised communities.

Nigeria has one of the youngest populations in the world, characterised by a median age of 18.1 years. Approximately 70% of the population is under the age of 30, and 42% is under the age of 15. Nigeria's youth could play a decisive role in politics as voters, candidates and electoral administrators,[4] but targeted initiatives are needed to harness the potential of this demographic.[5]

This case study emphasises the significance of youth voter registration as a fundamental prerequisite for the electoral and political engagement of Nigeria's youth. It examines the legal and procedural framework governing voter registration and delineates the voter registration process. The analysis includes an examination of the costs associated with voter registration. Furthermore, it examines the challenges faced by young individuals during the registration process, alongside recent initiatives aimed at enhancing youth voter registration. The study concludes with a discussion of various lessons learned and proposes recommendations related to youth voter registration in Nigeria.

1 Audrey Paige Sauer, "Privacy or the Polls: Public Voter Registration Laws as a Modern Form of Vote Denial," William and Mary Law Review, 61, 5 (2020), 1474-1504.

2 Richard L. Klein and Patrick Merloe, Building Confidence in the Voter Registration Process: An NDI Monitoring Guide for Political Parties and Civic Organizations (Washinton: National Democratic Institute, 2001)

3 "Voter Registration," ACE: The Electoral Knowledge Network (no date)

4 Akanni Ibukun Akinyemi and Jacob Wale Mobolaji, "Nigeria's Large, Youthful Population Could be an Asset or a Burden," Premium Times, July 21, 2022; International IDEA, "Youth Participation in Electoral Processes: New Roles for African Electoral Management Bodies" International IDEA Policy Brief, International IDEA (2015), ; National Bureau of Statistics, 2012 National Baseline Youth Survey (Abuja: NBS, 2013), 8

5 Rinu Oduala, "How Nigeria is Getting out the Youth Vote," Chatham House, August 3, 2022

Background

The 1999 Constitution, as amended in 2011, 2017 and 2023 and the Electoral Act (2022)[6] provide the legal framework for elections and mandate the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as Nigeria's electoral management body. The Electoral Act also establishes the legal framework for voter registration.[7] It charges INEC with compiling, maintaining and continuously updating a National Register of Voters.[8] This effectively translates into a requirement for continuous voter registration (CVR).

Nigeria has an active voter registration model in which eligible citizens must register and obtain a Permanent Voter Card (PVC), the sole document accepted by polling officials for verification on election day. The documents allowed for registration are instead the National Identification Number (NIN) or National ID card, Nigerian passport, driver's licence, birth certificate or age declaration and any other recognised identity document that may be accepted by INEC. Additionally, the voter register is not linked to a national civil register database, and other documents are not considered valid for voter identification. Nigeria periodically updates the voter register through national registration exercises.

Nigeria transitioned from manually compiled registers to a biometric system in 2006 and to smart cards and verification devices in 2015. However, concerns regarding the integrity of the register need to be addressed. These stem from a lack of resources, limited time for compiling and cleansing the register, inadequate staff training and challenges associated with distributing voter registration cards.

Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) is available for Nigerians who have turned 18 since the last registration exercise, those who have never registered but meet the age requirement, individuals needing to update their personal details, those requiring a replacement for a damaged or deteriorated PVC and for changes of voting location. Essentially, anyone 18 years or older who has not previously registered is eligible for CVR.[9] There are no provisions for out-of-country voting or out-of-country registration, and those in pretrial detention (currently 6,300) can neither register nor vote. The Electoral Act (2022) does not provide a definition of "continuous", as a result of which there is no specific timeline for voter registration. For example, the voter registration period for the 2023 general elections lasted 13 months, from June 2021 to July 2022.

Voter lists are posted both physically and online after voter registration (or Continuous Voter Registration, CVR) and before the publication of the final register of voters, to enable eligible citizens to correct registration errors, challenge potentially ineligible registrations, and resolve disputes arising from the Preliminary Register of Voters. In preparation for the 2023 general elections, INEC published the voter list on its website in November 2022, enabling Nigerians to view the lists at the state, local government area, registration area and polling unit levels.[10] In addition to the physical claims and objection exercise, the portal allows Nigerians to submit online claims for inclusion or deletion, request corrections and object to the inclusion of anyone not qualified to vote or deceased, electronically.

In 2023, physical copies of the voter list were displayed in all 8,809 registration areas (wards) and 774 local government areas across the nation. The list contains the name, picture, date of birth and Voter Identification Number (VIN) of each registered voter; however, for data protection and security reasons, critical information such as biometric details, residential addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses of voters is not made public in either the physical or online version.

Voter registration involves recording the name, age, fingerprints, address and photograph of prospective voters. The process begins with completing an online form on the INEC portal (https://cvr.inecnigeria.org). Subsequently, prospective voters are required to visit a registration centre at least twice: first to have their biometrics captured (fingerprints and photograph), and second to collect their PVC once they are registered. More than two visits are often necessary. According to a recent study, "only 30% of voters were able to get their PVCs the first time they tried, indicating multiple pick-up attempts up to five times. The rest had to make at least two visits, and 20% went at least four times before getting their PVCs."[11]

6 Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, Electoral Act, 2022, 61, vol. 109, March 29, 2022, (Lagos: The Federal Government Printer, 2022)

7 The Electoral Act, 2022; "Voter Registration in 2023," Stearns Explains, February 1, 2023

8 The Electoral Act, 2022.

9 According to the Electoral Act (2022) Section 12 (1), the qualification for registration includes that, "A person shall be qualified to be registered as a voter if such a person — (a) is a citizen of Nigeria; (b) has attained the age of 18 years; (c) is ordinarily resident, works in, originates from the Local Government, Area Council or Ward covered by the registration centre; (d) presents himself to the registration officers of the Commission for registration as a voter; and (e) is not subject to any legal incapacity to vote under any law, rule or regulations in force in Nigeria."

10 See: https://cvr.inecnigeria.org/register_display

11 SBM Intelligence, "Evaluating INEC's CVR Process: a Spotlight on Actual PVC Collection," SBM Intelligence, July, 2022

The CVR conducted before the 2023 elections, involved at least 5,346 INEC staff deployed across 2,673 centres nationwide. However, the number of centres was insufficient for the influx of people registering to vote in the lead-up to the elections.

The registration exercise was conducted continuously, both online through a dedicated portal and at designated registration centres, using the INEC Voter Enrolment Device (IVED) - a biometric voter registration device that captures applicants' demographic information, fingerprints, facial features, and supporting documentation for verification and inclusion in the National Register of Voters. The launch of the CVR portal (cvr.inecnigeria.org) in 2021 had already enhanced the voter registration process, by enabling prospective voters to complete their personal details online before visiting an INEC registration centre for biometric capture. This reduced the time spent at registration centres, improved the efficiency of the registration process, and facilitated better management of registration queues.[12] In addition to pre-registration, the portal is used for requesting replacement voter cards and for updating information, including addresses.

The evolving digital identity and civil registration infrastructure in Nigeria has significant implications for voter registration, particularly the recent launch of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System (e-CRVS)[13] and, alongside the longstanding National Identity Number (NIN), the new General Multipurpose National Identity Card (GMPC).

12 Samson Adenekan, "Explainer: 15 Things You Need to Know about the Continuous Voter Registration (CVR)," Premium Times, June 28, 2021, https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/470399-explainer-15-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-continuous-voters-registration-cvr.html?tztc=1.

13 National Population Commission, "Civil Registration and Vital Statistics," National Population Commission, (no date), http://nationalpopulation.gov.ng/civil-registration)

14 Beloved John, "2023 Elections: Nigeria's Voter Turnout Drops to Lowest," International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), April 1, 2023, .

15 Yiaga Africa, "Policy Brief: Are Nigerians Voting? Understanding Declining Voter Turnout in Nigeria," Yiaga Africa, February 28, 2025

In Nigeria, the National Population Commission is responsible for civil registration and vital statistics. The e-CRVS, a digital platform for registering births, deaths and other vital events, was launched by the National Population Commission in 2023 with the aim of creating a centralised national database. This new civil registration system is expected to improve the accuracy and accessibility of civil records. By providing electronic certificates, it also has the potential to address the issues with documentation discussed in this report.

The NIN is a unique identifier issued by the National Identity Management Commission and is necessary for accessing government services, banking and telecommunications. The NIN is linked to the National Identity Database, which consolidates identity information for citizens and legal residents. The latest development in this evolving environment is the introduction of the new national identity card (GMPC). Launched in 2025, this digital ID card will be linked to the NIN and is intended to replace the various IDs currently in use. It is expected to be used to access both public and private services, including voting.

Nigeria's current voter registration process still requires citizens to enrol with the INEC actively. The implementation of a centralised, digital ID infrastructure (GMPC, e-CRVS and NIN) will impact voter registration. Since the data needed for registration (such as date of birth, residency status and biometrics) will already have been captured and included in the database, maintaining the current legal requirement for active registration would be duplicative.

Synergies between e-CRVS, NIN and the GMPC offer an opportunity to modernise Nigeria's voter registration system and eliminate many of the barriers to registration identified in this case study. Passive voter registration, where eligible citizens are automatically enrolled or pre-verified using national databases, will become a technically viable and administratively efficient option, provided the civil registration databases are integrated with the INEC voter register. This would ensure that all eligible voters are verified and automatically registered.

Despite the growing number of registered voters, voter turnout has declined, particularly in the last four electoral cycles (2011-2023). The 2023 general elections saw a turnout of only 26.72% (24.9 million voters) of the 92.47 million registered voters who had collected their PVCs.[14] The low voter turnout is attributable to a range of factors, including ineffective voter education, erosion of trust in the electoral process, disillusionment with democracy, poor voting services, broken campaign promises, inadequate education and, last but not least, economic difficulties.[15] Despite the significant efforts of INEC, civil society and political parties, many voters, particularly young people, have disengaged from the electoral process. Pervasive corruption, vote-buying and overall electoral commercialisation have eroded public confidence and youth enthusiasm. Widening income disparity and high levels of unemployment and poverty have left young people disillusioned. Furthermore, the entire voting process is challenging for young voters due to inadequate voting services, including the distance to polling stations and the difficulties in collecting PVCs.

In summary, reversing the decline in voter turnout requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach. While INEC plays a critical role in strengthening voter education, improving voter registration and voting services, and enhancing the transparency of electoral processes, sustainable improvements in turnout also depend on the active involvement of political parties, candidates, civil society organisations, the media, and other democratic institutions. These stakeholders must work collectively to promote meaningful civic engagement, encourage political participation, and rebuild public confidence and trust in the electoral process.

Voter Registration Costs

Conducting elections is generally costly, with expenses influenced by factors such as the electoral system, population size, and election frequency. In Nigeria, the cost of elections has increased significantly, from just over ₦1 billion (~€8.6 million in 1999) to over ₦350 billion (~€723 million in 2023). Factors contributing to this cost increase include population growth, fluctuations in the value of the Naira (₦), and the high cost of modern electoral technology.

According to INEC, Nigeria spent over ₦355 billion (€555.4 million)[16] on the 2023 general elections, surpassing the initially projected budget of ₦305 billion (€476.4 million).[17] The breakdown of the planned expenditures revealed that electoral operations accounted for ₦159.7 billion (€249.6 million), electoral technology for ₦117.3 billion (€183.4 million), electoral administrative costs for ₦20.4 billion (€31.8 million) and unforeseen electoral expenses for ₦7.4 billion (€11.6 million). Voter registration costs were not provided. By January 2023, it became clear that the initial budget would be insufficient due to inflation, changes in the consumer price index and widening foreign exchange rate differentials. Consequently, INEC requested a supplementary budget of ₦52.1 billion (€81.5 million). After approval, the total appropriated amount rose to ₦355.2 billion (€555.7 million) for the 93.4 million registered voters in Nigeria. The timeline for the amounts released for the 2023 general elections was as follows: from February 2022 to February 2023, a total of ₦293.4 billion (€458.7 million) was released; in August and September 2023, an additional ₦20 billion (€31.2 million) was provided, leaving an outstanding balance of ₦61.8 billion (€96.5 million). As of February 24, 2024, INEC reports that the Federal Government had released ₦313.4 billion (€489.2 million) out of the ₦355 billion (€555.4 million) approved for the conduct of the 2023 general elections.

Regarding the 2023 election budget, INEC stated that the federal government was responsible for providing the necessary funds to cover the fixed and direct (core) costs of elections. Funding assistance from development partners is required to support activities such as training, capacity building, civic education, information production and stakeholder engagement.

A significant aspect of INEC's preparation for the 2023 general elections was the extensive registration of young Nigerians, with nearly 40% of the total registered voters (93.47 million) being under 35 years old. In the 2023 presidential and national assembly elections, the most expensive in Nigeria to date, out of 93.47 million registered voters, only 24.9 million cast their votes, resulting in a voter turnout of just 26.72%.

Several factors contributed to this low turnout, including violence, poor economic conditions, citizens' lack of trust in the electoral process and diminishing confidence in the ability of the electoral system to produce credible leaders. Additional factors included voter harassment and intimidation before the elections, electoral irregularities, late arrival of voting materials, malfunctioning of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) devices[18], poor conduct by electoral commission officials, currency scarcity due to the Central Bank of Nigeria's Naira redesign and ongoing fears of insurgent attacks in various areas of the country.[19]

Cost of elections, voter registration and voter turnout 1999-2023 (various sources)[20]

Election Cycles	1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019	2023
Cost of Election (N)	1.5bn	29bn	45.5bn	122.9bn	108.8bn	143bn	355bn
Cost of Election (€)	15m	207.1m	267.6m	565m	496m	357.5m	554.6m
Registered Voters	57.9m	60.8m	61.6m	73.5m	69.3m	84.0m	93m
Cost per Voter (N)	25.9	477	738.6	1672.1	1570	1702.4	3817.2
Cost per Voter (€)	0.26	3.4	4.3	7.7	7.2	4.3	6
Voter Turnout	52.3% (30.3m)	69.1% (42.0m)	57.3% (35.3m)	53.6% (40.7m)	43.6% (29.4m)	34.8% (28.6m)	29% (24.9m)

As previously mentioned, funding for elections in Nigeria is primarily provided by the federal government through budgetary allocations that must receive the approval of the National Assembly in the year preceding the election year.[21]

16 All euro conversions are approximate.

17 Jimisayo Opanuga, "Nigeria Spent N355 Billion on 2023 Elections," The Guardian, February 23, 2024

18 The Biometric and Voter-Accreditation System performs two main functions on for the 2023 Election Day: a) voter identification by reading the voter's Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) using the card's QR/barcode and b) digital transmission of polling-unit results by capturing the completed result sheets. However, it was not used for the primary vote count that was still carried out at the polling station level.

19 John, "2023 Elections: Nigeria's Voter Turnout."

20 Kabir Yasuf, "Analysis: Trend of Low Voter Turnout Continues in Nigerian Elections," Premium Times, March 5, 2023; Goodluck Jonathan Foundation, "Barriers to Civic Participation in Nigeria: The Ondo and Edo States Context", The Goodluck Jonathan Foundation (2020); Opeyemi Lawal,"From N1.5b to N305b. How Cost of Nigerian Elections Rose in 24 years," Foundation for Investigative Journalism, March 5, 2023; Emmanuel Aziken ,"The Amusing Sums and Stories from INEC," Vanguard, September 1, 2018.

21 INEC, Election Project Plan for the 2023 General Election (Abuja: INEC, 2022).

Barriers to Youth Voter Registration

The most significant barrier to youth voter registration in Nigeria is political apathy, which stems from civic disengagement, limited political education and a deep-seated distrust of the government and its agencies, including INEC. Political apathy not only hinders youth voter registration but also undermines the foundational elements of governance in a society like Nigeria, which has a substantial youth demographic.[22]

Recent successes in voter registration resulted from improvements in voter education and outreach, following a mobilisation effort by INEC, civil society organisations (CSOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs). However, it remains to be seen whether this trend will prove sustainable in the long term. Despite the increases in voter registration, turnout for the 2023 elections was low.

Several explanations have been offered for the recent increase in youth voter registration. This rise has been associated with the emergence of youth-led political campaigns, many of which were directly or indirectly linked to the #EndSARS protests of October 2020.[23] Another possible explanation is more self-interested. The voter card (PVC) has gained recognition as a valid identity document; for example, it is accepted by banks for opening accounts. This makes the voter card the most affordable means of identification when compared to other options such as a driver's license or passport. It is likely that this influences some young people's decision to register as voters.

On the other hand, low voter turnout seems to result, at least in part, from the prevailing climate of insecurity linked to the activities of insurgents, concerns about the use of force by security agencies, and restrictions on civic space and peaceful assembly, all of which may contribute to a climate of fear surrounding elections. Another disincentive for youth is the political culture. Candidates for public office are usually from much older age groups and are perceived as disconnected from the realities faced by the country's youth. Consequently, even politically informed or active young people have negative perceptions of the candidates emerging from party primaries.[24]

Young voters in Nigeria also face standard barriers to voter registration. Some young people lack a national ID number (NIN) or other valid means of identification. While there are no direct costs associated with the issuance of the PVC, the only government-issued identity that has no expiry date, several indirect costs present significant barriers for certain segments of the population, including many young people. These indirect costs include transportation and lost income or time away from school or work. The fact that registration is only possible for those who have already turned 18, rather than for those who will come of age before the next election, leads to the disenfranchisement of this group of potential voters. As with voting, security concerns also serve as a demotivating factor for voter registration.

One barrier for young voters specific to Nigeria is the need to make repeated trips to the registration centre to collect a voter card.[25] This leads to burdensome transportation costs and a loss of work time for registrants. Part of the reason PVCs are not readily available is that they are produced on a four-year cycle, just before the general elections are conducted. Streamlining the issuance process would help stimulate the registration of young people, a highly mobile section of the population. The online portal currently does not provide tracking services for PVC issuance.

INEC has developed policies to improve access to registration and voting for people with disabilities and seeks to mainstream disability issues into electoral preparation and administration at all stages of the electoral cycle through its Framework on Access and Participation of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in the Electoral Process, adopted in 2020.

Despite these obstacles and disincentives, millions of young people registered to vote for the first time in the lead-up to the 2023 elections. INEC announced in August 2022 that 10.5 million Nigerians had been added to the electoral register. Notably, 84% of the new voters were under 35, while only 3% were over 65.



22 Goodluck Jonathan Foundation, "Barriers to Civic Participation in Nigeria."

23 During the #EndSARS protests, millions of young Nigerians took to the streets to oppose the brutality of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigeria Police, only to face violent repression from state security agents.

24 Ope Adetayo and Obinna Tony-Francis Ochem, "Young Nigerians Struggle to Disrupt Old Power at Upcoming Election," Open Democracy, September 29, 2022.

25 SBM Intelligence, "Evaluating INEC.s CR Process: a Spotlight on Actual PVC Collection."

Youth Voter Registration Initiatives

The lowering of age barriers for candidacy to elected office appears to have positively affected the engagement of young Nigerians in broader political life and, consequently, voter registration. Advocacy for the so-called age-reduction bill was led by Samson Itodo, the founder of Yiaga Africa, under the banner of the #NotTooYoungToRun movement. The bill, signed by President Muhammadu Buhari in 2018, amended the constitution to reduce the age qualifications for the presidency from 40 to 30, for governors and senators from 35 to 30 and for members of parliament from 30 to 25.[26]

In terms of youth representation and candidacy, however, the results have been disappointing. According to a civil society report covering the period 2015 to 2019,[27] youth representation in the legislature improved by a very slight margin. Youth representation in the House of Representatives increased from 3% in 2019 to 3.92%, while in the state assemblies it rose slightly from 8.9% in 2019 to 9.2%. Youth candidacy subsequently declined from 34% in the 2019 elections to 28.6% in the 2023 elections. Specifically, youth candidacy for the House of Representatives dropped from 27.4% in 2019 to 21.6% in 2023, while youth candidacy for the State Houses of Assembly fell from 41.8% in 2019 to 35.6% in 2023. The percentage of youth candidates nominated at the state level was the highest, while the lowest percentage (3.7%) was for senatorial elections. One explanation may be the expenses associated with running for office and campaigning in Nigerian elections, which pose a significant challenge for young candidates. Additional obstacles impacting youth participation in politics include high unemployment rates, escalating insecurity and extremist violence, along with disillusionment with Nigerian politics.[28] As stated above, the limited number of youth candidates for elected office and the resulting generation gap between the political class and Nigeria's young voting population were factors contributing to the low participation in the 2023 elections.

The period leading up to the 2023 general elections saw the involvement of young people in the process, not only as potential voters but also as mobilisers for political participation. Their engagement was facilitated by the decision to close the country's universities for two weeks prior to the general elections.[29] Central to this development were Nigeria's CSOs, FBOs and advocacy groups at the national, state, local and community levels, all of which contributed to the result of nearly 8 million new registrations of young Nigerians, the majority of the 10 million new registrations since 2019.[30]

INEC has developed a comprehensive Youth Engagement Strategy (YES)[31] to enhance civic and voter education among young Nigerians. One of the key YES initiatives was the #YouthVoteCount campaign, implemented in collaboration with the European Union (EU) Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) and the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES), and conducted on university campuses across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. It utilised town-hall-style meetings, panel discussions, and performances by popular celebrities and youth ambassadors to engage young voters and encourage them to register, collect their PVCs, and participate in electoral politics. In June 2022, INEC, in partnership with the EU and civil society organisations, organised the YouthVoteCount 2.0 Mega Concert in Abuja and Lagos. The initiative leveraged pop culture to mobilise youth participation in the electoral process.

Another important INEC initiative is the Youth Ambassadors Programme, which engages young influencers and celebrities to promote voter education and non-violent participation in elections. These ambassadors utilise social media to disseminate information about the electoral process and encourage youth involvement. Recently, the Youth Ambassadors promoted the MyINEC mobile app as a source of election information for young voters.

Aside from these partnerships with INEC, civil education and voter education are offered by civil society and financed by development partners. No funding or support is provided by the electoral administration or other state actors to CSOs working in the field of youth inclusion.

26 Adetayo and Ochem, "Young Nigerians Struggle to Disrupt Old Power at Upcoming Election."

27 Yiaga Africa, 2023 Elections: Youth Representation in the Legislature (Abuja: Ylaga Africa, 2023).

28 Chinedu Asadu, "Young Voters in Nigeria Mobilize in Record Numbers Ahead of Presidential Election," PBS News, February 22, 2023. See aslo: Goodluck Jonathan Foundation "Barriers to Civic Participation in Nigeria."

29 Asadu, "Young Voters in Nigeria Mobilize in Record Numbers Ahead of Presidential Election."

30 Oduala, "How Nigeria is Getting out the Youth Vote."

31 The strategy development process began with pre-inception consultations before 2017, followed by an inaugural stakeholder meeting in January 2018, supported by Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (Yiaga). The strategy was validated in December 2020 during a stakeholder meeting in Abuja, organized by INEC in collaboration with Yiaga Africa and the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES).

Youth-led organisations (CSOs) employed various offline strategies and digital campaigns to mobilise young people for the 2023 general elections, demonstrating greater engagement than in previous elections. The mobilisations were generally the result of partnerships between civil society groups, foundations and organisations. They focused on various aspects of the election process as they affect youth, including voter education, voter pre-registration, PVC collection and voting.[32] The 2023 elections marked a high point in terms of newly registered youth voters,[33] effectively building on the changes to the legal framework regarding the age limit for candidacy.[34] The adoption of an online portal by INEC for the preliminary stage of voter registration has facilitated youth registration by removing the need for an initial in-person visit to an INEC office.

Political activities and campaigns, primarily led by young people, aimed to encourage eligible individuals to register as voters and run for elected office. CSOs, such as Yiaga Africa, garnered support for youth candidates, promoted voter registration, provided political education, trained party agents for youth candidates and mobilised funds.[35] Some of these initiatives were organised in partnership with INEC. Nigerian youth also volunteered to work with INEC as registration officers to register voters and, subsequently, to distribute PVCs.[36]

Social media has become an effective platform for engaging a large number of young people across various geographical and ethno-religious divides in Nigeria. Influencers leveraged their networks to establish online platforms for sharing political information and engaging in discussions. Candidates and their supporters utilised tweets, while influencers and musicians organised mobilisation competitions and challenges, such as Dauda Rara's Jagaban Shine Gaba challenge. This challenge encouraged citizens to mime a song and post it on TikTok. Rara and his judging team reviewed the submissions, awarding 12 cars, 30 iPhones and selecting an additional 50 participants to receive cash prizes.[37]

Yiaga Africa's #SixtyPercentOfUs and #ThePowerOf18 campaigns successfully utilised traditional and non-traditional political mobilisation tools to encourage voter registration, the collection of PVCs and voting in the 2023 elections. A highlight of these campaigns was their significant contribution to youth participation in the electoral process, particularly evident during the final months of the continuous voter registration period, which ended in July 2022. The campaigns targeted 15 states with low voter registration. Aiming to increase voter turnout by mobilising 60% of young registered voters, the #SixtyPercentofUS project sought to intensify efforts on cooperation and strategic youth engagement in its post-voter-registration initiatives, focusing on raising awareness, understanding the registration process and inspiring action.

GoVote is a platform and campaign developed by the CoCreation Hub (CCHub) that aims to educate Nigerians on how to register to vote and to mobilise them for elections. During the 2019 election cycle, GoVote expanded to provide first-time voters with information about what to expect on election day, promote responsible conduct before and during elections, and aggregate information to help voters make informed choices. GoVote also conducted citizen surveys on election governance.

GoNigeria, a non-profit and non-partisan movement dedicated to amplifying the voices of young Nigerians, collaborated with prominent Nigerian influencers to boost voter registration and participation ahead of the 2023 general elections. GoNigeria's programmes aimed to encourage voting-age youths to register and obtain their voter cards well before the polls. Pop culture and creative arts were utilised as tools for engagement.

Compared to traditional offline strategies, these low-cost, citizen-focused online approaches address the political marginalisation of youth by promoting civic participation. This creates opportunities for mass mobilisation to support candidates, raise funds, encourage voter registration and provide real-time updates on political and election matters.[38]



32 "WeVote Registers First Time Voters in 3 Tertiary Institutions in Lagos," WeVote, 2023.

33 Adetayo and Ochem, "Young Nigerians Struggle to Disrupt Old Power at Upcoming Election."

34 Teniola T. Tayo, "Nigeria's youth take centre stage in the 2023 polls," Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 2023.

35 Samson Adenekan, "EU, INEC, Yiaga Take 'Youth Vote Counts' Campaign to Abuja," Premium Times, June 22, 2022.

36 Jide Ojo, "Nigerian Youths and 2023 General Elections," Punch, February 15, 2023, .

37 Jibrin Ibrahim, "Social Media and the 2023 Election Campaigns", Premium Times, February 17, 2023.

38 Oduala, "How Nigeria is Getting out the Youth Vote."

In other words, online spaces were greatly democratised and adapted for participatory politics, thereby creating a political environment in which the agenda-setting voices and preferences of Nigerian youth were clearly projected. Social media had a mainly positive influence on youth voter registration for the 2023 general elections. However, it remains to be seen whether disinformation on social media also contributed to the low voter turnout.

Although social media was the main channel for communication, there was still an appreciation for the importance of traditional voter mobilisation among young people. As noted earlier, several organisations recruited volunteers to support the registration process. The traditional mobilisation efforts involved building strategic partnerships among civil society groups, international organisations, government agencies and creative artists, such as young musicians. Young people were targeted in major cities and tertiary institutions to promote voter registration through activities such as meetings, voter education and campaign concerts. For example, the YouthVoteCount campaign in Abuja in June 2022 resulted from a partnership involving the European Union, INEC, and Yiaga Africa to mobilise young people to register and encourage their participation in electoral politics.

Another example is the Frontline Youth Creativity Initiative, which provided financial support for young people to collect their PVCs after registering. INEC also utilised the Youth Ambassadors initiative to engage Nigeria's large youth population through various platforms. The Ambassadors are seen as role models, helping to mobilise young people for positive participation and advocating for violence-free elections.[39]

It should also be noted that religious centres, such as churches and mosques, also championed the drive for voter registration, voter education and voter mobilisation. Some clerics openly urged INEC to make worship centres registration points.[40] Church assemblies, especially youth-focused churches, adopted several strategies, including using the PVC as a gate pass for worship services to encourage their members to register as voters.



39 Oduala, "How Nigeria is Getting out the Youth Vote."

40 Idiwuor Opiyo, "Nigeria: Church Plan to Mobilize Voter Registration Ahead of 2023 Election," Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA), June 24, 2022; Linus Unah, "The Church in Nigeria Champions Voter Registration Drive," America Magazine, May 10, 2018; "Clerics urge INEC to Make Churches, Mosques Registration Points," Punch, March 12, 2018.

Lessons Learned

1

The paradox of high voter registration and low voter turnout implies that a significant number of registered voters are not sufficiently mobilised to participate in the electoral process. Although an increase in voter registration is commendable, the failure to convert registrants into voters requires careful analysis. Electoral participation is the goal – voter registration is a means to that end.

2

Youth-centred campaigns are key to successfully mobilising young people. Youth-led voter registration initiatives focused on strategic locations, such as university campuses, proved particularly effective in the lead-up to the 2023 elections. The best results were achieved through peer-to-peer campaigns and youth-friendly events, such as music events that accept the PVC as a gate pass. Youth mobilisation in rural areas was primarily undertaken by faith-based organisations, such as churches and mosques, as well as community-based organisations; however, their efforts remained largely ignored.

3

Public sector-driven information campaigns are important but need to be complemented with public-private partnerships and civil society involvement. It was precisely this youth-led mobilisation that generated momentum in 2023, offsetting the shortcomings of more official interventions. Cooperation among stakeholders resulted in the successful realisation of youth registration campaigns. Since these youth-owned or youth-led campaigns have proven to be especially effective, they should not be limited to the pre-election period.

4

Technology has offered a level of flexibility that aligns with youth preferences, especially in volunteering as registration officers and registering to obtain PVCs ahead of upcoming elections. It also enables launching online political campaigns to engage young people actively using various social media platforms. The online CVR portal has simplified the registration process, enabling more young people to register as voters. The success of the CVR portal highlights the importance of adapting interventions to the current reality, where most Nigerians, particularly young people, have access to internet services.

5

The credibility of the Nigerian electoral administration greatly influences whether registered voters decide to participate in elections or not. Voter education programmes need to address the lack of trust among young people in the electoral process. Registered voters need to recognise the importance of transforming their voting potential (registration) into actual voting power in order to shape the political future of Nigeria.

6

The evolving digital identification and civil registration infrastructure in Nigeria will significantly impact voter registration, particularly with the recent introduction of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System (e-CRVS) and the new General Multipurpose National Identity Card (GMPC). These developments will offer an opportunity to modernise Nigeria's voter registration process and remove many of the barriers to registration identified in this case study. Although these digital systems are still in development, they are expected to provide a solid foundation for automated, inclusive and secure voter registration in the future, enabling a transition to a passive system in which first-time voters are automatically registered upon reaching voting age.

Recommendations

1. Voter turnout

Voter education and awareness raising on voter registration should be supplemented by initiatives to support youth voter turnout.

2. Youth-centric mobilisation:

Future voter education, awareness-raising and mobilisation campaigns conducted by INEC, educational institutions, CSOs and other relevant entities should build on the positive experiences of youth-led and youth-centric engagement, employing modalities and approaches that resonate with young people. Support should be provided to faith-based and community-based organisations to aid voter registration, particularly in rural areas of Nigeria. Digital campaigns and volunteering opportunities that engage youth should be promoted on social media and other online platforms. Tailored messages should be presented in youth-friendly formats and on platforms that align with the media consumption habits of young people.

3. Voter education and awareness-raising

Donor agencies should provide funding and capacity-building support to youth-led and youth-serving CSOs in order to support campaigns for voter registration and electoral participation. Public-private partnerships should be fostered and sustained collaboration encouraged among institutions, CSOs, youth groups and both public and private sector stakeholders. Campaigns should be extended beyond electoral periods to reach newly eligible voters. As the credibility of the Nigerian electoral system significantly influences whether registered voters choose to participate in elections, INEC should utilise empirical evidence from perceived electoral integrity (PEI) studies to inform strategies aimed at strengthening public trust and confidence in election administration.

4. Leverage technologies

The Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) portal should be adapted and enhanced to make registration easier and more appealing to young people. Efforts should focus on streamlining the process to minimise repeat visits to registration centres.

5. Internships and networking

INEC, CSOs and political parties should establish internships and volunteer initiatives focused on election management to provide young people with valuable hands-on experience. Additionally, it is essential to develop the necessary information infrastructure for social networking to expand outreach efforts among young people, including the creation of a regional knowledge hub for sharing materials and initiatives related to youth participation.

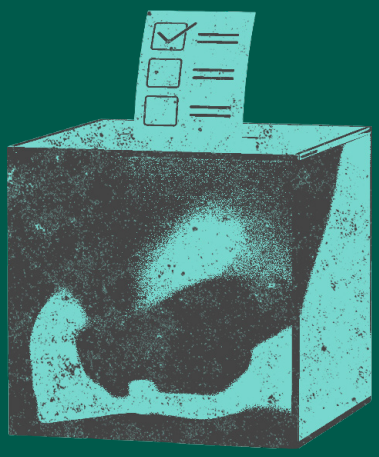
6. Political parties

should subsidise the costs associated with purchasing nomination forms to facilitate greater youth involvement.

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This case study was conducted by Yiaga Africa is a non-profit civic hub of changemakers committed to building a people-driven, democratic, and developed Africa. Established in 2007 as a student-led initiative at the University of Jos, Nigeria, Yiaga Africa has emerged as one of Africa's leading civic organizations advancing democratic governance, human rights, and active citizenship. Through innovative programming and evidence-driven advocacy, we empower citizens to demand accountability, influence public policy, and actively shape their societies.

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YOUTH VOTER REGISTRATION COSTS & CHALLENGES

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