

2027: NIGERIANS AT THE BALLOT



WHAT YOUNG NIGERIANS ARE REALLY THINKING ABOUT

Acknowledgements

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Authors' Note

As Nigeria moves closer to another national election cycle, young people are once again at the centre of political conversations, not only because they are the country's largest demographic, but because their choices and expectations may determine the direction of what comes next. We created this edition of the Citizen Report to look forward: to understand how young Nigerians and women feel about the next election, and what conditions will shape whether they participate or withdraw. While Nigeria's elections have historically generated energy, debate, and hope, recent turnout trends point to a more troubling reality. The 2023 general elections recorded the lowest voter turnout since the return to democratic rule in 1999, raising urgent questions about the future of participation and trust in the democratic process.

Across surveys, interviews, and desk research, one message emerges clearly. Young people are politically aware, connected, and motivated by issues that affect their daily lives. However, their engagement is strongly shaped by trust, trust that votes will count, that institutions will act appropriately, and that participation can translate into tangible change. Participation, in this sense, is not driven by enthusiasm alone, but by lived experience, safety, economic realities,

representation, and the evolving digital information environment.

What young Nigerians choose to do next, whether to show up or step back, carries significant implications for Nigeria's democratic future. The future of the country's elections is not written yet, but the choices made between now and 2027 will help determine who shows up to write it.

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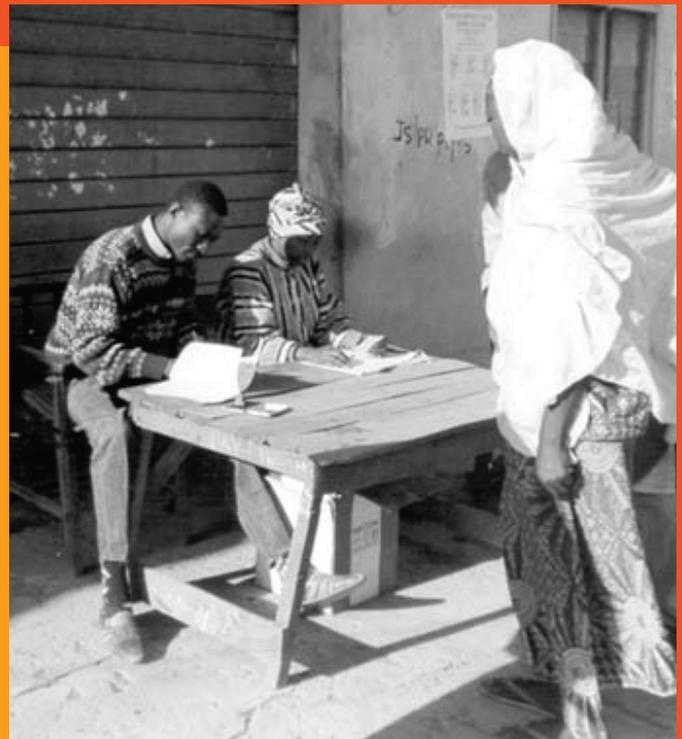
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SETTING THE STAGE



In 1999, Nigeria returned to democracy after years of military rule. People lined up at polling units in numbers that reflected hope. That first presidential election recorded over 52% voter turnout, and by 2003, it peaked at 69%, the highest in Nigeria's history.



Fast forward to 2023, more than 93 million Nigerians registered to vote, but only 27% showed up. It was the lowest turnout in the country's democratic journey. For a nation with one of the world's youngest populations, over 60% under the age of 30, the gap between voter registration and voter turnout has become one of democracy's biggest paradoxes. Aside from the challenges of unavailable Personal Voters Cards (PVCs), there has been a series of reports of missing PVCs, poor communication on the place and time of collection and alleged extortion by INEC officials in the process. The combination of all these factors is enough to challenge citizens' confidence in the process.

Young people (18-35), who should be the heartbeat of the process, are often missing at the ballot box. In 2019, they made up 51% of registered voters; by 2023, that share had dropped to 39.6%. Women, too, remain stuck at the margins.

Though nearly half of registered voters are female, they occupy less than 5% of seats in the National Assembly, which in itself reflects a decline.

This is the setup for 2027. On one side, Nigeria has the numbers: a youthful, digitally connected population and women who hold untapped political power. On the other hand, there's apathy, distrust, and a long shadow of unfulfilled promises

So when we ask the question "Will you vote in 2027?", it's not just about polling day. It's about whether Nigerians, especially young people and women, still believe their vote can change anything. It's about whether the largest demographics in the country are ready to show up, or whether they will stay away, leaving the future to be decided by a few.

2027 is a stress test of Nigeria's democracy.

key insights



KEY INSIGHTS

10,681

Number of young Nigerians Surveyed



key insights

48%

Will Definitely
Vote in 2027

85%

Supports Female
Candidacy

78%

Reports that
Economy Influence
their Voting

70%

Have Little to no
Trust in INEC





Methodology and Demographics

We surveyed 10,000+ young Nigerians: here's how we crunched the numbers

This study was designed and executed using a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative data collected through self-administered surveys and qualitative insights gathered by identifying key stakeholders and conducting expert interviews.

The quantitative data was collected across all 36 states in the country, including the Federal Capital Territory. The data was then cleaned and made ready for analysis.

This analysis serves three main purposes:

Diagnosis:

To uncover the drivers behind these attitudes, both motivating (“push”) factors like civic duty and reform movements, and discouraging (“pull”) factors like distrust, disinformation, and exclusion.

Solutions:

To provide actionable insights and strategies for policymakers, civil society, and electoral institutions, especially on how to rebuild trust, reduce barriers, and inspire participation among youth and women.

Ultimately, this report goes beyond numbers or forecasts and is about understanding the emotions, motivations, and lived realities behind the question:

Will Nigerians, especially young people and women, choose to show up for democracy in 2027?.

Forecast:

To gauge and project young Nigerians’ attitudes toward the upcoming 2027 elections, how they feel, what they expect, and whether they intend to vote.



A Young and Vibrant Sample

Nigeria is one of the youngest countries in the world, with a median age of 18.1 years and more than half of its population under the age of 30. This demographic reality forms the backdrop of our study and is reflected clearly in the composition of our respondents. The survey draws heavily from a group of vibrant young people with access to the internet. The data reveals an overwhelmingly youthful sample: over 80% of respondents are below the age of 35, with the largest groups falling within the 25–29 and 30–34 brackets. These are the same young adults who occupy Nigeria’s digital spaces, drive online political discourse, and form the backbone of contemporary civic movements. Their perspectives offer a valuable window into how Nigeria’s future electorate thinks, feels, and engages.

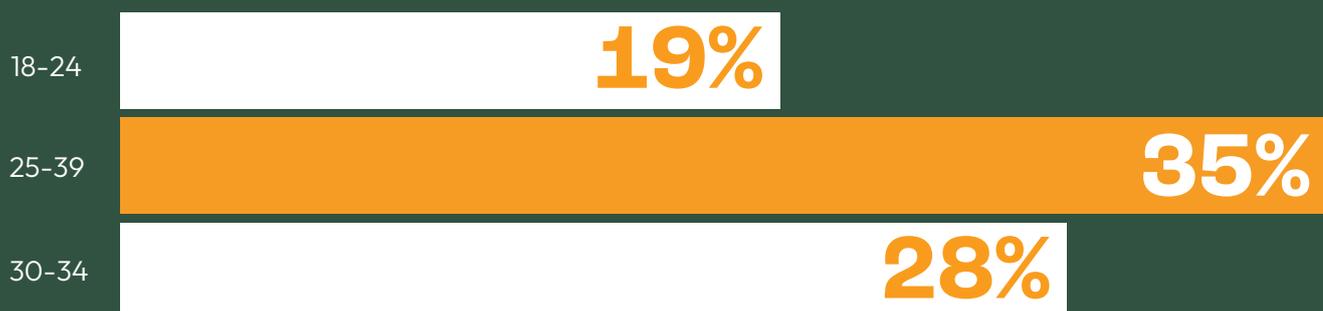
This youthful demographic is significant not merely because of its size, but because of its influence.



Young Nigerians today navigate politics in a world shaped by technology, economic uncertainty, social inequality, and rapid cultural change. They are more connected, more expressive, and more informed than previous generations. They consume news digitally, challenge institutional authority openly, and mobilize collectively, whether through hashtags, activism, or community organising.

By capturing the attitudes of this young and vibrant population, the survey provides critical insights into the emerging trends that will shape Nigeria’s democratic trajectory in the years ahead. Their voices underscore a broader shift in Nigeria’s electoral landscape: youth are no longer passive observers but active shapers of political narratives, expectations, and demands.

Age Distribution



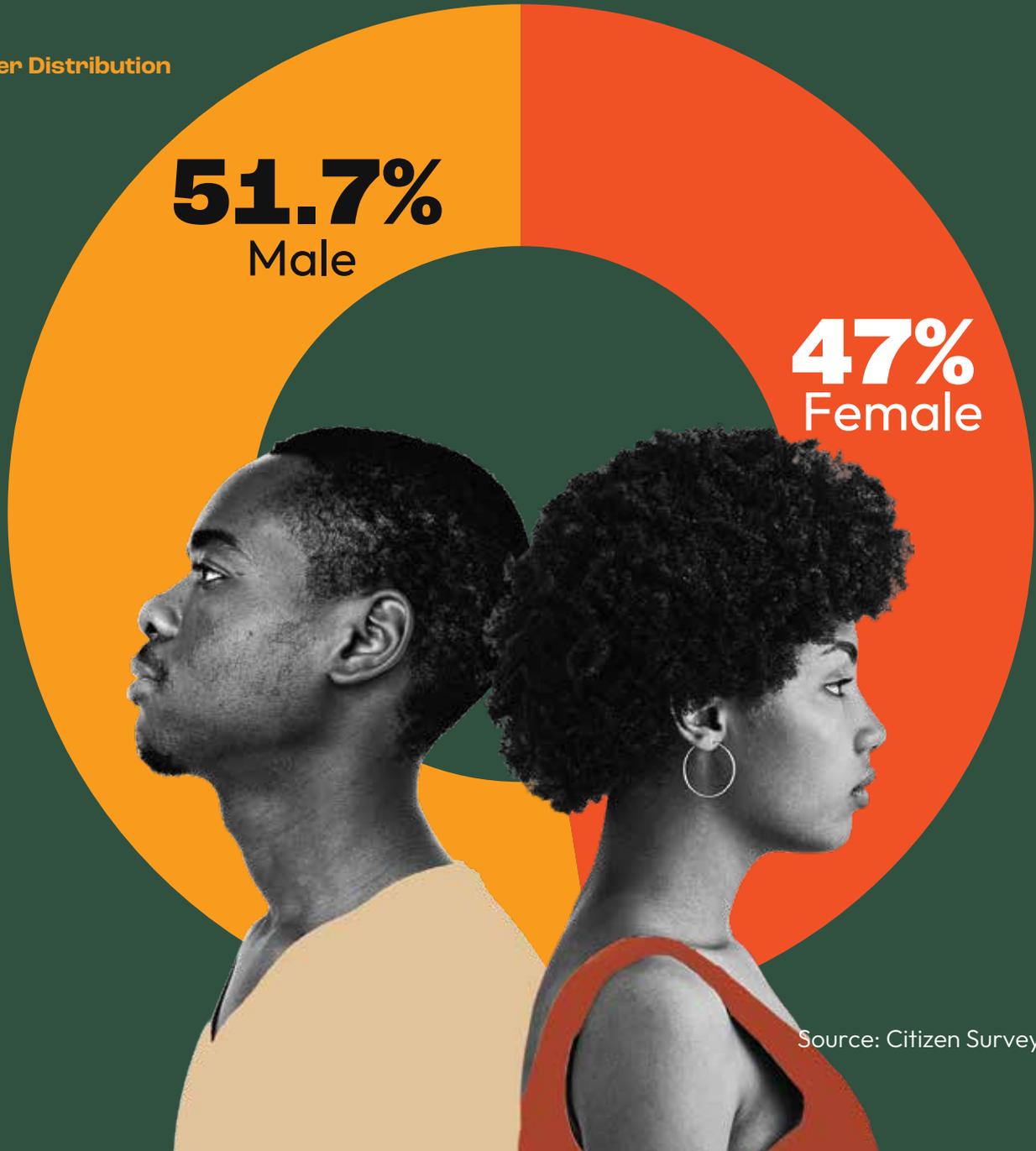
Source: Citizen Survey 2025

How Our Respondents Identify Across Gender

To understand youth attitudes toward elections, we must first understand who is speaking, and that begins with how respondents identify across gender. The gender distribution in our survey reflects the inclusive and diverse outlook of young Nigerians: 47% identified as female, 51.7% identified as male, and 1.3% preferred not to disclose their gender.

This balanced representation enhances the credibility of our findings, ensuring that the perspectives captured reflect the varied experiences and expectations of young Nigerians across gender identities.

Gender Distribution



Source: Citizen Survey 2025

Geographic Spread of our Respondents

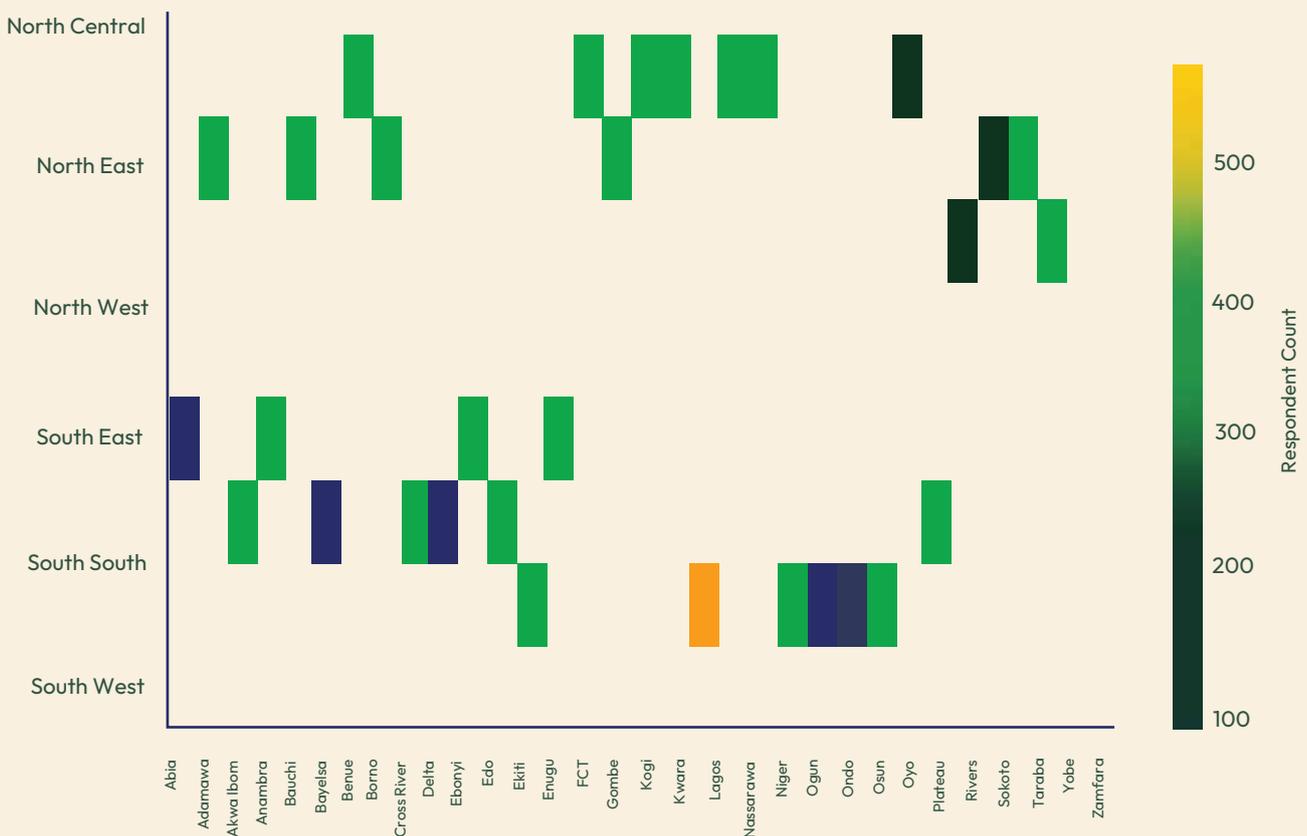
The survey reflects a broad and nationally diverse footprint, with youth respondents drawn from all regions of Nigeria. Participation spans every geopolitical zone, capturing perspectives across the country’s varied political, social, and regional contexts.

At the zonal level, the North Central, South West, and North East regions recorded the highest concentrations of respondents. The South South and South East also contributed substantial participation, while the North West registered comparatively lower participation.

Despite these variations, all zones are represented, reinforcing the national scope of the dataset.

State-level analysis further illustrates this diversity. The highest concentrations of respondents were recorded in Lagos (5.5%), Bauchi (4%), Adamawa (3.8%), Edo (3.8%) - Borno (3.5%), reflecting active youth participation across Medium-density participation from states such as Nasarawa and Niger (3% each), and Enugu (2.7%), points to consistent engagement. Lower participation from states, including Plateau (0.9%), Sokoto (1.5%), and Taraba (1.4%).

Geographical Heatmap of Respondents (Pseudo-Map Using State Intensities)



Source: Citizen Survey 2025



How We've Voted Over the Years

Understanding the Story Behind Nigeria's Declining Voter Turnout

If you line up Nigeria's elections from 1999 till now, one thing jumps out immediately:

The early excitement Nigerians had for democracy has slowly faded into "abeg, let me rest."

And the evidence is everywhere.

In a study by Fagunwa (2015), there was an empirical warning for years that turnout has been consistently falling, not because Nigerians stopped caring, but because the political environment keeps giving them fewer reasons to show up. Think of fraud, rigging, intimidation, violence, and state

interference- basically all the things that make an election feel like an obstacle course instead of a civic duty.

The Commonwealth Observer Groups' final post-2023 Nigeria elections report underscores this, pointing out areas of significant weakness and recommending improvements to bolster credibility.

Civil Society Organizations are not left out of these assessments. YIAGA Africa, in its post election report, highlights the persistent logistical challenges, technological failures and breaches of electoral integrity that continue to shape voter experiences long after elections.



A History Written in Ballot Boxes

Nigeria's democracy has seen seven general elections since 1999 — Each drop in voter turnout is not just a reflection of public disillusionment; it is also a direct consequence of the strain on the institution responsible for administering elections. The limited autonomy of INEC, constrained by its reliance on federal funding and susceptibility to political interference, further weakens electoral credibility (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2009).

In 1999, over 52% of registered voters turned out, a remarkable figure for a nation emerging from years of military rule. By 2003, that number climbed to 69%, the highest in Nigeria's democratic history, as citizens embraced the promise of renewal and accountability.

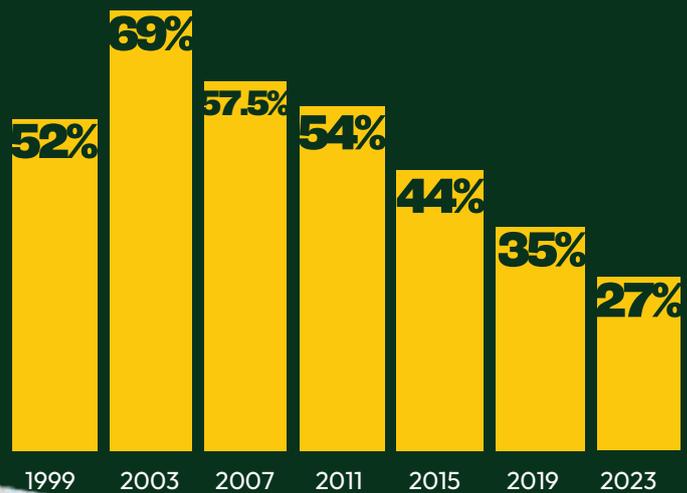
But the years that followed told a different story. By 2007, turnout fell to 57%, then to 54% in 2011, 44% in 2015, and 35% in 2019. The 2023 elections marked a new low: only 27% of registered voters cast their ballots, the smallest participation rate since 1999.

Each drop in turnout has its reasons, from electoral violence and logistical breakdowns to

deeper issues of trust, governance, and the perceived futility of voting. What began as democratic fatigue has evolved into a generational disconnection from politics itself.

Percentage of Voter Turnout in Nigeria's General Elections

Voter turnout has been on a steady decline



Source: Dataphyte



Nigeria Lost 11% of Its Youth Voters in Just Four Years

If there's one paradox that defines Nigeria's electoral story, it's this: high registration, low turnout. **For every four registered voters, three stayed home.** But the numbers reveal something even more troubling: the voters disappearing fastest are the ones who should be shaping the nation's future.

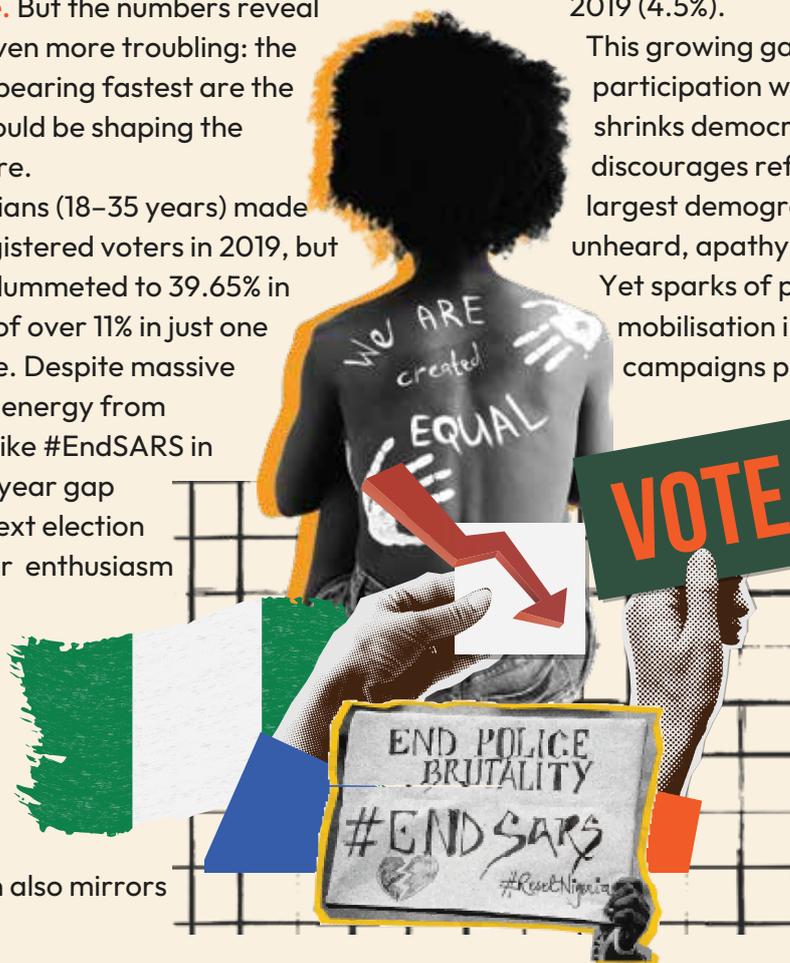
Young Nigerians (18–35 years) made up 51% of registered voters in 2019, but that figure plummeted to 39.65% in 2023, a loss of over 11% in just one election cycle. Despite massive pre-election energy from movements like #EndSARS in 2020, the 3-year gap before the next election drained voter enthusiasm during voter registration and never translated into votes on election day. Women's participation also mirrors this decline.

Though they represent nearly half of registered voters, only 4.4% of elected officials after the 2023 elections were women, at the same level as 2019 (4.5%).

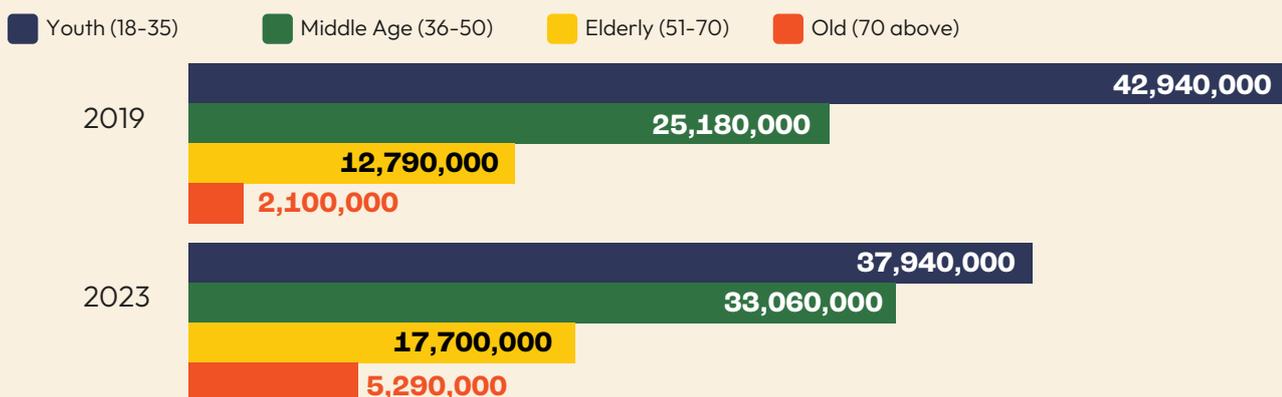
This growing gap between registration and participation weakens electoral legitimacy, shrinks democratic accountability, and discourages reform. When the nation's two largest demographics—youth and women—feel unheard, apathy becomes systemic.

Yet sparks of possibility remain. Youth-driven mobilisation in 2023 and women-led advocacy campaigns prove civic energy exists; it just hasn't found a sustainable channel within the political system.

The question isn't whether Nigerians care, it's whether they still believe voting is worth it. As we look toward 2027, that belief will determine whether Nigeria's democracy strengthens or continues to hollow out from within.



Demographic distribution between 2019 and 2023 voter turnout



Source: INEC and Dataphyte



How Youth Are Looking at the Next Elections

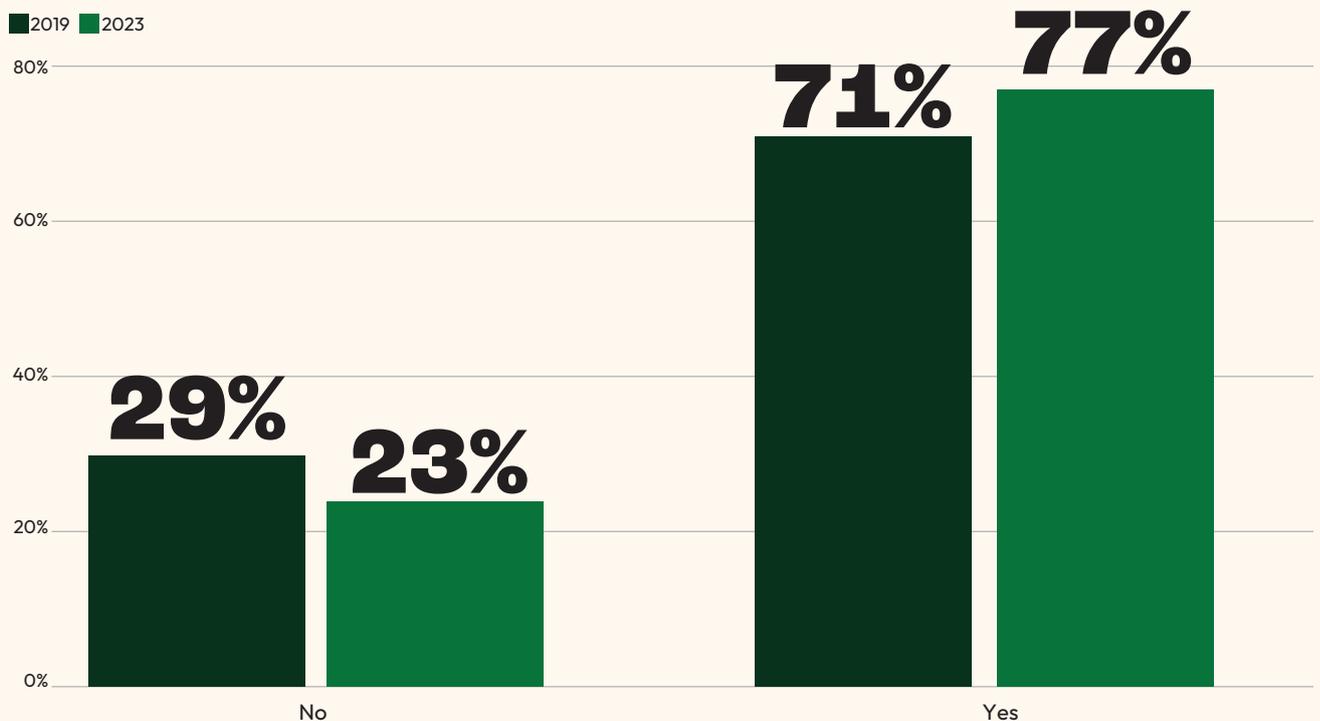
Despite their frustrations, young voters showed up in 2019 & 2023

The chart illustrates a noticeable shift in voter participation between the 2019 and 2023 elections, with significant differences in turnout. In 2019, 71% of respondents indicated that they voted, which demonstrates a strong level of voter engagement and interest in the electoral process.

In 2023, participation remained high, with 77% of respondents confirming they voted. This slight increase from 2019 suggests that, despite challenges and public disillusionment in other areas, a large portion of voters continued to show up at the polls.

Past Election Participation

Did you vote in the previous election?



Source: Citizen survey 2025

The Decision: Almost half still intend to vote in 2027

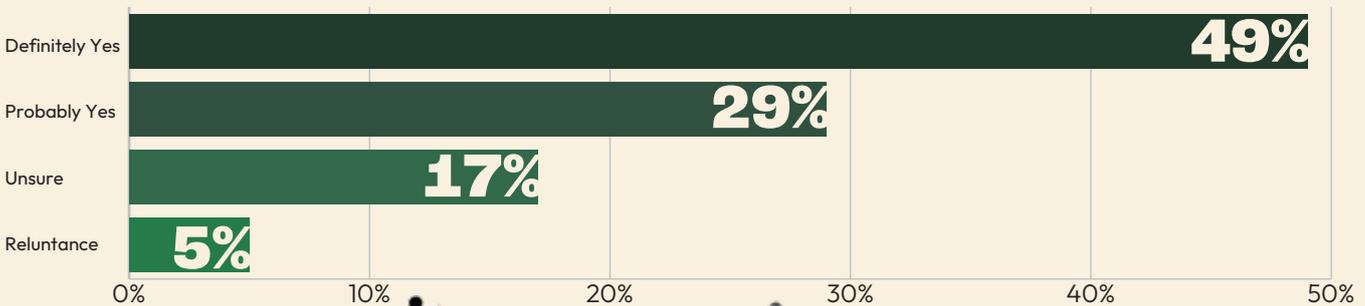
Survey insights show that Nigerian youth have not abandoned their civic duty, despite widespread dissatisfaction following the 2023 elections. When asked about their intention to vote in 2027, young respondents show a notable willingness to engage. Of over 10,000 respondents, 48.5% said they definitely plan to vote in 2027, 29.2% say they probably will vote, while 17.3% remain unsure, a total of 5% express reluctance to vote. Altogether, over 8000 young people indicate some intention to vote, showing that youth have

not disengaged completely despite frustrations surrounding previous elections.

The 17.3% respondents who remain undecided form a critical swing segment whose engagement will depend on whether the political environment before 2027 appears credible, transparent, and safe. Meanwhile, 5% of those who express reluctance represent a smaller but important group who remain to be swayed by factors known only to them.

Intention to vote

Do you plan to vote come 2027?



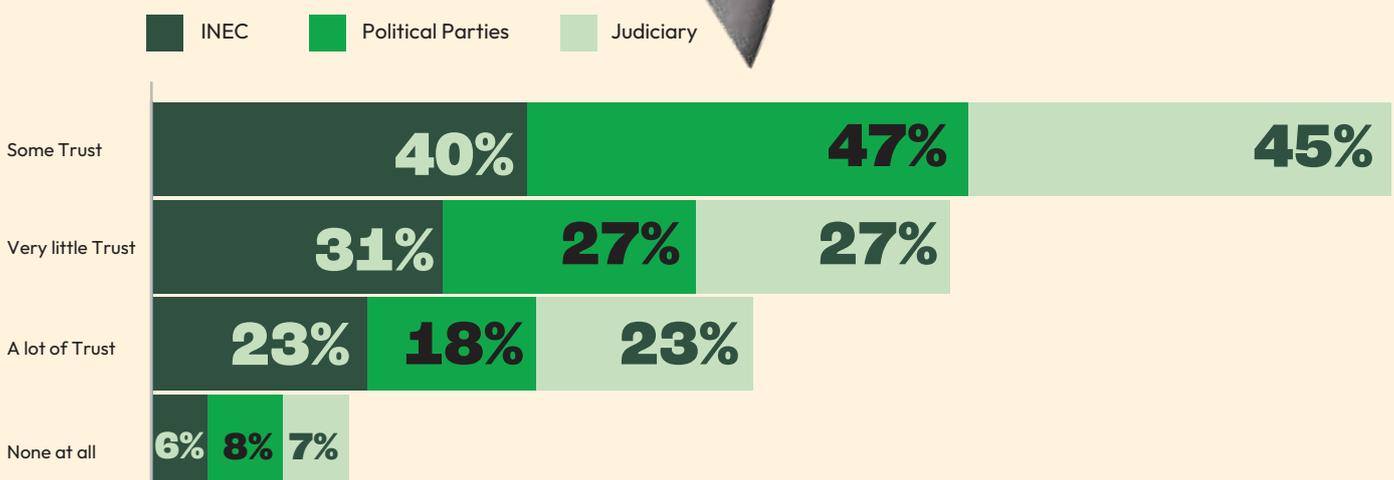
The Distrust: 7 out of 10 voters have little or no trust in Election Actors

While intention to vote remains relatively high, trust in INEC and other political actors within the electoral process is considerably weaker. Respondents tend to cluster around the middle bands of trust, as seen in the chart provided.

These insights show that more than 70% of young Nigerians have only “some” or “very little” trust in INEC and other political actors. These institutions are neither fully rejected nor fully embraced; instead, youth hold a fragile, ambivalent trust that could shift positively or negatively depending on the performances leading up to 2027. Subsequently The Afrobarometer report highlights that trust in INEC and other political actors is quite low, with only 23% of Nigerians expressing strong trust in INEC.

Both surveys reflect an important reality: although young Nigerians continue to express a willingness to vote, their trust in the system remains fragile.

According to Afrobarometer, 71% of Nigerians support elections as the best way to choose leaders, but they simultaneously doubt the ability of elections to ensure that leaders are held accountable.



Source: Citizen survey 2025

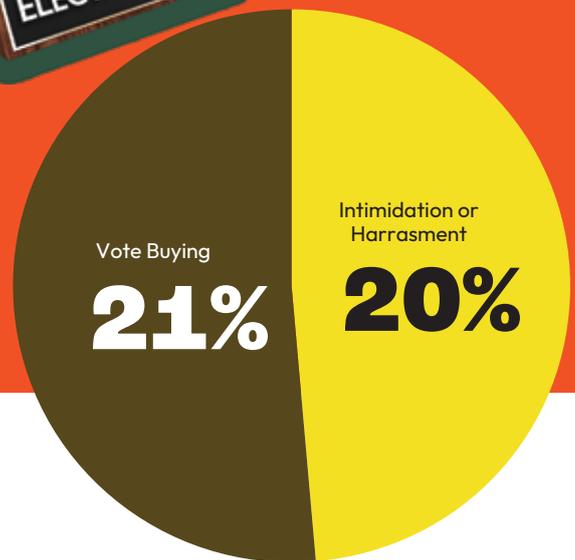
The Reality of Elections: Electoral malpractice has defined the experience for many young voters



The infographic displayed shows that exposure to electoral malpractice is widespread among young Nigerians. Across the full sample (N = 10,681), the most frequently reported experiences relate to economic inducement and coercive pressure at polling points, followed by more visible forms of disorder and procedural violations.

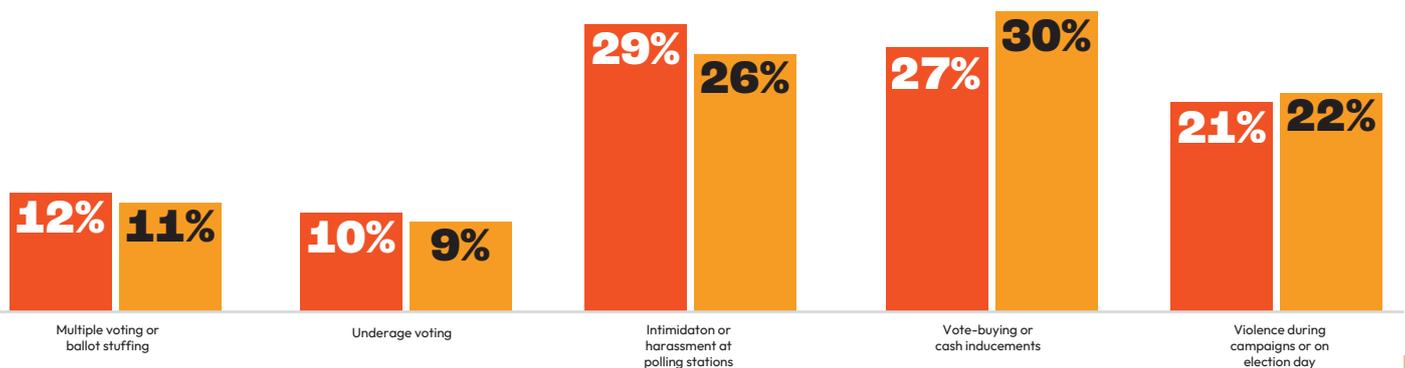
- The two most prevalent exposures are:
1. Vote-buying or cash inducements: 21%
 2. Intimidation or harassment at polling stations: 20%

This suggests that many youth experience elections not primarily as an exercise in informed civic choice, but as an environment where material inducement and coercive pressure play a significant role in shaping participation.



Reality of Nigerians during elections

Female Male



Source: Citizen survey 2025

Electoral malpractice is a huge determinant of willingness to vote

The data on the impact of electoral malpractice on willingness to vote reveals key insights into how both female and male respondents are affected by electoral issues.

A lot – it discourages me: A significant portion of male respondents (43.4%) reported that electoral malpractice discourages them from voting, compared to 37.5% of females. This indicates a stronger deterrent effect on men.

It motivates me to vote: A small percentage of respondents feel motivated to vote because of electoral malpractice. Only 2.9% of females and 6.2% of males indicated this response, suggesting that while some may feel driven by a desire to challenge the system, it is a minority sentiment.

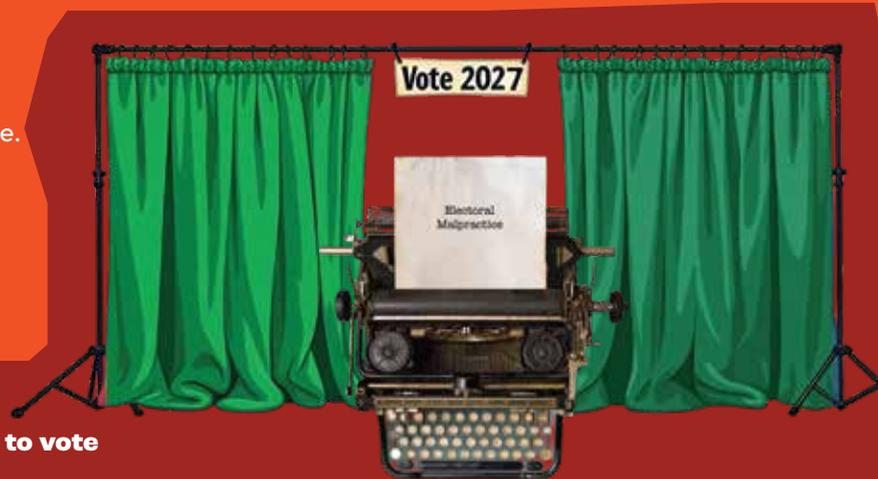
Not at all – it has no effect on me: Around 15.7% of females and 16.8% of males said that electoral malpractice had no effect on their willingness to vote. These findings underscore a significant level of disillusionment and frustration with the electoral process, with a notable portion of the electorate feeling discouraged or impacted by electoral

malpractice, though a smaller group remains unaffected or motivated by it.

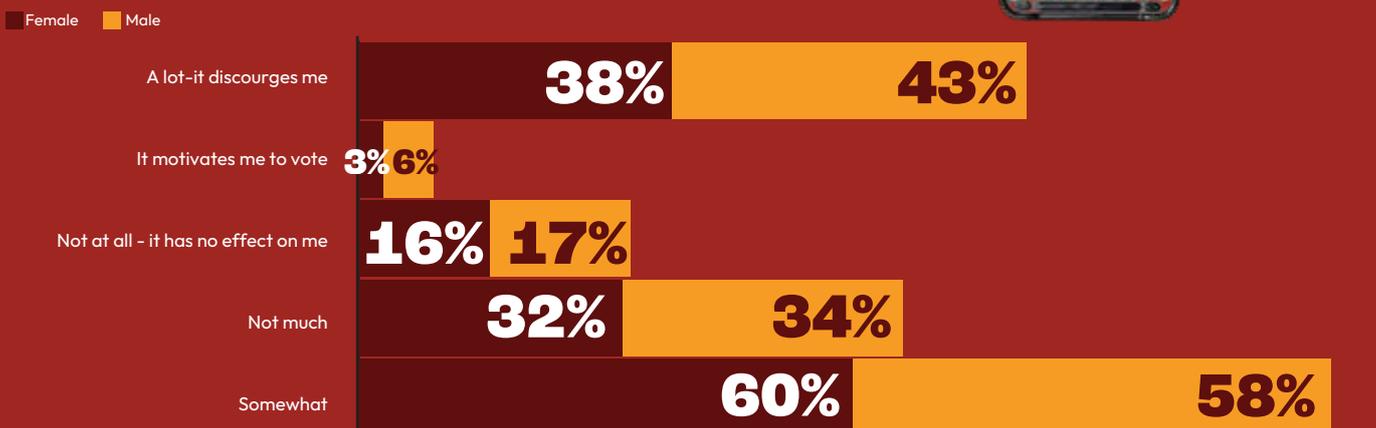
This indicates a neutral stance where malpractice doesn't influence their voting decision.

Not much: 32.1% of females and 34% of males said that electoral malpractice has little impact on their willingness to vote, reflecting a somewhat resigned attitude towards the electoral system.

Somewhat: A majority of both female (59.6%) and male (57.6%) respondents indicated that electoral malpractice has some impact on their decision to vote, suggesting that while it doesn't fully discourage them, it does influence their engagement in the political process.



Impact of Electoral Malpractice on Willingness to vote



Source: Citizen survey 2025



The Politics You See Depends on Your Gender

Young voters, **8 out of 10** are willing to support female candidates but the system has locked them out

Here's a paradox: voters are ready to support female candidates but can't find them. 9,080 respondents say they'd support a female candidate, strongly or somewhat. Women themselves show 87.8% support.

Youth attitudes are relatively supportive. The political system just isn't designed to translate that support into candidacy and representation.

Even among men, it's 84.5%. The constraint isn't voter hostility. It's party gatekeeping, campaign financing, intimidation, and a cultural environment that punishes women for ambition.

87.8%

Women Supporting Women



84.5%

Men Supporting Women



Despite Being Half the Population, Women Hold Only 4.4% of Elected Positions

Nigeria's democracy has a gender problem. Women make up nearly 50% of the population but occupy fewer seats than a rounding error. The Senate? 4 women out of 109. House of Representatives? 15 out of 360.

The downward trend continues: 22 female lawmakers in 2011 dropped to just 11 in 2019, then 15 in 2023. At the local level, the gap between male and female chairpersons and councillors remains cavernous. A democracy that systematically excludes half its citizens isn't functioning.

Youth attitudes are relatively supportive. The political system just isn't designed to translate that support into candidacy and representation.

— Nenkus Tongs
Women in Politics Forum



72% Say Women's Voices Are Acknowledged But Have Limited Influence

Young Nigerians aren't delusional about women's political power. They see the reality: women are visible but not powerful, present but not decisive. That's the perception gap between formal inclusion narratives and lived political reality.



24%

Acknowledged but limited influence

17%

Highly valued & influential

11%

Completely ignored

17%

Heard occasionally but often over look

"If people do not trust the process, they will sit back at home. Even if everything is put in place, lack of trust will discourage participation."

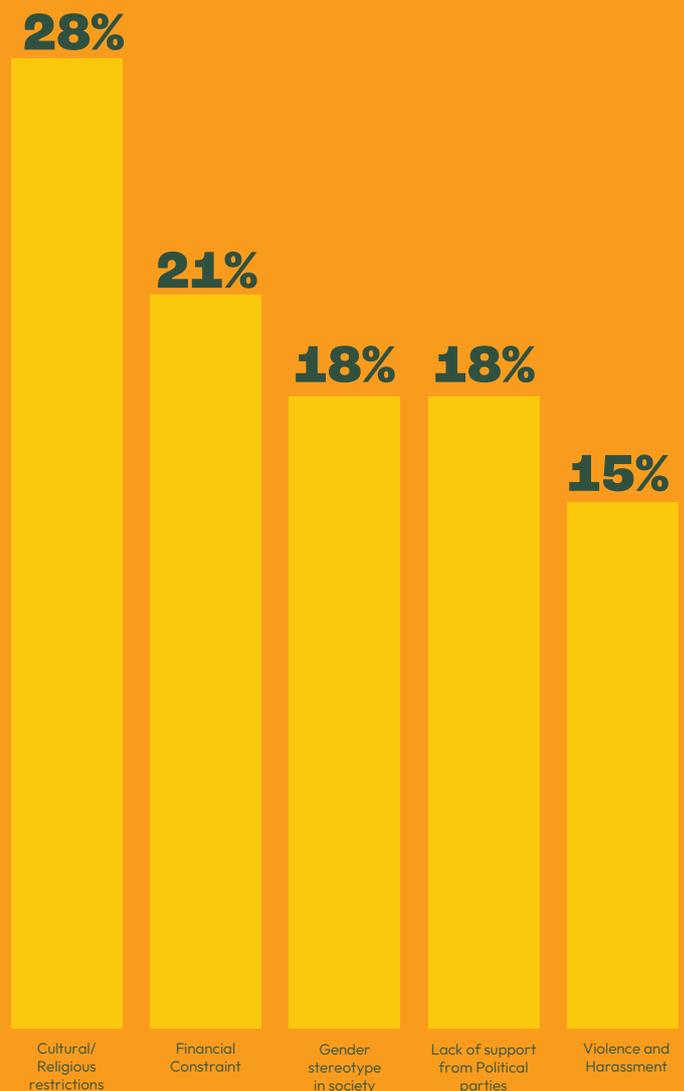
— Magdalene Aku, INEC Assistant Director

Cultural and Religious Restrictions Top Barrier at 28%, But Violence Enforces Exclusion

The barriers aren't subtle. They're structural, layered, and designed to exhaust. Cultural and religious restrictions define political leadership as male-coded. Financial constraints lock women out of networks. Party gatekeeping limits opportunity.

Without enforceable protections and deliberate inclusion, women remain dependent on informal goodwill. .

Biggest Barriers Women Face in Politics



"Young women are active in mobilisation, but the risks they face when becoming visible in politics are much higher."

— Hassan Taiwo,
National Coordinator,
Education Rights Campaign

39.2% Discouraged From Voting By Disinformation

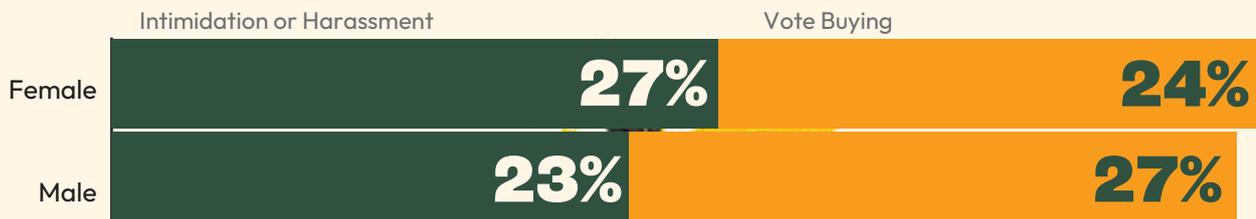
Information disorder isn't marginal—it's routine. 83.3% of young Nigerians have encountered fake news, deepfakes, or manipulated political content. For 68.2%, it influenced their voting decision. Among those affected, 39.2% were discouraged from voting. Women report slightly higher demobilization rates than men, facing gendered

reputational and emotional costs from online harassment and disinformation.

Electoral credibility failures translates across gender. For many young women, lived experience translates into heightened caution, fear, and withdrawal. Some young men reframe the same experiences as reason to remain engaged.

Electoral Malpractice From a Gendered View

Exposure by Gender





What Makes Young People Vote or Stay Home

Young voters, 6 out of 10 say government accountability & performance will drive them to the polls

From 1922 when the Clifford Constitution introduced elective principles to the present, elections in Nigeria have been very problematic. Local, state and general elections in Nigeria have been controversial, inconclusive and most times, rejected by political opponents who often allege gross electoral malpractice by sitting governments, electoral bodies and their victors (opponents).

Despite widespread exposure to malpractice and declining trust in institutions, our citizen survey data indicate that many young Nigerians remain inclined toward electoral participation.

Survey findings indicate that young Nigerians' decisions to participate in the 2027 elections are strongly shaped by their assessment of past leadership performance. When asked whether their decision to vote in 2027 is influenced by whether past leaders met or failed to meet expectations, a clear majority of respondents expressed agreement.

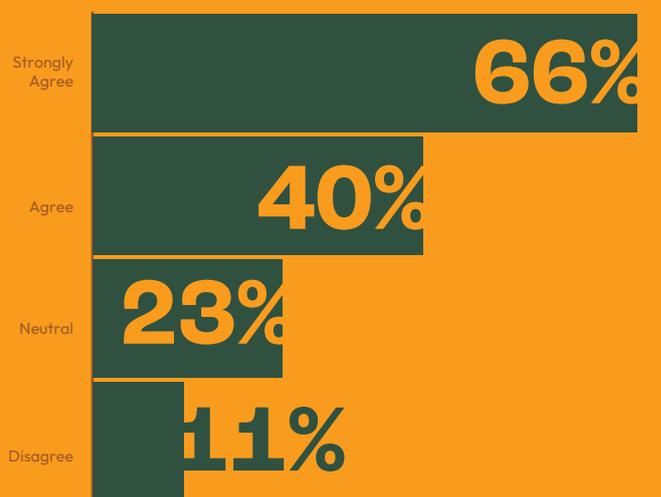
Overall, 7,074 respondents (66.2%) either agree or strongly agree that the performance of past leaders influences their decision to vote. Of these, 4,351 respondents (40.7%) agree. This highlights that retrospective evaluation of governance outcomes plays a central role in shaping youth electoral behaviour.

At the same time, a substantial minority of respondents express ambivalence. 2,491 respondents (23.3%) selected neutral, suggesting uncertainty about whether voting leads to meaningful accountability or change.

On the other hand, only 11% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that past leadership performance affects their decision to vote. Taken together, these findings reinforce the view that youth electoral behaviour is conditional rather than apathetic. Young people are not withdrawing from elections because they do not care; rather, they are making calculated decisions based on whether governance has delivered on expectations. Where leaders are perceived to have failed, motivation to vote weakens, contributing to hesitation, neutrality, or withdrawal. Conversely, credible evidence of accountability and performance has the potential to re-mobilise a significant portion of the youth electorate ahead of 2027.

Past Leadership Performance

Will your decision to vote be shaped by past leadership performance?



One in Five Young Voters Have Seen Election Violence Up Close

Let's talk about what really goes down during elections in Nigeria, it's not all smooth sailing. According to our survey, these are the realities that many Nigerians face when they show up to vote

Intimidation/Harassment: A shocking 29% of women say they've faced intimidation or harassment at the polls, while 26% of men report the same.

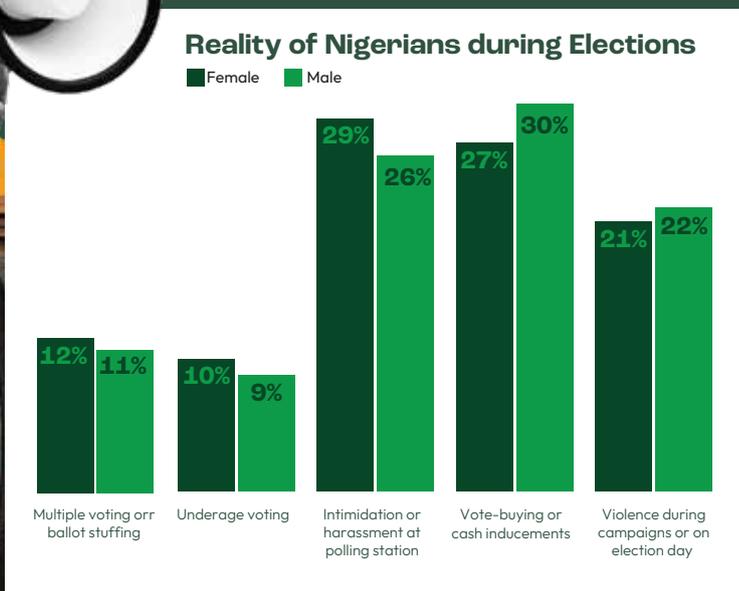
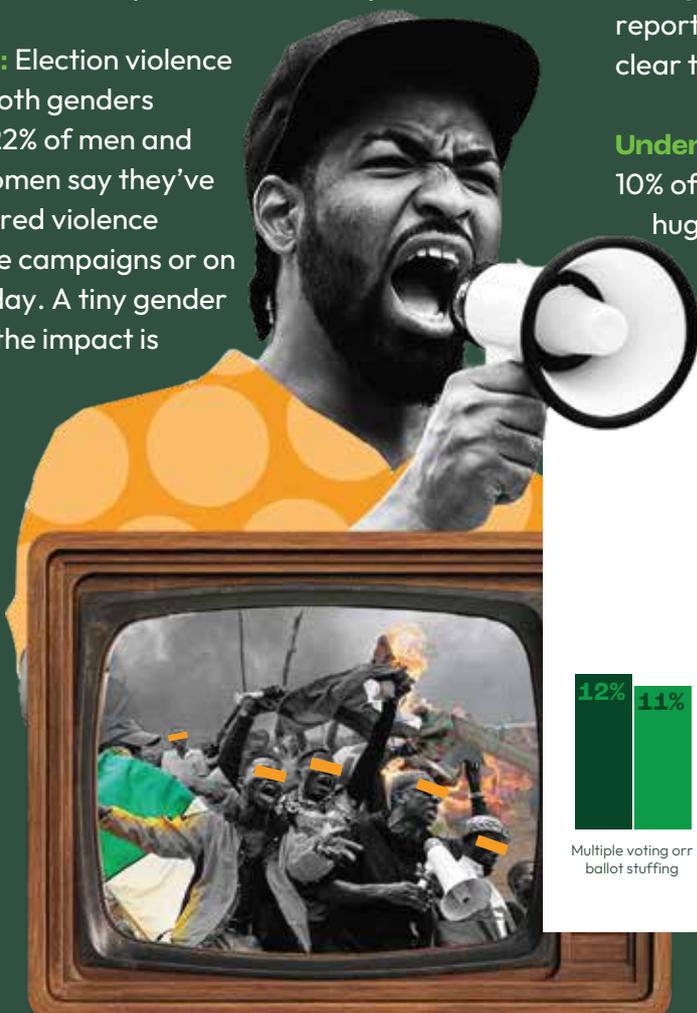
Vote-buying: 30% of men and 27% of women have witnessed vote-buying or cash inducements. Men seem to be more exposed to this shady business

Violence: Election violence affects both genders heavily. 22% of men and 21% of women say they've encountered violence during the campaigns or on election day. A tiny gender gap, but the impact is huge.

While both men and women face significant challenges, the data shows that certain malpractices affect both genders similarly, though with some notable differences. These variations offer important context for understanding why the impact of malpractice on motivation and trust is not uniform across gender. The data suggests that specific practices may discourage men and women in different ways, which could explain why both genders, including young men and women, may feel increasingly disengaged or hesitant about participating in future elections.

Multiple Voting: 12% of women and 11% of men report seeing multiple voting or ballot stuffing. It's clear this is a serious problem on both sides.

Underage Voting: Underage voting is a reality for 10% of women and 9% of men. The numbers aren't huge, but the fact that this happens at all speaks volumes about the integrity of our electoral system.



Trust is required for political engagement to translate into electoral participation

The roots of youth activism in Nigeria can be traced back to historical movements such as the struggle against colonialism and the fight for independence. The Aba Women's Riot, predominantly spearheaded by women, established a precedent for youth-led resistance in Nigeria. From colonial resistance movements to the fight against military dictatorships, young Nigerians have consistently played pivotal roles in advocating for change and pushing for progress. More recently protest movements like EndSARS mobilized significant political engagement. However, as highlighted in expert interviews, the trust deficit in the electoral system remained a key barrier to translating activism into electoral participation. Insights from expert interview conducted with Mr Hassan Taiwo the National coordinator of Education as a Right Campaign reiterated that activism often serves as the entry point into political consciousness for young people, but not necessarily into electoral participation. He explained, many young people "become politically awake before they become electorally convinced."

In other words, activism can elevate political identity without resolving the trust deficit that determines whether that identity translates into voting behaviour. This is consistent with the broader report finding that turnout is conditional and that trust, risk, and efficacy mediate participation.

He discussed the emotional duality on one hand, activism generates collective identity, peer reinforcement, and a belief that change is possible. On the other, it can harden into withdrawal when demands are ignored or civic space becomes hostile.

“Activism can mobilise hope, but when nothing changes, it also mobilises scepticism”.

— Hassan Taiwo,
National Coordinator,
Education Rights Campaign



78.3% report that economic hardship influences their voting decisions.

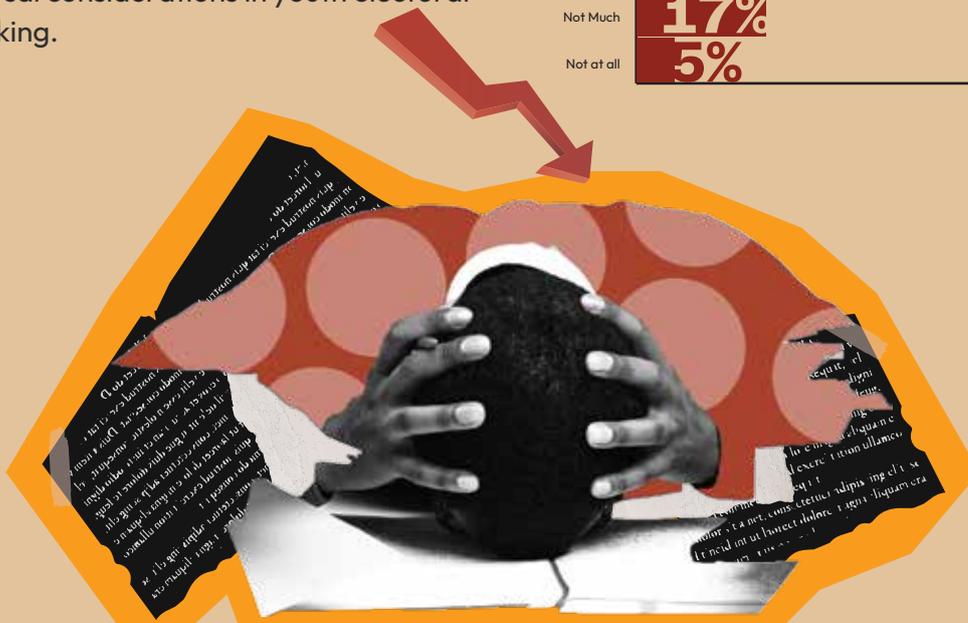
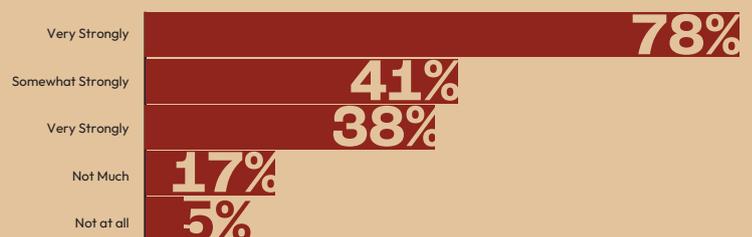
Survey findings indicate that economic conditions play a decisive role in shaping young Nigerians' electoral behaviour. When asked how strongly economic hardship influences their decision to vote, an overwhelming majority of respondents reported that it has a meaningful effect. In total, 78.3% respondents report that economic hardship influences their voting decision either somewhat or very strongly. Of these, 40.8% respondents indicate that hardship influences them somewhat, while 37.5% respondents say it influences them very strongly. This underscores the centrality of economic experience, such as unemployment, rising living costs, and income instability, in shaping political engagement among youth. A further 17.2% respondents report that economic hardship influences them not much, suggesting partial disengagement or scepticism about whether elections can meaningfully address economic challenges. Only 4.5% respondents indicate that economic hardship influences them not at all, confirming that economic conditions are nearly universal considerations in youth electoral decision-making.

These findings highlight an important dual effect. On one hand, economic hardship can act as a push factor, motivating participation in the hope that elections will bring economic relief or policy change. On the other hand, when hardship persists without visible improvement, it can become a pull factor, discouraging participation by reinforcing beliefs that voting does not lead to tangible economic outcomes.

The large share of respondents who report strong economic influence suggests that youth turnout toward 2027 will be highly sensitive to economic signals in the pre-election period. Improvements in employment prospects, cost of living, and economic security could mobilise youth participation, while continued economic strain may deepen frustration and withdrawal.

Influence of Economic Conditioning on Voter Behaviour

How well do the economic realities of the country motivate you to or not to vote?



Community and Religious Leaders wield sizeable influence over voting decisions

Religion is a complex factor that exerts a profound impact on voting patterns in Nigeria. Prior literature has explored the intricate relationship between religion and politics, highlighting the intricate ways in which faith shapes political identities, mobilizes voters, and influences electoral dynamic.

The citizens survey findings show that religious and community leaders play a significant role in shaping youth electoral behaviour in Nigeria.

When respondents were asked how strongly religious or community leaders influence their decision to vote, a clear majority reported some level of influence.

In total, 71.2% respondents indicate that religious or community leaders influence their voting decision either somewhat or very strongly. Of these, 40.8% respondents report being influenced somewhat, while 30.4% respondents report being influenced very strongly. This highlights the continued relevance of trusted local figures in mobilising electoral participation among young people.

At the same time, 22.8% respondents report that such leaders influence them not much, suggesting a degree of independence from traditional authority structures among a segment of the youth population. Only 6% respondents report no influence at all, indicating that outright rejection of religious or community influence remains limited.

These findings suggest that while digital platforms and peer networks are important drivers of youth political engagement, offline social authority remains a powerful mobilisation channel. Religious and community leaders often serve as intermediaries between political actors and young voters, particularly in contexts where institutional trust is weak. Their influence can act as a push factor, encouraging turnout through moral framing, community obligation, or issue-based messaging. However, this influence also carries risks. In environments where leaders are perceived as partisan or aligned with entrenched political interests, their involvement may reinforce distrust or disengagement among youth who seek independent political expression. As such, the role of religious and community leaders represents both an opportunity and a constraint in shaping youth turnout toward 2027.



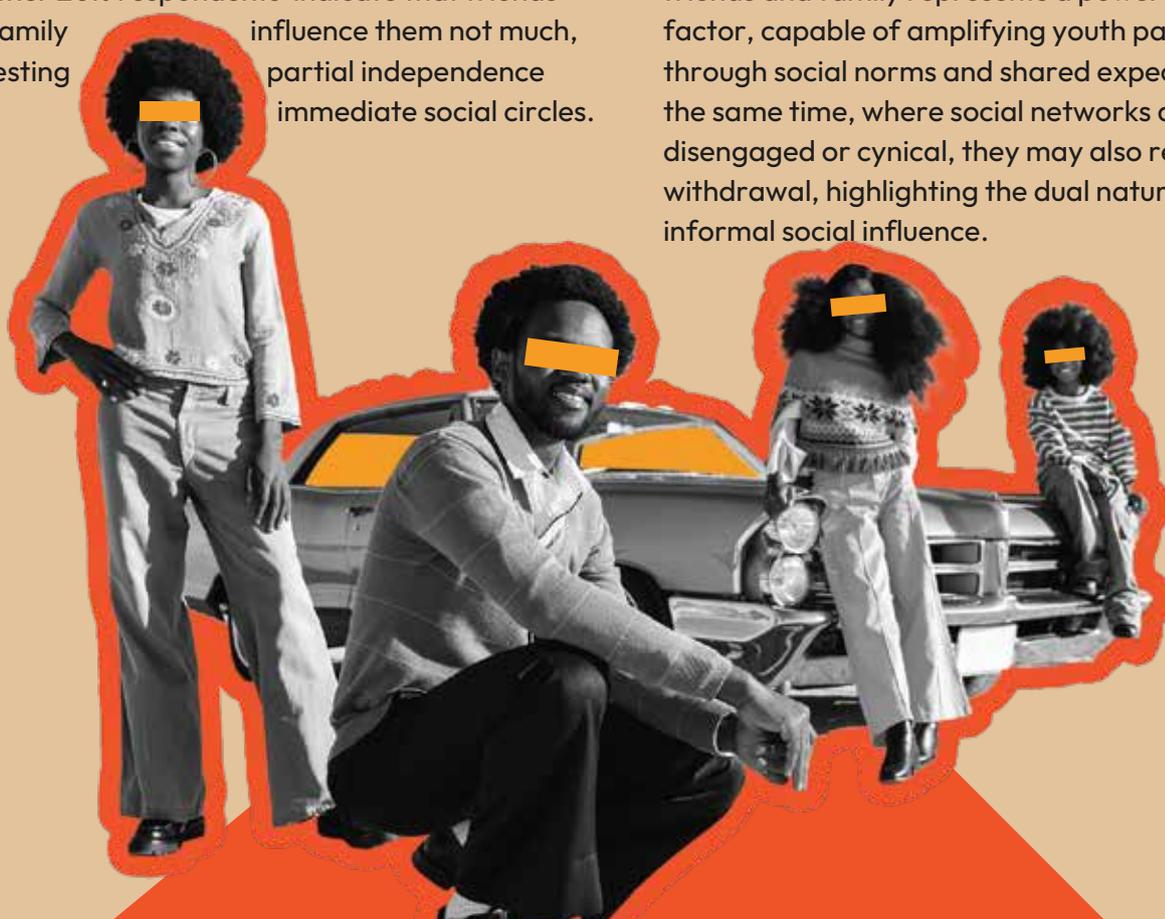
Social networks as a push factor: About 8 out of 10 are influenced to vote by family & friends

Survey findings indicate that friends and family are among the strongest influences on young Nigerians' decisions to vote. When asked how strongly friends and family influence their electoral participation, a substantial majority of respondents reported moderate to strong influence.

Overall, 78% respondents states that friends and family influence their decision to vote either somewhat or very strongly. Of these, 44% respondents (43.9%) report being influenced somewhat, while 34% respondents report a very strong influence. This highlights the central role of close social networks in shaping youth electoral behaviour.

A further 20% respondents indicate that friends and family influence them not much, suggesting partial independence from immediate social circles.

Only 2% respondents report no influence at all, indicating that complete insulation from family or peer influence is rare among youth voters. These findings underscore that electoral participation among young people is often a collective, socially reinforced decision, rather than a purely individual one. Discussions within households, peer groups, and friendship networks appear to shape political attitudes, turnout decisions, and perceptions of civic responsibility. In contexts where trust in institutions is fragile, these interpersonal relationships serve as critical reference points for deciding whether participation is worthwhile. From a mobilisation perspective, the influence of friends and family represents a powerful push factor, capable of amplifying youth participation through social norms and shared expectations. At the same time, where social networks are disengaged or cynical, they may also reinforce withdrawal, highlighting the dual nature of informal social influence.





Future Outlook:
Will They Actually
Vote in **2027?**

Forecasting Youth Electoral Behaviour Toward 2027

This report adopts a behavioural scenario model grounded in three interrelated dimensions: motivation to vote, cost and risk of participation, and perceived political efficacy.

Firstly, motivation among young Nigerians remains substantial but uneven. Economic hardship is a dominant driver, 78% indicating that hardship influences their decision to vote either somewhat or very strongly. Similarly, evaluation of leadership performance matters as 66% say their decision to vote in 2027 depends on whether past leaders met expectations. Social influence further reinforces motivation, with 78% influenced by friends and family and 71% influenced by religious or community leaders.

Secondly, this motivation is counterbalanced by the cost and risk of participation. Electoral malpractice emerges as a powerful immobiliser, with 62% reporting reduced motivation following exposure to irregularities.

Violence remains a persistent deterrent, with nearly one in five respondents having witnessed election-related violence. Disinformation further increases participation costs, as 39% of respondents say manipulated political content discouraged them from voting.

Thirdly, perceived political efficacy especially for young women, shapes whether motivation translates into action. A majority of respondents 63% believe women's voices are limited, overlooked, or ignored in Nigerian politics. While support for female candidates is high 85%, the gap between normative support and actual representation weakens confidence that participation will yield meaningful influence. These three dimensions form the basis for the scenarios that follow.



Scenario One: “Same Storm, New Election” (Low Turnout Scenario)

This report adopts a behavioural scenario model grounded in three interrelated dimensions: motivation to vote, cost and risk of participation, and perceived political efficacy.

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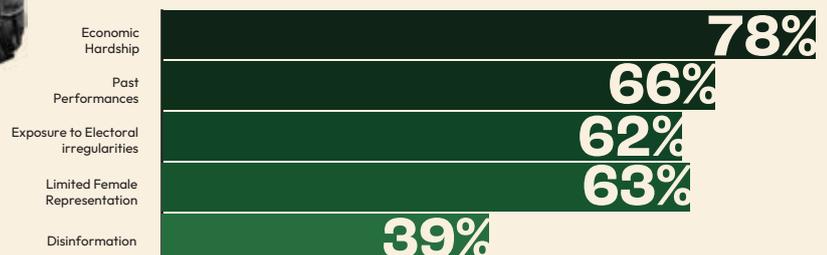
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Demotivating Factors

Drivers of poor electoral turnout



Scenario Two: “Hard Times, High Stakes” (Moderate Turnout Scenario)

In the second scenario, economic hardship prevails, thereby intensifying political urgency. The deteriorating standard of living, coupled with rising unemployment increases the demand for change, making elections feel consequential. However, improvements in institutional trust, security, and information integrity are partially improved rather than comprehensive. Under these conditions, motivation increases, particularly among economically affected youth. The strong influence of hardship 78% combines with social mobilisation through friends, families, and community networks to sustain participation. A segment of youth responds to disinformation with resistance rather than withdrawal, as reflected in the 29.% who report being motivated by exposure to manipulated content.

At the same time, unresolved trust issues prevent turnout from reaching its full potential. Persistent malpractice narratives and uneven enforcement keep scepticism alive, limiting participation among undecided and risk-averse voters.

For women, turnout improves modestly, particularly where economic pressure intersects with strong family or community support. However, without clear safety and inclusion signals, many women remain hesitant.

Forecast outcome:

Youth turnout stabilises or increases slightly, driven by economic pressure and social influence, but remains capped by unresolved trust and safety concerns.



Scenario Three: “Credible Process, Safer Participation” (High Turnout Scenario)

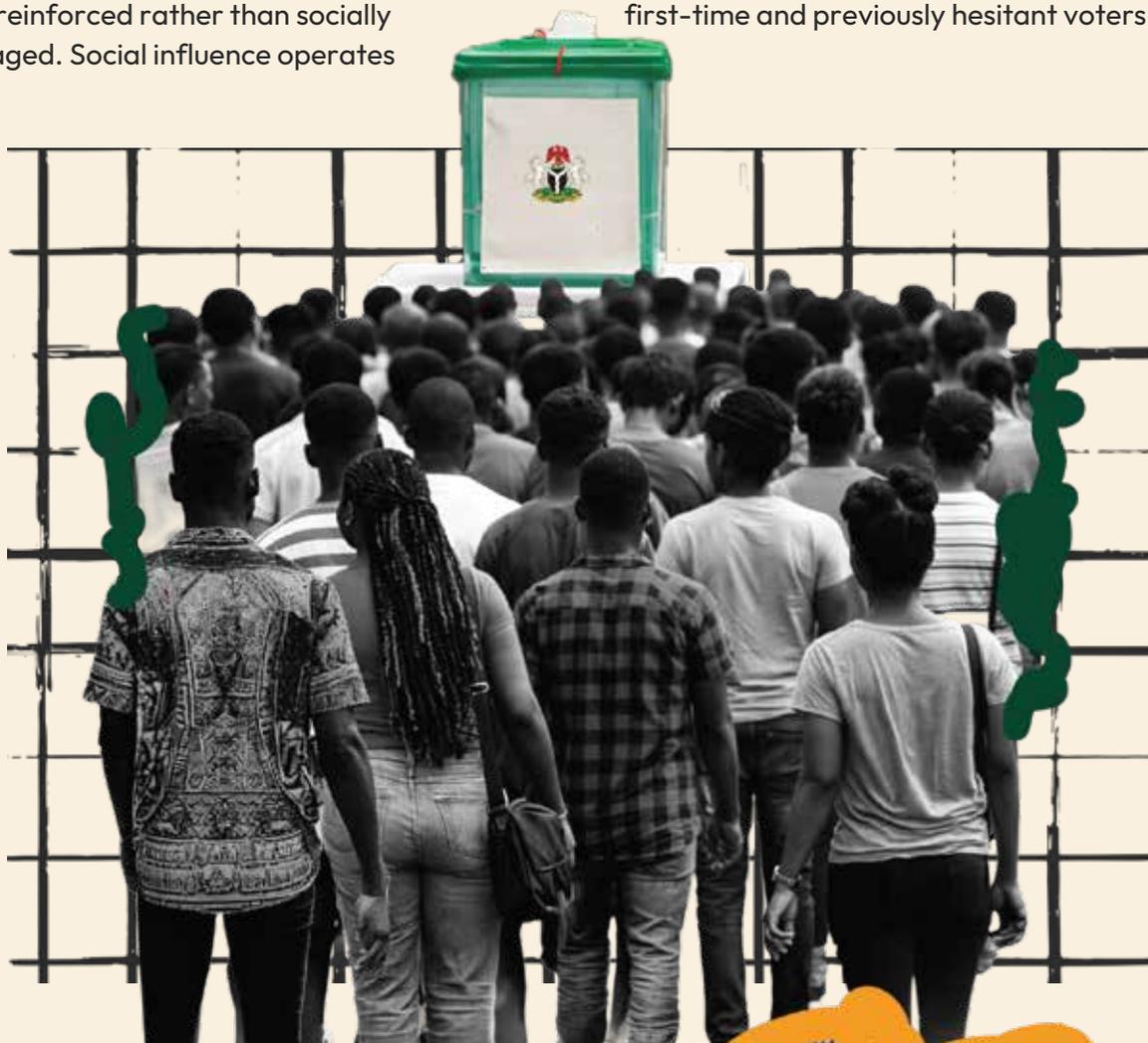
The third and final scenario assumption is based on meaningful improvements across multiple fronts. Electoral transparency measures are clearly communicated and widely understood. Security coordination reduces intimidation and violence. Disinformation is countered more effectively through timely, credible messaging by institutions, media, and civil society. Political actors send stronger inclusion signals, particularly toward women and youth. In this environment, the behavioural pathway identified earlier is disrupted. Motivation outweighs risk, and participation becomes socially reinforced rather than socially discouraged. Social influence operates

as a turnout multiplier, as friends, families, and community leaders encourage participation with greater confidence.

Young women benefit disproportionately under this scenario. Reduced fear, stronger legitimacy signals, and improved inclusion transform high normative support for women candidates (85.0%) into actual participation. The perceived value of voting increases as efficacy improves.

Forecast outcome:

Youth turnout rises significantly, with narrower gender gaps and increased participation among first-time and previously hesitant voters.



CONCLUSION

This report set out to forecast youth electoral participation toward 2027 by moving beyond surface-level narratives of apathy and instead examining the conditions that shape whether young Nigerians participate or withdraw. Across the survey and Key Informant Interviews, one core finding is consistent: youth turnout is not fixed. It is conditional, responsive, and shaped by the balance between motivation, risk, trust, and perceived efficacy. Taken together, the forecasting scenarios show that youth turnout in 2027 will largely depend on whether key stakeholders can reduce the costs of participation and increase confidence in the process. Where insecurity persists, malpractice remains visible, and disinformation circulates unchecked, turnout is likely to stagnate or decline, with women most affected. Where economic pressure and social mobilisation dominate but trust reforms remain partial, turnout may stabilise or rise modestly. The highest-turnout pathway requires credible electoral administration, visible transparency, strong security coordination, rapid counter-disinformation responses, and deliberate inclusion strategies that lower barriers for women and first-time voters.

Ultimately, the most important forecast offered by this report is not a single turnout figure but a behavioural conclusion: Nigeria's youth are not absent from politics; they are evaluating it.

Their participation in 2027 will depend on whether elections feel safe enough to attend, credible enough to trust, and meaningful enough to justify the cost. Improving turnout is therefore not only a mobilisation challenge, but a governance challenge. If institutions and stakeholders succeed in restoring confidence and lowering risk, youth participation can become a stabilising force for democratic legitimacy in 2027. If they fail, disengagement will continue to deepen, and the country risks entering another electoral cycle where its largest demographic remains the least empowered in shaping outcomes.

Explore the Zikoko Citizen Misinformation Dashboard

Misinformation continues to shape political trust and citizen engagement among young people. As elections approach, political claims circulate more frequently and with higher stakes.

In the previous edition of Citizen Report on misinformation, we found that:

- 58.8% of young people surveyed say they verify news before sharing.
- 62% say misinformation discourages their political participation.

The **Citizen Misinformation Dashboard** tracks misleading and false claims circulating online, detailing who made the claims, when they emerged, and where they were debunked.



Access here:

<https://bit.ly/zkkdashboard>

(or scan the QR code)

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