

DISCUSSION PAPER



# IMPROVING THE INTEGRITY OF NIGERIA'S REGISTER OF VOTERS

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# Acronyms

AFIS	Automated Fingerprint Identification System
AFIS	Automated Biometric Identification System
CVR	Continuous Voter Registration
DDCM	Direct Data Capture Machine
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
IVED	INEC Voter Enrollment Device
NIMC	National Identity Management Commission
NIS	Nigerian Immigration Service
NPC	National Population Commission
PVC	Permanent Voter Card

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We hope the paper inspires policy actions to improve the integrity of Nigeria's register of voters and encourage more research and documentation of our electoral process.

# Introduction

Registration of voters and compilation of the National Register of Voters is a core electoral activity in Nigeria. The 1999 Constitution makes it a core function of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in addition to conducting elections and referendums, managing political parties, constituency delimitation, and voter and civic education. The importance of a reliable register of voters to elections and democracy is not farfetched. First, it is the determinant of voting rights in Nigeria. Only Nigerian citizens whose names appear on the Register of Voters can vote in an election or referendum. Second, the register is a means of identifying the voter. A major factor undermining democratic elections in many countries is voter impersonation. Considering that elections are designed as a mechanism for determining citizens' choices, impersonation distorts this critical aspect of elections. Third and related to the risk of voter impersonation is the question of the integrity of an election. A poor register of voters is conducive to election rigging through impersonation, manipulation of a number of votes and voter suppression.

A fourth and critical importance of a voters register to elections and democracy is the access it grants voters. In Nigeria, voter access is determined by the possession of a Permanent Voters' Card (PVC). Only those on the register receive the PVC and, therefore, can vote. Fifth, the register of voters also determines the allocation of voters to polling units in Nigeria. The Electoral Act mandates INEC to register voters and allocate them to polling units. Only those whose names appear in the register in specified polling units can vote on election day. Finally, the register of voters is also related to voter turnout. Not only is level of turnout dependent on the number of voters in the register, more importantly, research literature shows that there is a correlation between voter registration and voter turnout. Thus, Ansolabehere and Konisky argue that in the United States, states with more facilitative registration of voters tend to record more turnout.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, not only is a reliable register of voters at the heart of election integrity, it also inspires public confidence in elections. Not surprisingly, voter registration is one of the key categories of the much-cited Perception of Electoral Integrity Index (PEI Index) developed by Pippa Norris and her team.<sup>2</sup>



*In the United States, until recently, getting enrolled was not difficult and different canvassing organizations helped to enroll voters. Also, until recently in many states, voters were not required to show a photo identification to be able to vote.*

<sup>1</sup>Ansolabehere, S. and Konisky, D. M. 2006. "The Introduction of Voter Registration and Its Effect on Turnout". *Political Analysis*. Vol. 14, No. 1. p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Norris, P., Frank, W. and i Coma, F. 2014. "Measuring Electoral Integrity Around the World: A New Dataset", *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 4. pp. 790 – 791.

Different democracies have different levels of strictness in compiling the register of voters or voters' roll. In the United States, until recently, getting enrolled was not difficult and different canvassing organizations helped to enroll voters. Also, until recently in many states, voters were not required to show a photo identification to be able to vote. In the United Kingdom, eligible voters are expected to self - enroll by completing a form delivered annually to residences. The form is used to declare the number of voters living in the postcode and to enroll intending new voters. The general concern is that where enrollment is permissive, the roll may not inspire confidence. For instance, in the United States, there have been repeated accusations of fraud, as well as claims of impersonation in the register. Some observers argue that increasing stringent measures for voter registration and voting, especially the use of photo identity cards, are targeted at minority and disadvantaged groups, such as black communities and immigrants. Other countries like Nigeria have more stringent voter registration and identification procedures. The Nigerian constitution and the Electoral Act establish the requirements and procedure for voter registration.

Further conditions are specified in the regulations, guidelines and manuals of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), some of which are regarded as subsidiary legislations. At the same time, there is also a stringent voter identification process, which is linked to the Register of Voters. The Electoral Act provides for INEC to issue voters' cards (or permanent voters' card) to voters whose names are in the Register of Voters<sup>3</sup>. The Permanent Voters' Card (PVC) qualifies a voter to vote on election day. In fact, if a voter's name is in the register, but he/she does not have a PVC, then he/she cannot vote<sup>4</sup>.

The underlying assumption behind these stringent voter registration and identification processes in Nigeria is that they protect elections from abuse. In other words, strict registration measures ensure high integrity of the voters' register and, by extension, elections. Ironically, despite these stringent measures in registering and identifying voters, many Nigerians and election observers continue to question the integrity of national and local elections. A significant part of the concern lies with the integrity of the Register of Voters because the integrity of the register could make or mar an election. As Evrensel correctly notes, "the quality of the process and product –that is, the voters' roll– can determine the outcome of an election and consequently the stability of the democratic institutions in a country".<sup>5</sup>

What is the problem with Nigeria's compilation of the voters' register? What are the challenges with the current register? How could the integrity of the register be enhanced? These are the questions that this discussion paper addresses.



*A major part of the concern is with the integrity of the Register of Voters. The integrity of the register could make or mar an election.*

<sup>3</sup>Section 47, Electoral Act 2022

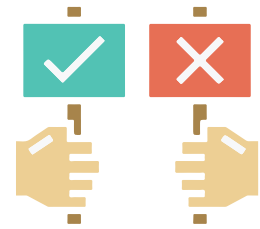
<sup>4</sup>Section 5, 19, INEC Regulations and Guidelines, 2022

# Brief history of voter registration in Nigeria

The elective principle was introduced in Nigeria in 1922, following the reforms initiated by the Governor, Sir Hugh Charles Clifford. The 1922 Clifford Constitution abolished the Nigerian Legislative Council and expanded the mandate of the Lagos Legislative Council to cover the whole of the Southern Nigeria Protectorate, with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria to be governed by proclamation.<sup>6</sup> The Constitution introduced four elected seats in the forty-six-member Legislative Council, three for Lagos and one for Calabar. The qualification to vote entailed adult suffrage (at least 21 years), a one-year residency and a gross income of 100 and 20 pounds per annum in Lagos and Calabar respectively.<sup>7</sup>

The 1946 Richards Constitution, which became operational on 1st December 1947, created a Central Legislative Council for the whole country for the first time and expanded its membership to forty-four members. However, all but four of these members were nominated. Only the four members from Lagos and Calabar, dating to the Clifford Constitution, remained elected members still on the same qualified suffrage. However, the gross income qualification was reduced to 50 pounds.<sup>8</sup> The Constitution also created non-legislative bicameral legislatures consisting of a House of Chiefs and a House of Assembly in the Northern, Western and Eastern Regions. These legislatures did not make laws, but only advised the Central Legislative Council in Lagos. In effect, the elective principle remained only for the four seats representing Lagos and Calabar.

Table 1 shows that Universal adult suffrage was first introduced for the 1954 Federal election in the Eastern Region and Lagos. From the Table, Sklar reports that 1,039,551 voted in the election in the Eastern Region. The universal adult suffrage was “virtually” adopted in the Western Region for the 1956 regional election. In all, 1,899,520 were registered, while 1,291,174 voted, representing a 68% turnout. For the 1959 Federal election that heralded Nigeria’s independence in 1960, the universal adult suffrage applied to the Eastern and Western Regions, while the Northern Region applied the universal male suffrage, rather than the taxpayer suffrage that had been used for primary elections in the region in 1954 and 1956. Table 1 also shows the number of registered voters and turnout for the 1959 Federal election. A total of about 9 million voters registered, while roughly 7.2 million voted, representing a turnout of 79.8%. In the Eastern Region, the turnout



*Universal adult suffrage was first introduced for the 1954 Federal election in the Eastern Region and Lagos.*

<sup>7</sup>Ogbogbo, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). 2021. Electoral Constituencies in Nigeria: Division, Revision and Alteration. Discussion Paper No. 2. Abuja: INEC. p. 6. Ogbogbo, “Historicizing the Legal Framework of Elections in Nigeria” p. 44.



was 75.3%, in the Western Region it was 71.2%, in the Northern Region it was 89.4%, while it was 76.2% in Lagos. It was not until the 1964/65 House of Representatives election that the universal adult suffrage became applicable throughout Nigeria. In other words, prior to that election not all adult Nigerians could be registered to vote. At some point, it was limited by income, at other times by gender and yet at others by taxpaying. With the nationwide universal adult suffrage, the register of voters in Nigeria, as shown in Table 2, has continued to grow in leaps and bounds increasing from 60.8 million in 2003 to about 93.5 million in 2023. This represents an average increase of 6.5 million voters every four years. The foregoing chequered history of voter registration in Nigeria shows the struggles that Nigerians have waged over the years for the right to vote. At the heart of these struggles has been the voters' register. Indeed, having a register that is inclusive, transparently compiled and inspires the confidence of citizens remains central to Nigeria's democratic development.

**Table 1: Nigerian General Elections 1951 - 1961**

<i>Election</i>	<i>Method of Voting*</i>	<i>Candidates per Constituency</i>	<i>Qualifications of Electors</i>	<i>Number of Persons Registered</i>	<i>Number and Percentage of Those Registered Actually Voting</i>	<i>Total Seats</i>
Eastern regional election of 1951	3-stage electoral college system	Multi-member constituencies	Taxpayer suffrage at the primary level			84
Western regional election of 1951	3-stage electoral college system; direct voting in Lagos	Multi-member constituencies	Taxpayer suffrage at the primary level; universal adult suffrage in Lagos			80
Northern regional election of 1951	4- or 5-stage electoral college system	Multi-member constituencies	Taxpayer suffrage at the primary level			90
Eastern regional election of 1953	2-stage electoral college system	Multi-member constituencies	Taxpayer suffrage at the primary level			94
Federal election Eastern Region, 1954	Direct, secret ballot	Multi-member constituencies	Universal adult suffrage		1,039,551	42
Federal election Western Region, 1954	Direct, secret ballot	Single-member constituencies	Taxpayer suffrage			42
Federal election Northern Region, 1954	2- or 3-stage electoral college system	Multi-member constituencies	Taxpayer suffrage at the primary level			92
Federal election Southern Cameroons, 1954	Indirect	Multi-member constituencies				6
Federal election Lagos, 1954	Direct, secret ballot	Single-member constituencies	Universal adult suffrage			2
Western regional election of 1956	Direct, secret ballot	Single-member constituencies	Virtually universal adult suffrage	1,899,520	1,291,174 (68%)	80
Northern regional election of 1956	2- or 3-stage electoral college system in rural electoral districts; Direct, secret ballot in urban electoral districts	Multi-member rural district constituencies; single-member urban district constituencies	Taxpayer suffrage at the primary level			131

Eastern regional election of 1957	Direct, secret ballot	Multi-member constituencies	Universal adult suffrage	1,767,008	Plural voting (46.78%)	84
Federal election of 1959	Direct, secret ballot	Single-member constituencies	Universal adult suffrage in the East and the West; universal male suffrage in the North			
<b>Total</b>				9,036,083	7,185,555 (79.8%)	312
<b>East</b>				2,598,234	1,929,754 (75.3%)	73
<b>West</b>				2,653,188	1,887,209 (71.2%)	62
<b>North</b>				3,640,284	3,258,520 (89.4%)	174
<b>Lagos</b>				144,377	110,072 (76.2%)	3
Western regional election of 1960	Direct, secret ballot	Single-member constituencies	Universal adult suffrage			124
Northern Regional election of 1961	Direct, secret ballot	Single-member constituencies	Universal male suffrage	3½ million		170
Eastern Regional election of 1961	Direct, secret ballot	Single-member constituencies	Universal adult suffrage	2,712,598	1,554,420 (57.3%) in 135 contested constituencies	146

**Source:** Sklar, R. 1963. Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp. 32 – 33

**Table 2: Registered voters and turnout 1964 – 2023**

Election	Date	Registered voters	Voters actually voting	Turnout (%)
House of Representatives	30 December 1964 & 18 March 1965	N/A	5,761,483	N/A
Senate	07 July 1979	48,633,782	12,532,195	25.8
House of Representatives	14 July 1979	48,633,782	14,941,555	30.7
Presidential	11 August 1979	48,633,782	16,846,633 (valid votes)	NA
Presidential	6 August 1983	65,304,818	25,430,096 (valid votes)	NA
Presidential	12 June 1993	38,866,336	14,293,396 (valid votes)	NA
Senate	20 February 1999	57,938,945	24,386,247	42.1
House of Representatives	20 February 1999	57,938,945	23,573,407	40.7
Presidential	27 February 1999	57,938,945	30,280,052	52.3
Senate	12 April 2003	60,823,022	29,995,171	49.3
House of Representatives	12 April 2003	60,823,022	30,386,270	50.0
Presidential	19 April 2003	60,823,022	42,081,735	69.1
Presidential	21 April 2007	61,567,036	35,397,517	58.0
Presidential	16 April 2011	73,528,040	39,469,484	53.7
Presidential	28 March 2015	67,422,005	29,432,083	47.1
Presidential	23 February 2019	84,004,084	27,324,583 (valid votes)	34.7
Presidential	25 February 2023	93,469,008		26.7

## Legal framework

Nigeria, like most contemporary democracies, guarantees universal adult suffrage, with the Nigerian Constitution defining adulthood as the attainment of 18 years of age. The laws also make the voter registration “continuous”, although there is no clear definition of what continuous means, leading INEC to variously define it. Nigeria also has a very stringent voter registration provisions in its laws. Sections 77 (2) and 117 (2) of the 1999 Constitution clearly defines a person entitled to register to vote as a Nigerian citizen, who has attained the age of 18 and is residing in Nigeria at the time of registration. The 2022 Electoral Act further elaborates on qualification to be registered. According to Section 12 of the Act:

*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 (d) is not subject to any legal incapacity to vote under any law, rule or regulation in force in Nigeria.*

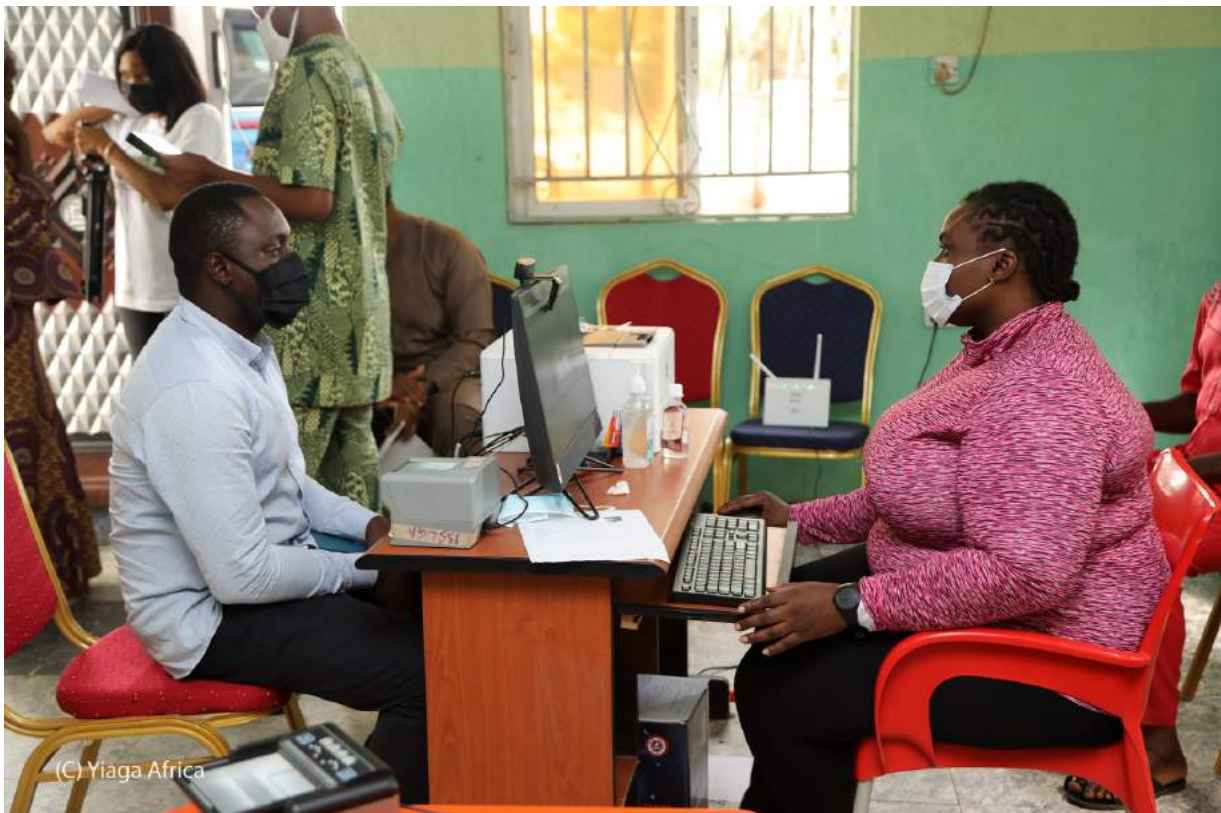


The Electoral Act also provides for the procedure for registration, which includes appearance in person, presentation of a birth certificate, national passport, identity card or drivers' license , or "any other document that will prove the identity, age and nationality of the applicant". The Act further prohibits multiple registration and imposes a fine and jail term for such a breach. In fact, there are 18 separate offences and penalties related to the registration of voters in Nigeria, which are presented in Table 3. These legal provisions are further detailed in INEC's guidelines for Continuous Voter Registration (CVR)



*Among other things, it is often said that Nigeria's voters' registers are inflated, particularly with multiple and bogus registrants, and that its compilation and management are not transparent and efficient.*

Despite these stringent legal and operational provisions, over the years voter registration in Nigeria has not inspired the deep confidence of the public and political actors. Among other things, it is often said that Nigeria's voters' registers are inflated, particularly with multiple and bogus registrants, and that its compilation and management are not transparent and efficient. For instance, the register compiled for the 2007 general election contained several fictitious names. The question remains: how do stakeholders ensure the integrity of the voters' register? But how do we frame the questions of with regards to the register of voters?



**Table 3: Offences related to Registration of Voters and Penalties**

<b>1.1 Failing to give information</b>		
Any person who after demand or requisition made of him or her under this Act without just cause, fails to give any such information as he or she possesses or does not give the information within the time specified.	A fine not more than N100,000 or imprisonment for a term not more than one year or both.	Section 23 (1) Electoral Act 2022
<b>1.2. Giving or transmitting false information</b>		
Any person who in the name of any other person, whether living, dead or fictitious, signs an application form for registration as a voter to have that other person registered as a voter, transmits or is involved in transmitting to any person as genuine a declaration relating to registration which is false in any material particular, knowing it to be false.	A fine not more than N100,000 or imprisonment for a term not more than one year or both.	Section 23 (1) Electoral Act 2022
<b>1.3. Procuring false or fictitious registration</b>		
Any person who intentionally procures the inclusion in the Register of Voters of his or herself or any other person with the knowledge that he or she or that other person ought not to have been registered ; or by his or herself or any other person procures the registration of a fictitious person, commits an offence.	A fine not more than N100,000 or imprisonment for a term not more than one year or both.	Section 23 (1) Electoral Act 2022
<b>1.4. Causing or hindering another person from registering as a voter</b>		
Any person who—		
(a) by duress, including threats of any kind causes or induces any person or persons generally to refrain from registering as a voter or voters; or  (b) hinders another person from registering as a voter, commits an offence.	A fine not more than N500,000 or imprisonment for a term not more than five years.	Section 22 (2) Electoral Act 2022

<b>1.5. Buying, attempting to buy, selling or attempting to sell, or unlawfully possessing any voter's card</b>		
Any person who-		
(a) is in unlawful possession of any voter's card whether issued in the name of any voter or not; or  (b) sells or attempts to sell or offers to sell any voter's card whether issued in the name of any voter or not; or  (c) buys or offers to buy any voters' card whether on his own behalf or on behalf of any other person, commits an offence	A fine not more than N500,000 or imprisonment for a term not more than two years or both.	Section 22 Electoral Act 2022
<b>1.6. Holding more than one valid voter's card</b>		
No voter shall hold more than one valid voters' card	A fine not more than N500,000 or imprisonment for a term not more than one year or both.	Section 16 (2) & (3) Electoral Act 2022
<b>1.7. Issuing a REPLACEMENT permanent voter's card less than 90 days before polling day</b>		
No person shall issue a replacement permanent voter's card to any voter less than 90 days before polling day	A fine not more than N200,000 or imprisonment for a term not more than two years or both	Section 18 (3) & (5)
<b>1.8 Destroying, mutilating or altering documents required for registration</b>		
A person who without authority, destroys, mutilates, defaces or remove or makes any alteration in any notice or document required for the purpose of registration under this Act.	A maximum fine of N1,000,000 or to imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both.	Section 114 Electoral Act 2022
<b>1.9 Making false or multiple registration as a voter.</b>		
A person who presents his or herself to be or does any act whereby he or she is by whatever name or description howsoever, included in the register of voters for a constituency in which he or she is not entitled to be registered or causes his or herself to be registered in more than one registration or revision centre.	A maximum fine of N1,000,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both.	Section 114 Electoral Act 2022

**1.10 Impersonating, applying by self or by proxy for inclusion in any other list of voters.**

<p>Any person who—</p> <p>(a) applies to be included in any list of voters in the name of some other person, whether such name is that of a person living or dead or of a fictitious person.</p> <p>(b) having once to his or her knowledge been improperly included in a list of voters under this Act as a voter entitled to vote at any election, applies, except as authorised by this Act, to be included in any other list of voters prepared for any constituency as a voter at an election.</p>	<p>A maximum fine of N500,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both</p>	<p>Section 119 (1) &amp; (2) Electoral Act 2022</p>
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**1.11 Making false publication to prevent registration.**

<p>A person who publishes any statement or report which he or she knows to be false or does not believe to be true so as to prevent persons who are qualified to register from registering as voters.</p>	<p>A maximum fine of N1,000,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both.</p>	<p>Section 114 Electoral Act 2022</p>
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**1.12 Making false entry or statement.**

<p>A person who makes in any record, register or document which he or she is required to prepare, publish or keep for the purpose of registration, any entry or statement which he or she knows to be false or does not believe to be true.</p>	<p>A maximum fine of N1,000,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both.</p>	<p>Section 114 Electoral Act 2022</p>
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**1.13 Impeding or obstructing a Registration or Revision Officer.**

<p>A person who impedes or obstructs a registration officer or a revision officer in the performance of his or her duties.</p>	<p>A maximum fine of N1,000,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both.</p>	<p>Section 114 Electoral Act 2022</p>
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**1.14 Misrepresenting or personating the identity of a Registration or Assistant Registration Officer.**

<p>A person, who without proper authority, wears the identification of a registration officer or assistant registration officer or wears any other identification purporting to be the identification of a registration officer or assistant registration officer.</p>	<p>A maximum fine of N1,000,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both.</p>	<p>Section 114 Electoral Act 2022</p>
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<b>1.15 Forging a Registration Card.</b>		
A person who forges a registration card.	A maximum fine of N1,000,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both.	Section 114 Electoral Act 2022
<b>1.16 Carrying out Registration or Revision in an undesignated centre.</b>		
A person who carries out registration or revision of voters at a centre or place not designated by the Commission.	A maximum fine of N1,000,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both.	Section 114 Electoral Act 2022
<b>1.17 Failing to Display or Publish Voters' Register.</b>		
An official or staff of the Commission, who fails to display or publish the voters' register for public scrutiny at every Registration Area and on its official website or any website established by the Commission for that purpose.	A fine of N100,000 or imprisonment for a term of six months or both.	Section 19 (1) & (5) Electoral Act 2022
<b>1.18 Improper use of government and public corporation vehicles or boats.</b>		
<p>No person shall provide for the purpose of conveying any other person to a registration office or to a polling unit any government vehicle or boat, or any vehicle or boat belonging to a public corporation except in respect of a person who is ordinarily entitled to use such vehicle or boat and in emergency in respect of an electoral officer.</p> <p>Any person who contravenes the provisions of this section, commits an offence.</p>	A maximum fine of N500,000 or imprisonment for a term of six months or both.	Section 118 Electoral Act 2022



# Conceptualising the Integrity of a Voters' Register

The integrity of a voters' register could be imagined as the product of three interconnected factors, namely, a robust legal and regulatory framework, adequate citizen participation and public oversight, and a strong enrollment and data management system (Fig. 1). The legal and regulatory framework sets out the rules, which must ensure that all other factors are actualized. A strong enrollment and data management system is at the heart of compiling a voters' register. Among other things, it should guarantee adequate access to citizens to enrol, deploy a sound

and well-tested technology, and ensure that those who conduct registration are well-trained and have the necessary skills. Finally, citizen participation is an important measure of the success of registration. For one thing, they must turn out to be registered. But beyond that, citizen's oversight of the process gives it legitimacy. The interaction of these three factors then ensures that the registration process and the resultant voters' register are transparent, inclusive, and enjoy public trust, which collectively define the integrity of the register.

**Fig. 1: Interaction of factors making for the integrity of Voters' Register**

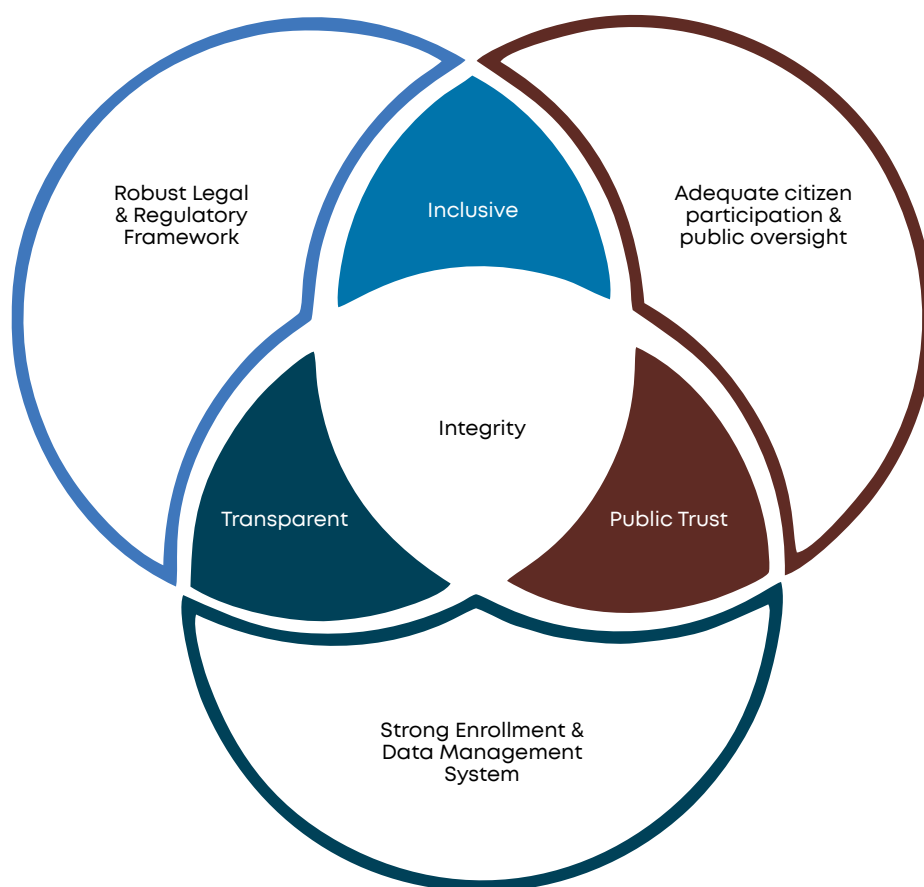


Table 4 further shows how the three main factors are expressed empirically. There are 16 indicators of the integrity of a register of voters, which are clustered according to the three main factors. They include for the legal and regulatory framework, a clear and well publicized enrollment procedure backed by legislation, clear protocols for updating and cleaning up the register, effective system of claims and objections, public access to the register, and cost-effectiveness. For citizen participation and public oversight, the indicators include adequate opportunities for people to register, including people with special needs, adequate participation of stakeholders in observing the process, and public acceptance of the registration and register. Finally, for enrollment and data management system, efficient deduplication and clean-up of the

register, effective update of the register, including removal of persons who should not be in the register, such as foreigners, underaged and deceased persons, compliance of officials with all the enrollment and data management rules, publication of disaggregated enrollment data and robust data protection, are key indicators of integrity. Finally, deriving from these three factors and their indicators, three key principles underlie the integrity of a register namely, effectiveness, access and accountability. The enrollment system must be effective by deploying the best methodology and ensuring adequate access to stakeholders, particularly registrants. Additionally, it must be based on a high level of accountability by the authorities responsible for registration and the resultant register.

**Table 4: Factors making for the integrity of the Voters’ Register and their indicators**

Factors	Indicators
Robust legal and regulatory framework	
	1.Well publicized enrollment procedure
	2.Clear rules and procedures for updating and cleaning up the register
	3.Effective claims and objections provisions
	4.Register is readily available to stakeholders
	5.Strong correspondence between numbers in register and number of identification cards (PVC) issued
	6.Cost is reasonable, comparable to the experiences of other countries
Adequate citizen participation and public oversight	1.Adequate opportunities and time for eligible persons to register
	2.Provides adequately for citizens with special needs or are marginalized
	3.Full involvement of stakeholders and citizen groups, such as political parties, CSOs and observer groups
	4.High level of public acceptance of the registration process and its outcome – the register

Strong enrollment and data management system	1.Efficient deduplication and clean-up of the register
	2.Effective update of the register, including removal of persons who should not be in the register, such as foreigners, underaged and diseased persons.
	3.Strong compliance of officials to all the enrollment and data management rules
	4.Number of registered voters is specific, disaggregated and published
	5.Fits a reasonable model of estimating the size of voting population
	6.Robust data protection and system security



## Emergence of biometric registration

Partly to overcome the historical problems of voters' registers in Nigeria and to increase their integrity, INEC introduced a biometric register in 2006. In the run up to the 2007 general elections, INEC began compiling a biometric register using what it called the Direct Data Capture Machines (DDCM). This is basically a laptop computer with two peripherals attached – a webcam and a fingerprint scanner. Unfortunately, the process was dogged by problems ranging from power supply, scarcity of machines, inability of INEC officials to manipulate the machines and of course breakdown and maintenance problems. In some cases, potential registrants had to buy fuel to power the generators to run the DDCM. It is not surprising that the register compiled from that exercise was dogged by many problems. There were obviously fictitious names like Mike Tyson, presumably the American boxer, and several names moved from one state to other states. In fact, a major criticism of the 2007 general election bordered on a very badly compiled and manipulated Register of Voters.<sup>7</sup>



*The new Commission therefore made the compilation of a reliable register one of its priorities towards the general election initially scheduled for later that year*



(c)Yiaga Africa

<sup>7</sup> Ibrahim, Jibrin and Ibeanu, Okechukwu (eds). 2009. Direct Capture: The 2007 Nigerian Elections and Subversion of Popular Sovereignty. Abuja: Centre Democracy and Development.

Consequently, when a new Commission was appointed in July 2010, it met a register that had inaccurate entries, poor picture quality, numerous duplicate entries, many records without pictures and fingerprints, underage registrants. The new Commission therefore made the compilation of a reliable register one of its priorities towards the general election initially scheduled for later that year. The election was later moved to 2011 partly to enable the Commission to compile a new register. The challenges with the old register were traced to inadequate or inappropriate equipment, substandard equipment due to absence of harmonized specifications to suppliers, inadequate or poorly trained registration staff, issues with the software running the equipment, licensing issues, inability to integrate data collected using different equipment, as well as inadequate backend facilities.

Still, the Commission decided that a biometric register was best for Nigeria, particularly to prevent the practice of having to conduct fresh nationwide registration for every general election. However, to achieve this required both fundamental changes to both the equipment and methodology. In summary the plan for the new registration exercise was as follows:

1. Acquire and deploy one Direct Data Capture Machine (DDCM) in each of the 120,000 polling units in the country, which would serve as registration centres with a 10% redundancy. This brought the total number of devices acquired to 132,000 units. Essentially, this meant 132,000 each of laptops, fingerprint scanners, webcams and self-powering printers. At the time, this was said to be the largest single computer hardware contract globally.
2. Develop the necessary registration software to be fully owned by the Commission.

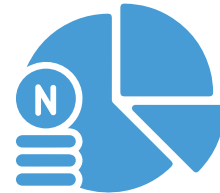


3. Overhaul the backend data management system at both the national and state levels – procure new servers, acquire appropriate software, ensure data protection, train staff, etc.
4. Provide detailed specifications for hardware and software. For the hardware, the technical team of the Commission produced a very professional and detailed request for quotes, including the specification of paper scissors.
5. Recruit and train 360,000 registration staff.

It was estimated that with the plan, registering one person every nine to ten minutes and working eight hours daily, about 70 million Nigerians would be registered in 14 days. In the end, over 73 million people were registered.

The approved budget for 2011 registration exercise was 87.7 billion Naira. The high cost was attributable to the short time within which the registration was to be completed to meet the legal requirement of the date of the election. The original plan was to complete it in two weeks, starting from 15 January 2011, but was later extended for another one week. Also, the methodology entailed conducting the registration simultaneously in all the 120,000 polling units. This meant that the registration hardware had to be provided for all the 120,000 locations, at least three registration and review staff had to be deployed in each location, as well as enormous backend data processing resources. Still the Commission was able to drastically reduce the cost of the exercise by depending on open-source software to run the operations and to write its own

software, “The Open VR”, for capturing the data at the frontend. The Ubuntu Linux was deployed as the operating system free of charge, while “The Open VR” has remained in use since 2011 with occasional modifications. It was estimated at the time that all these saved Nigeria well over 80 million US dollars in licensed software alone.<sup>10</sup>



When the 2011 voter registration came to an end, the database was the largest storage of the biometrics and other information

*The approved budget for 2011 registration exercise was 87.7 billion Naira.*

of Nigerians. It contained the details of over 73 million Nigerians, including their ten fingerprints, photographs, addresses and phone numbers. A big challenge during the registration was the stability of the Open VR software, which arose from inadequate time available to properly test it before deployment. However, the technical team provided excellent support with several updates to the software during the exercise. This was recognized by organizations that observed the exercise.<sup>11</sup> After the registration, other challenges relating to data management arose. It became clear that the Commission did not have the infrastructure for the database. There were a few old IBM servers running the Oracle database, but they had either broken down or, in one case, been locked because of licensing and contracting issues. Consequently, the Commission decided to implement a new architecture for the database. First, it decided that rather than have a single mammoth iron server, it would acquire a series of

<sup>10</sup>Chief Technical Adviser to the INEC Chairman at the time, I recall that the Commission received price quotations of about 300 dollars per

<sup>11</sup>See for instance, Project 2011 Swift Count. 2011. Interim Report of the Voter Registration Exercise for the 2011 General Elections. Abuja: Project 2011 Swift Count. p. 2.

servers and link them to maximize their computing power. Second, it decided to also implement an open-source database software, settling for the open-source PostgreSQL and MySQL. Although this was widely criticized by “experts” at the time, who insisted that Oracle was the world’s leading database software, the Commission argued that open-source software was cost-effective and offered the possibility of developing internal database management capabilities and reduced external dependence on experts. Moreover, although prior to the time the Commission paid millions of dollars in database management software, it did not have any of the servers containing data from previous registration.

INEC also grappled with deduplication as part of the challenges with data management since the Commission anticipated multiple registrations during the registration exercise. In the registration methodology had included the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS). The problem was the matching methodology due to the large data pulled in, the computing resources available and the timeline within which to complete it in the light of the election, which was less than 60 days away. The AFIS entailed matching the ten fingerprints of each record against the over 73 million other records. Considering these problems, AFIS was run daily on each machine at the 120,000 registration locations to weed out identical records, that is, individuals who register more than once in one area. Second, after the registration, AFIS was also run for all data for each state. And finally, AFIS was run for contiguous states of Nigeria. The logic was that it would be difficult for a person to vote in one state and proceed to another state to vote a second time on election day. In effect, INEC did not run the AFIS for the over 73 million records in

the national database.

One other challenge was an attempt by some contractors and government officials to convince President Goodluck Jonathan to stop INEC from conducting the registration of voters, under the pretext that it was too expensive and they possessed the required data of voters.

In a meeting of several agencies collecting biometric data of Nigerians, including INEC, with President Jonathan, the contractor in question, a French company, made a presentation in which it made several unsubstantiated claims against INEC’s voter registration plans. It even offered to give INEC about 50,000 of the machines it used for the national civic registration. Incidentally, the same contractor had applied to INEC to conduct



*In the registration methodology had included the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS). The problem was the matching methodology due the large data pulled in, the computing resources available and the timeline within which to complete it in the light of the election, which was less than 60 days away.*

the voter registration and was turned down. But more interestingly, the same contractor had handled the civic registration conducted some years earlier by the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC). It locked down the data and denied NIMC access due to a contractual rift. At the end of the meeting, the President dismissed their claims and urged INEC to continue with the voter registration as planned.

Finally, there was also a sinister attempt to take over all INEC registration equipment and sequester its accounts by a company that claimed that the Commission infringed its copyright. Apparently, the company had registered the DDCM as its “invention”. Curiously, the Patents Office registered the patent within a very short time. Even more curious was that it accepted that a combination of a laptop, webcam, fingerprint

scanner, external battery and printer is an “invention”. Above all, a court agreed with this company and the Commission was ordered to pay billions of Naira to this bogus patent holder, otherwise its accounts would become subject to a garnishee court proceeding. Again, the Commission successfully challenged this, and the registration proceeded as planned.



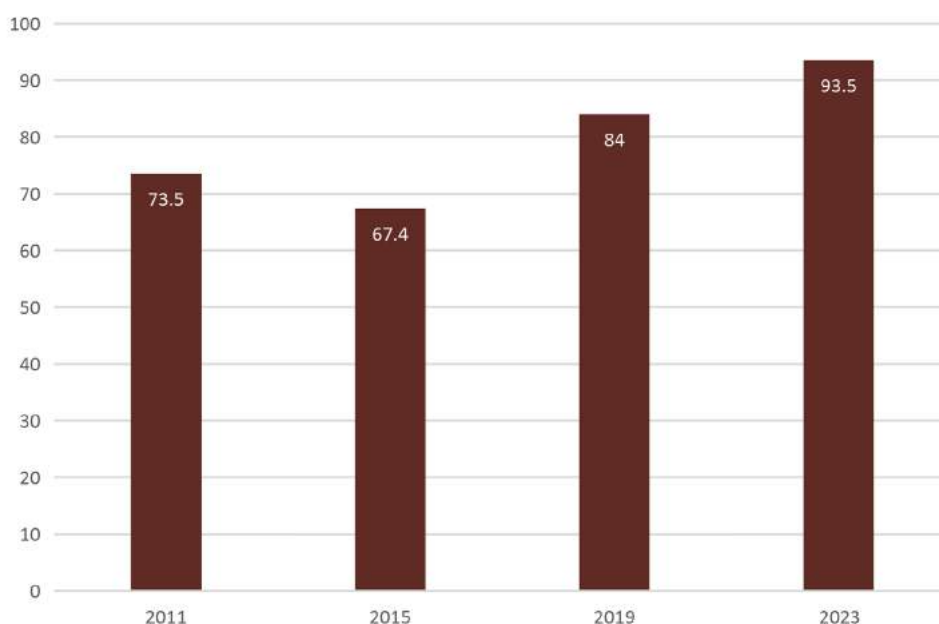
# Analysis of Nigeria's current Register of Voters

The register compiled from the 2011 registration exercise has remained the foundation of the current register. The Commission achieved one of its main objectives in conducting the 2011 exercise: no new nationwide registration would be conducted in the future, as the register would be a reliable base for subsequent Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) provided in the Electoral Act. The decision will end the trend of conducting fresh nationwide registration of voters before every general election. National voter registration costs a lot of money and often subjects the electoral Commission to pressure to complete the registration in good time for elections.

Following its compilation, the 2011 register has been the backbone of CVR for three electoral cycles. For the 2015 general

election, the number of registered voters fell from about 73 million to about 68 million. This was mostly due to improved deduplication of the database. With more time and resources, further deduplication and cleanup of the database was conducted between 2011 and 2015, which led to a reduction of 5 million in the number of registered voters. Between 2015 and 2019, about 16 million voters were added to the register, bringing it to 84 million. This is attributed to the conduct of voter registration on a continuous basis. Also, there was more enthusiasm among potential voters, especially young voters, following the improvements in the electoral process between 2010 and 2015. For the 2023 general election, over 93 million voters were on the database (see Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2: Registered voters, 2011 - 2023**



There have been substantial improvements in the voter registration process and the Register of Voters since 2011, which have encouraged more eligible voters to register. In 2018, a new generation of DDC Machines were introduced by the Commission. With durable batteries, the new device addressed the power challenges experienced with previous generations of the DDCM. Also, the Open VR software was modified and improved, with the inclusion of disability as a registration field. This enhanced commission's ability to provide for the specific needs of Persons with Disability (PWDs) during elections. In addition, the software is more stable after several iterations and deployment for voter registration since 2011. One of the important developments in voter registration occurred in April 2017, when the Commission decided to conduct the CVR continuously as envisaged in the Electoral Act<sup>12</sup>.

In the voter registration exercises before 2017, the Commission scheduled a certain period every year for registration. Traditionally, the exercise would only last for a few weeks. The major constraint on adopting a continuous approach to voter registration was funding, especially with the expectation that the Commission would repeat the 2011 methodology of having all the polling units as registration centres. However, in 2017, the Commission began to deploy for voter registration in the Registration Areas and Local Government Areas of all the states and the wards and area councils of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. In addition, it created several additional registration centres to cater for high- turnout areas. These deployments lasted longer than before, and INEC intermittently allotted more time for backend data management before continuation. However, the entire process

was usually suspended not later than 90 days to a general election, in line with the Electoral Act<sup>13</sup>.

The most notable improvement in voter registration since 2006, when biometric capture of voter began is the incremental deployment of technology in compiling the register. The weaknesses of the first generation of data capture machines include non-standardization of equipment, very low interoperability of different hardware and software, lack of standardisation of data, licensing challenges and technology peonage. By technology peonage, we mean that INEC became captured by those supplying it with registration technology, including selling ransomware. In one case from the 2006 registration, a company contracted for the registration returned data to INEC encrypted and demanded further payment to decrypt the data.

Since the 2011 registration exercise, tremendous progress has been recorded in voter registration. INEC introduced a new standardised data-capturing (both hardware and software) and overhauled the back end of the registration technology. These improvements laid the foundation for introducing a new generation of Permanent Voters' Cards (PVC) with chips containing the voter's biometrics. It also paved way for the use of technological devices for accreditation of voters, first, the Smart Card Reader (SCR) in the 2015 and 2019 general elections, and the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in 2023.

In 2021, INEC introduced the third generation of voter enrollment device to replace the old DDCM, which it calls the INEC Voter Enrollment Device (IVED). This marked a transition from the old laptop-based DDCMs to a tablet-based

<sup>12</sup>Section 10, Electoral Act 2022

<sup>13</sup>Section 9(6) Electoral Act 2022

enrollment device. IVED is less bulky and provides about the same data capturing power as the DDCM. In addition, it eliminated the bulky external batteries that accompanied the DDCM. More importantly, the IVED transitions into the BVAS during elections, thus saving the Commission enormous amount of money. In 2021, the Commission also introduced online display of the preliminary register from CVR for claims and objections. Claims and objections, which offers the public an opportunity to report errors and ineligible voters to the Commission, is a mandatory legal provision. Over the years, it has been one of the weakest aspects of the registration process. Displaying the preliminary register online afforded the public a more effective way of recording their claims and objections.

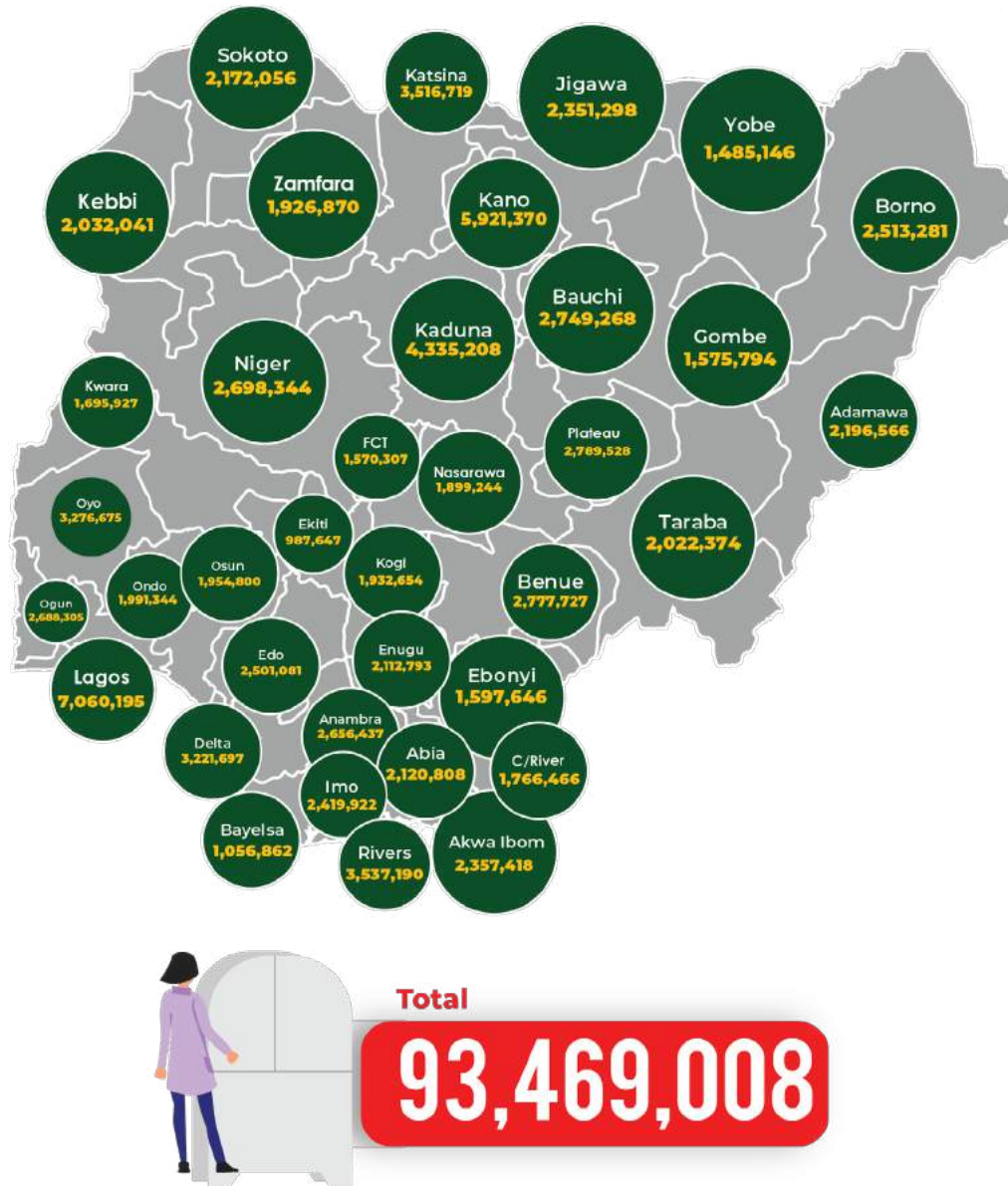
Easily the most important technological innovation in voter registration in Nigeria was the introduction of online registration. This was introduced as part of the 2021/2022 Continuous Voter Registration (CVR), which ran from 28th June 2021 to 31st July 2022, when it was suspended to prepare and integrate the data into the register for the 2023 general election. At the end of the exercise, 31, 098,093 registrants applied for fresh registration, transfers, update of information and reviews. Of this number, 10,487,972, representing about 34% of all applications, were made online. The online registration was an instant success as the portal allowed registrants to pre-register their details and book an appointment for biometrics capture at one of the INEC registration centres.

These improvements led to the addition of 9,464,924 new registrants into the Register of Voters, bringing it to 93,469,008. Figures 3 and 4 show the distribution of voters in the present register. Lagos and Kano states continue to lead in the number of voters (Fig. 3),. Fig. 4 shows the disaggregated data showing various categories of registered voters. INEC has improved tremendously in providing disaggregated data of registered voters, which is a major consideration in the integrity of a voters' register.



*In 2021, the Commission also introduced online display of the preliminary register from CVR for claims and objections.*

**Fig. 3: Distribution of registered voters by State, 2023**

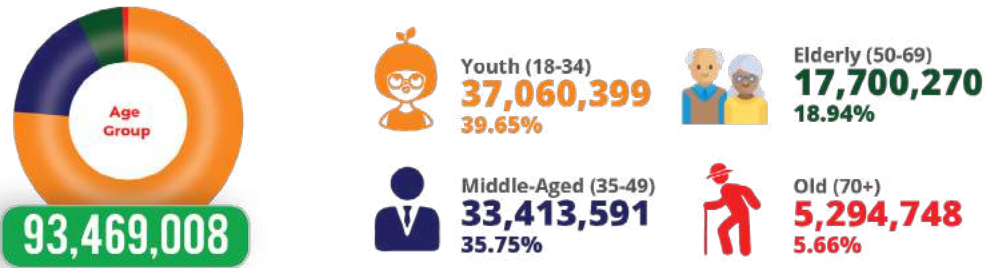
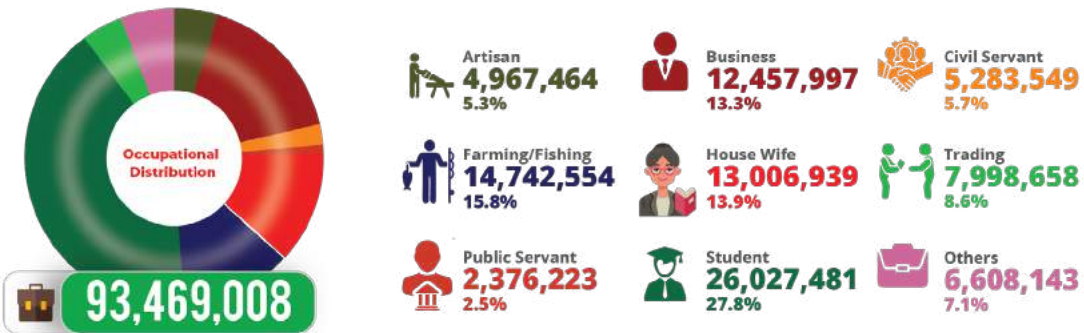
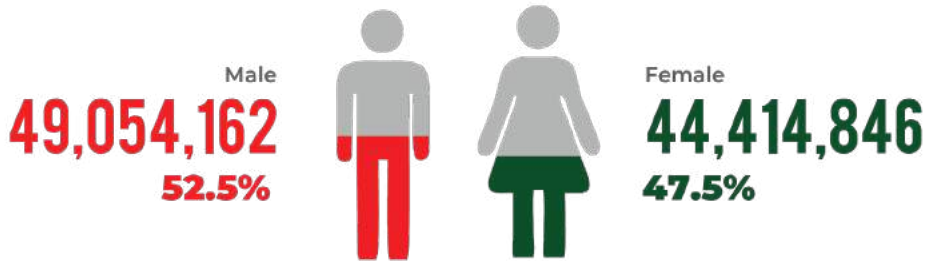


**Source:** Mahmood Yakubu. 2023. "Nigeria's 2023 Elections: Preparations and Priorities for Electoral Integrity and Inclusion". Lecture Delivered at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), London, 17th January. p. 3.

Fig. 4: Registered voters disaggregated by various categories, 2023

# VOTER DISTRIBUTION

## By Categories



**Disability**



Figures only available for the latest CVR (June 2021- July 2022) when data on disability was collected.

**Source:** Mahmood Yakubu. 2023. "Nigeria's 2023 Elections: Preparations and Priorities for Electoral Integrity and Inclusion". Lecture Delivered at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), London, 17th January. p. 12.

# Challenges with the current Register of Voters

Despite substantial improvements in the registration of voters since 2011, the present register has its challenges. There have been growing concerns about whether the register captures Nigeria's voting population. Notwithstanding the robust mobilisation of voters, especially young people, the relatively low turnout for the 2023 general election brought this concern back into bold relief. Also, the high number of uncollected Permanent Voters' Cards further underscored these concerns. Several challenges have confronted the compilation of the voters' register, which undermines its integrity.

## **Absence of a legal and policy framework for cleaning the register**

There is no clear long-term policy for cleaning up the register. Apart from deduplication, not much work is done with cleaning up the register. Consequently, there are still many persons that were legitimately registered, but should no longer be on the Register, such as deceased persons and persons who have permanently relocated out of the country. To address the issue of deceased persons in the register, the Commission since 2019 has been "nulling"<sup>14</sup> the names of prominent deceased persons before publishing the final register for each general election. However, this scarcely addresses the problem. Part of the challenge with clean-up of the register is that the National

Population Commission (NPC) does not have reliable data on deceased persons. It is even more difficult to get reliable data from Immigrations Service about Nigerians who may have relocated permanently out of the country. In short, the challenge here is not exclusively that of INEC, but a general problem of gathering and managing population data in Nigeria.



*Part of the challenge with clean-up of the register is that the National Population Commission (NPC) does not have reliable data on deceased persons.*

## **Politically motivated inflation of the register**

One of the legends of the voters' register in Nigeria is its inflation for political reasons, through the inclusion of persons who are ineligible to be registered. This is a widely held view among politicians and the electorate alike. Yet, it is difficult to say by how much the register may be inflated. However, the repeated discovery of confirmed foreigners in the register, as well as a lingering problem of underage registrants strongly suggests that the register may be inflated. Beyond registering the ineligible, there is also the lasting issue

<sup>14</sup> Nulling is the term used by the Commission to designate such removal. This thinking is that since there is no clear legal/policy framework for removing persons who were legitimately registered from the register, their names should be "nulled", but left in the register. Consequently, such names will not be published with others.

of multiple registration. At the end of the last phase of CVR in July 2022, about 45% of all registrations nationwide, rising to as high as 50% in some states, were detected by the Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS) deployed by INEC as either multiple registration or incomplete registration. These invalid cases were not included in the Register of Voters. Previously, INEC used the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) to

clean up the register, but ABIS is said to be a more comprehensive and robust system, involving not just fingerprint recognition but other biometrics, such as facial recognition. Despite being criminalized by Section 114 of the 2022 Electoral Act with a “maximum fine of N1,000,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both”, many people continue to indulge in multiple registrations.

**Table 5: 2021/2022 Continuous Voter Registration (CVR)**

State	CVR Completed Voter Registration	Completed Pre-Registration	Completed Walk-Ins	Suspected Duplicate Registration	Automatically Flagged as Duplicate Registration	Adjudicated	Invalidated Applications	Valid Registration	% Invalid
ABIA	48,109	16,061	32,048	30,367	23,834	36	23,870	24,239	49.6%
ADAMAWA	62,059	14,172	47,887	34,309	22,584	95	22,679	39,380	36.5%
AKWA IBOM	91,541	14,509	77,032	57,952	44,656	278	44,934	46,607	49.1%
ANAMBRA	138,802	15,980	122,822	69,278	62,367	331	62,698	69,524	45.2%
BAUCHI	80,127	31,570	48,557	44,795	28,949	1,370	30,319	49,808	37.8%
BAYELSA	132,628	79,355	53,273	96,921	86,297	2,653	88,950	43,678	67.1%
BENUE	47,161	15,483	31,678	24,737	16,289	12	16,301	30,860	34.6%
BORNO	48,965	22,109	26,856	31,491	22,254	1,415	23,669	25,296	48.3%
CROSS RIVER	58,194	6,848	51,346	36,820	29,758	86	29,844	28,350	51.3%
DELTA	140,299	91,904	48,395	89,377	69,580	650	70,230	70,069	50.1%
EBONYI	58,228	48,097	10,131	39,934	34,962	18	34,980	23,248	60.1%
EDO	52,013	8,733	43,280	26,881	19,454	94	19,548	32,465	37.6%
EKITI	40,234	23,759	16,475	24,143	17,258	392	17,650	22,584	43.9%
ENUGU	27,155	9,088	18,067	15,166	11,760	13	11,773	15,382	43.4%
FCT	43,001	9,315	33,686	18,010	14,534	121	14,655	28,346	34.1%
GOMBE	42,307	21,437	20,870	25,921	18,112	261	18,373	23,934	43.4%
IMO	16,511	5,663	10,848	8,879	6,941	204	7,145	9,366	43.3%
JIGAWA	64,299	24,096	40,203	42,529	28,785	226	29,011	35,288	45.1%
KADUNA	52,308	32,855	19,453	28,397	18,634	700	19,334	32,974	37.0%
KANO	128,628	44,437	84,191	75,772	50,720	653	51,373	77,255	39.9%
KATSINA	53,919	13,846	40,073	32,886	21,816	30	21,846	32,073	40.5%
KEBBI	60,113	13,218	46,895	38,356	25,169	583	25,752	34,361	42.8%
KOGI	77,338	29,371	47,967	47,449	34,076	2,695	36,771	40,567	47.5%
KWARA	77,546	31,171	46,375	44,606	29,487	273	29,760	47,786	38.4%
LAGOS	50,778	29,673	21,105	21,884	14,342	73	14,415	36,363	28.4%
NASARAWA	46,781	16,871	29,910	26,655	18,166	1,625	19,791	26,990	42.3%
NIGER	67,630	11,597	56,033	37,940	24,285	561	24,846	42,784	36.7%
OGUN	37,407	11,781	25,626	21,986	14,738	1,008	15,746	21,661	42.1%
ONDO	40,047	17,027	23,020	23,958	16,807	645	17,452	22,595	43.6%
OSUN	218,142	152,886	65,256	128,512	84,329	4,301	88,630	129,512	40.6%
OYO	78,420	29,550	48,870	45,214	29,803	3,356	33,159	45,261	42.3%
PLATEAU	43,195	15,547	27,648	26,414	18,456	284	18,740	24,455	43.4%
RIVERS	120,555	43,168	77,387	77,208	63,373	709	64,082	56,473	53.2%
SOKOTO	80,115	33,513	46,602	52,448	34,402	2,037	36,439	43,676	45.5%
TARABA	38,110	6,517	31,593	22,331	15,908	1,691	17,599	20,511	46.2%
YOBE	27,724	10,474	17,250	15,266	10,351	44	10,395	17,329	37.5%
ZAMFARA	33,069	12,701	20,368	20,626	13,491	109	13,600	19,469	41.1%
TOTALS	2,523,458	1,014,382	1,509,076	1,505,418	1,096,727	29,632	1,126,359	1,390,519	44.6%

## Weak compilation and auditing practices

The inflation of the register during registration is not unrelated to some weak compilation and auditing practices. Although INEC has clear guidelines for the registration of voters, in many centres, they are observed in breach. This breach is partly due to poor training of registration officers but also the result of poor or inadequate registration facilities, shortages of consumables or poor attitude of INEC officials. Since the registration officers are mostly ad hoc staff, the Commission's oversight and control are limited, especially when deployed in remote areas of the country. For example, during the 2011 registration, it was reported that some registration officers engaged in fake registrations by using still pictures and simulated "fingerprints" using the stub or tail end of palm fruits and pieces of polyurethane foam. INEC systems have been modified to detect such records and multiple registrations. Notwithstanding, it is nearly impossible to eliminate such suspect records entirely, considering the number of records and collusion between politicians and INEC officials.

## Data management and processing

A major source of the problems with the register is the backend management of data. This is central to being able to remove ineligible records from the system. One problem is to develop adequate processing power to carry out the matching of biometrics. When the AFIS was in use between 2011 and 2021, a recurrent complaint from the ICT Department of INEC is inadequate server space and processing power to conduct a nationwide

matching of the fingerprints, considering the enormity of the cases to be matched. At some point, the data of each registrant was split between two different servers from where they are pulled for processing due to low storage space. This was fraught with risk of losing records or mismatching data. Subsequently, the Commission depended on cloud servers for data processing. It should be expected that some of these challenges would persist with the introduction of ABIS, which involves not only the matching of fingerprints, but also the faces of registrants. In fact, on 14th September 2022, the spokesperson of the Coalition of United Political Parties (CUPP), Ikenga Imo Ugochinyere alleged the padding of the register in Imo State ahead of the 2023 general election. He specifically alleged that Omuma Ward in Oru-East Local Government Area of Imo State, which happens to be the home of the Governor of Imo State, had its register inflated by nearly 40,000 mostly fictitious voters, from about 6,500 registered voters in 2015 over 46,000 voters. This was partly corroborated by INEC, which confirmed that many ineligible records had been found in the register for the area but that they were being removed.<sup>15</sup> This case has now been suggestively called "the Omuma magic".<sup>16</sup>

Data security also remains a persistent concern. In an era of widespread cyber insecurity, it is inevitable that this will be a major concern. The Commission has tried to deal with this by maintaining secure backups of the national register at different locations. In addition, the main national database is offline, which would have increased the risk of cyberattacks. Moreover, each state has its own register domiciled in the state. The ultimate goal is to ensure rapid disaster recovery should

<sup>15</sup>See Amaechi, Ikechukwu. 2022. "2023 elections and the fake registrants in Imo". Vanguard Newspaper (online) <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/09/2023-elections-and-the-fake-registrants-in-imo/>. September, 22. [Accessed 18th November 2023].

<sup>16</sup> Orjime, Moses. 2023. "CUPP Raises Alarm, Accuses Uzodimma of Fresh Plot to Rig 2023 Elections". Leadership Newspaper (online) <https://leadership.ng/cupp-raises-alarm-accuses-uzodimma-of-fresh-plot-to-rig-2023-elections/>. [Accessed 18th November 2023].



there be an attack on the database. However, this strategy presumes that such pernicious attacks will be external. The risk of internal sabotage remains grave and over the years INEC has been working very hard to secure the national register from internal sabotage by improving on the regulation of access to the voter register databases and introducing more robust audit trails. The continuous use of external experts and consultants for managing some of the critical tasks of data management must be constantly monitored by the relevant standing committee of the Commission, which should include thorough independent security checks. Ultimately, all the critical backend functions should be managed by INEC staff.

### **Cost of voter registration**

The cost of voter registration in Nigeria is excessively high due to the sheer size of the country. While it is difficult to precisely determine the full cost of CVR, any methodology adopted by INEC has cost implications. INEC expended over 87 billion Naira on the 2011 registration because the registration was conducted at the polling unit level. However, since the register produced from that exercise remains the baseline for all CVR since then, the annual cost has reduced drastically. This reduction is attributed to the

Commission policy to limit the registration centres to the 8809 registration areas and wards in the country, rather than polling units, although with the occasional special centres to serve high-traffic locations. For the 2019 CVR the Commission budgeted 5,124,473,950 naira, as shown in Table 6. This detailed breakdown is necessary to properly educate the public on the actual magnitude of these electoral activities, given the size of Nigeria.

One important point about the cost of voter registration in Nigeria relates to its integrity cost. While the core cost of voter registration is high due to the size of Nigeria, the overall cost is also driven up by integrity costs. These are costs arising from the need to specifically secure the integrity of the process. It involves the physical protection of registrants, INEC officials and materials, and the protection of the collected data. These two integrity cost components continue to rise in Nigeria, with the high insecurity and the tendency of political actors to manipulate electoral processes. In fact, the introduction of expensive technologies for voter registration is principally to secure the integrity of the process, as well as improve the efficiency of voter registration. Finally, the absence of reliable census and civic registration data drives up the cost of registration.

**Table 6: Detailed breakdown of 2019 INEC CVR budget**

1.	Form ECA 1 Booklet 1 per Polling Unit (120,000) and (4,500 for HQ & Zonal Stores) @4,500.	498,000,000
2.	Adhesive Transparent Film for laminating temporary voters' card (TVC) 10% of Registered Voters in each State (7,827,906) @40.	313,116,240
3.	DDCMs Ink Cartridges for the printing of temporary voters' card (TVC), 3 pairs per Registration Centre (8,809) and 280 pairs for HQ	934,945,000
4.	Inkless Pad for Thump Printing of the Registration Booklet. 1 per Registration Area, RAs (8,809) and 2,100 for each Zonal Store of 6 @4,200	46,035,950
5.	A4 Papers for Printing of temporary voters' card and register of voter for display of claims and objections. 1 Carton per Registration Area (8,809) and 391 for HQ. @9,800.	90,160,000
6.	Registration forms (EC series 15 types) for states and the 6 Zonal Stores. 10% of Registered Voters in each state and 6 Zonal Stores (51,517,824) @15 naira.	772,767,360
7.	External Media Storage (High Capacity), Hard Drive for Back of Data @ Registration Centres (2,252) @50,000.	112,600,000
8.	Power Surge Protection, for the charging of DDCMs at Registration Area (RAs) and for HQ use (6,922) @12,000	115,458,000
9.	Honoraria for Registration Officers, Registration Officers (ROs & RAOs @N3,600 Honoraria + N500 feeding + N500 Transport = N4,600)/ day/personnel @6 days	765,844,800.
10.	Honoraria for Security, Security @ N500/day 2/ RA & 2.LGA @6 days	57,498,000
11.	Logistics Support to State, Servicing, Fueling of Generators @ N4,500/ RA and EO's Allowance @ N50,000/ LGA	78,340,000
12.	Stakeholders Meeting in the States and Support for States @ N50,000/ LGA	51,820,400
13.	Display and Hearing of Claims and Objections, REVO and AREVO @4,000 per day per personnel for 5 days	425,474,700
14.	Printing of Register for Pre-CVR, Cartridges 10pcs per State @ N300,000 and Maintenance Kits 6 per State @N250,000	240,526,500
15.	Supervision by Commission members, Hon. Commissioners and RECs	19,334,000
16.	Technical Support and Help Desk for providing support during CVR	26,575,600
17.	Arch Lever file & Transparent cellophane bag for securing PVC Collection Register @ 2per PU (120,000 PUs) @ N444	106,478,400
18.	Honoraria for PVC Distribution, Honoraria for Distribution of PVC Personnel @N3,600 Honoraria, N500 for feeding and N500 for Transport = N4,600 per day for 5 days per personnel	425,454,000
19.	Honoraria for Security, Security @ N500/day 2/ RA & 2.LGA @6 days	44,045,000
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,124,473,950</b>

## **Poor interagency collaboration**

A cost-effective production of the register of voters requires good interagency collaboration involving INEC, the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), National Population Commission and the National Bureau of Statistics and Immigrations Service, among others. The harmonisation of data collection templates and other frameworks would greatly reduce both cost and time. In the past, INEC collaborated with these agencies. For instance, for the 2011 voter registration exercise, it was in fact, at the instance of NIMC that INEC decided to collect the ten fingerprints of registrants. This was necessary to bring it in tandem with NIMC's database. Before then, INEC only registered four fingerprints – thumb and index fingers. INEC has also collaborated severally with the NPC around cleaning up the register. In that collaboration, NPC was to provide INEC with information about deceased persons who might be in the register. Also, there was a long period of collaboration between NPC and INEC around the harmonization of the former's census Enumeration Areas and the latter's Registration Areas. The logic was, among other things, to easily determine the number of eligible voters in a Registration Area, based on census data. In addition, INEC has collaborated with the Immigrations Service to detect foreigners with the PVC and to expunge them from the register. A major area of collaboration among these agencies, especially the NBS is to produce a reliable model for estimating the number of eligible voters in Nigeria. The number of potential voters in Nigeria remains conjectural. Yet, it is possible for these agencies to collaborate to determine a feasible model that takes into consideration census figures, records of births and deaths, civic registration numbers, migration figures, and so on.

The heuristic numbers from this model will assist INEC immensely in projecting and predicting numbers for CVR.

One problem with these collaborations is that the other agencies do not have adequate data to provide to INEC. In fact, in 2018 NIMC requested data from INEC's voters' register to help it populate its own database. Also, the data from both the NPC and NIS have been either unsubstantial or comes in mere trickles. A further problem has been funding of these agencies. Sometimes, the collaborating agencies look up to INEC to fund these collaborations from its own budget.

## **Interdepartmental rivalries in INEC**

Within INEC, there is a lingering challenge of interdepartmental collaboration on voter registration. Although the situation continues to improve, the desire of the two Departments central to voter registration, namely, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Voter Registry, to control their respective functions sometimes creates frictions. At some point in the past, the two departments were one, but the functional density resulting from further application of technology to elections and massive expansion in the number of registered voters, led to the creation of two separate departments. The Commission may consider treating CVR as a special electoral event and create a CVR Coordinating Committee (CVRCC) of the Commission for that purpose.

## **Access and inclusivity**

A good register must reflect the diverse constitution of the population. It should pay particular attention to usually underprivileged groups. Access and inclusivity address the extent to which registration and the register provide adequate opportunities for citizens to

register, particularly disadvantaged groups like Persons With Disability (PWD), senior citizens, the youth, women and other persons with special needs. Another area that has attracted attention in the Commission in recent times is prisoners voting. Many Nigerians in prison do not have the opportunity to register and to vote. A collaboration between INEC and the National Correctional Service (NCS) to register convicts in their custody did not achieve much. Also, there is an increasing demand by Nigerians in the diaspora to be registered. This would require far-reaching legal amendments. It should be part of future discussions around the inclusivity of the Register of Voters.

### **Uncollected Permanent Voters' Cards**

There is an organic relationship between the Register of Voters in Nigeria and the Permanent Voters' Cards (PVC). The electoral legal framework provides for issuing PVCs based on the register. The growing number of uncollected

PVCs reaffirms inconsistencies in the voters' register. There have been varying explanations for the high volume of uncollected PVCs, including lack of interest by registrants to participate in elections, especially where the government makes it mandatory for civil servants to register, student populations who register in a location and move on to other locations, the poor attitude of INEC staff in providing the PVCs for collection, and the amount of time required to produce the cards. However, the high number of uncollected PVCs may be an indication of inflation of the register, especially with underage voters who are then unable to appear in public to collect their cards since the Electoral Act and INEC policy requires those registrants to collect the cards in person. The most serious threat to the integrity of elections from these uncollected PVCs is that politicians could get hold of them and use them to undermine elections. Considering the current method of voter identification during elections, INEC should strongly consider issuing the cards in very simple forms at the registration centres.

# Pathways to a Reliable Register of Voters in Nigeria

The importance of a credible register of voters to the integrity elections cannot be overemphasised. It is even more so in a fledgling democracy like Nigeria, where the electoral process is riddled with mistrust. Although Nigeria has very stringent rules on voter registration and the compilation of the register of voters, including several offences, these registers over the years have not inspired the trust of stakeholders. We have examined some of the sources of the mistrust regarding the current register, which are related to several challenges in its compilation and management. To be sure, the existing register, the compilation of which commenced in January 2011, represents a major improvement on pre-2011 registers. Prior to 2011, registers were compiled manually by filling out the details of registrants by hand in a large register. This was later typed out to form the voters' register. In 2002, the Commission experimented with the OCR technology and in 2006 introduced the biometric register. As we have seen, the 2006 exercise was largely unsuccessful, necessitating the total recompilation of a biometric register in 2011.

Based on our analysis, there are several pathways to raising the integrity of the present register. They are as follows:

1. Creation of an interagency framework for the clean up the register. This will be led by INEC in collaboration with the National Population Commission and National Identity Management Commission, the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria Immigrations Service, civil society and academia.
2. The voters' register should be effectively linked to census, civic registration and other databases for easy verification and updating.
3. The register needs to be depoliticized by increasing citizens' involvement in its compilation. Ironically, because of the mindset of politicians, the fact that INEC compiles the register immediately makes it prone to politicisation. Consequently, INEC should shift its focus from registration to management of the voters' register. It should allow other agencies to collect data based on clear guidelines as to procedure and quality of data and focus more on deduplication, verification and management of the data.
4. INEC should commence full online registration of voters immediately. The existing portal should be equipped with all the necessary capabilities for registrants to provide their information, as well as to capture their biometrics. The portal should be able to return a message confirming the successful registration of a voter and offer an electronic PVC to be printed and laminated by the registrant.
5. INEC should use companies like KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) for a phased establishment of 37,000 Points of Registration (PoR) across the country and request Nigerian governments and organizations to donate equipment

for online registration for these PoRs to assist citizens who may not have private access to the registration portal.

6. INEC should fully activate the use of Registration Area Officers (RAOs) and create a corps of Ad hoc Registration Officers (AdRAOs), with the latter drawn from serving NYSC members, to strengthen its registration of voters at the Registration Area/Ward level. RAOs and AdRAOs should lead a collaboration with mortuaries, community leaders, mosques and churches to gather election-related information about deceased persons for the Commission.
7. INEC and NIMC should collaborate to harmonize the National Identity Number (NIN) and Voter Identification Number. One simple way of doing this would be to modify NIN to include some unique aspects of a person's VIN. For instance, the last six digits of a NIN could be the VIN. NIMC can also offer voter registration services.
8. Discontinue the printing of PVCs and move the funds to voter registration. INEC should issue PVCs as a paper document at the point of registration,

which can be printed laminated by the holder. INEC should also offer downloadable PVCs from its registration portal, ensuring the necessary checks against identity theft.

9. INEC should start using specified identity documents such as international passports and National Identity Cards for voting. This should be piloted in several off-cycle and by-elections.
10. INEC should consider having an independent audit of the register using qualified external experts or organizations before publishing it for a general election. This will build public confidence and transparency.
11. INEC National Commissioners should exercise stronger oversight over staff who manage the registration and register, calling on qualified external experts where necessary. The relationship between different departments of the Commission in voter registration should be properly defined, streamlined and coordinated under a Standing Committee on Voter Registration.



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