

# Millions of Nigerians are ready to vote in 2023 - Are you one of them?

By Pamela Uzoma



Photo by: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

## Introduction

As a democratic country, Nigerian elections are the only recognized means of bringing in leaders who will govern the state of affairs. This singular act demonstrates the enormous power and responsibility within reach of a Nation's citizens. However, relevant data shows that Nigerians have grown weary of voting. This act alone accounts for the increased voter apathy the country has been experiencing since the 2015 elections<sup>1</sup>. As Nigeria prepares to hold its seventh consecutive general election, this piece highlights current trends and convey reasons why citizens should get involved in not just the electoral process of registering and collecting their Permanent Voters Cards (PVC) but also ensure that they go to the polls to vote.

## Why should you vote?

1. **Exercise your democratic right:** Voting is a fundamental right enshrined in Nigeria's constitution. Citizens' participation in the electoral process - to vote, to campaign, and to seek elected office is a great avenue to project citizens' voices and take part in key decision-making that reflects the will of the people and puts in place measures of accountability. This (accountability) is particularly important in a country like Nigeria, where electoral integrity begs the question of being a facade or not. Current trends reveal that the more citizens refuse to exercise their democratic right to vote, the worse the threats to our

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<sup>1</sup> The Challenges of Free and Fair Elections in Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal" by Dr. Chris O. Ogbogbo - [https://www.academia.edu/19979239/The\\_Challenges\\_of\\_Free\\_and\\_Fair\\_Elections\\_in\\_Nigeria\\_A\\_Critical\\_Appraisal](https://www.academia.edu/19979239/The_Challenges_of_Free_and_Fair_Elections_in_Nigeria_A_Critical_Appraisal)

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electoral integrity. Here is a special call to all electoral officials, unbiasedness is the watchword and “no zone” for electoral corruption.

**2. Influence the direction of Nigeria:** The most immediate output of an electoral process is the election of a candidate to govern and represent. This output translates directly to citizens’ influence in the country's next phase or direction; by voting for the candidates and parties that align with their values and key priorities areas as highlighted in Manifestos. While deciding an ideal candidate is usually not an easy task considering Nigeria's political complexities with several political parties and numerous candidates presented at different levels of government amidst economic challenges, corruption, insecurity, and poverty, participating in the voting exercise is of great benefit. Furthermore, as West Africa’s largest economic and military power, Nigeria plays a crucial role in promoting regional stability and integration<sup>2</sup>. This, therefore, poses more responsibilities on why we must all show up at the poll these coming elections.

**3. Hold elected officials accountable:** By participating in Nigeria's elections, you can hold elected officials accountable for their actions and decisions while in office. This is important given Nigeria's challenges with corruption and poor governance. However, the commodification of votes has become a permanent feature of Nigerian elections - even within political parties during primaries. Instead of concentrating on issue-based politics, vote buying is prioritized with cash, food, clothing, and other commodities in exchange for votes -this should not be so. Citizens are expected to freely elect any candidate of their choice and be able to hold elected candidates accountable. This cannot be done if the basis of electing candidates through vote buying comes in.

**4. Represent your community:** Voting in Nigeria's elections is an opportunity to represent the interests of your community and help shape its future. By casting your vote, you can help ensure that your community's needs are heard and addressed by those in power. Casting your vote on election days usually makes the most significant impact on the community. We get to decide who we shall give power to, not only to be a leader but to bring meaningful change in our communities. Going out to the polls usually encourages or guilts those around you into doing the same. This chain reaction can increase voter turnout exponentially.

### Conclusion

In the quest for change and accountability of elected officials, the people have an essential role in moving a country forward. In the case of Nigeria, the growing voter apathy poses a risk to the democratic structures. Non-partisan citizens are most likely to bring in the wrong leaders because it leaves more room for rigging and vote buying. With this, it is imperative to note that every vote counts, and by

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<sup>2</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/article/5-things-know-about-nigerian-elections>

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participating in elections, citizens can make a real difference in the political process and help shape the country's future.