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Nigeria’s 2027 Elections: A Test of Democratic Confidence



Introduction

Nigeria's January 2027 general election will test more than the popularity of presidential candidates. It will reveal whether the country's political parties can respond to growing public dissatisfaction, whether electoral institutions can inspire confidence, and whether millions of eligible voters will be able to participate safely. Economic hardship, insecurity and youth frustration are shaping the political environment, while the registration of millions of additional voters has raised questions about participation and electoral preparedness. The election also carries significance beyond Nigeria, given the country's influence in West Africa. As preparations continue, the central question is whether political competition will strengthen public confidence in democracy or deepen existing doubts about the electoral process.

Nigeria's political contest: The candidates and the struggle for voter confidence

The 2027 presidential election will bring together 18 candidates competing to convince Nigerians that they can address the country's economic and security challenges. President Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) will seek to defend his administration's record, while opposition candidates, including Atiku Abubakar of the African Democratic Congress (ADC) and Peter Obi of the Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC), will seek to persuade voters that they offer credible alternatives. Other contenders include Oyo State governor Oluseyi Makinde of the Allied Peoples Movement (APM), Sandy Ojang Onor of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Omoyele Sowore of the African Action Congress, Adewole Adebayo of the Social Democratic Party, Donald Duke of the Peoples Redemption Party and Sunday Chibuzo Okereke of the Labour Party. The breadth of the field provides voters with multiple choices, but the central challenge for each candidate will be to build public confidence, establish a convincing policy agenda and mobilise support across Nigeria's diverse regions.

Economic hardship, insecurity and the demand for change

The election will take place amid widespread concern about the cost of living, employment opportunities and personal security. These issues are likely to shape how voters assess the incumbent administration and the alternatives offered by opposition parties. For many Nigerians, the election is an opportunity to judge whether the government has improved their living conditions and whether competing candidates can offer a more convincing direction.

Insecurity presents an additional challenge. Banditry, kidnapping, terrorism and communal violence affect communities across parts of the country, with consequences for livelihoods, public confidence and freedom of movement (Ali & Mukhtar, 2025; Ogbuka

et al., 2026). Electoral participation depends not only on citizens' willingness to vote but also on their ability to reach polling stations without fear. Where violence threatens communities, even a voter who is dissatisfied with the government may struggle to participate.

Young people will be particularly important to this contest. Their frustrations over employment, economic opportunities and governance have found expression through social media and public activism (see Feyijimi, 2026). However, online dissatisfaction does not automatically translate into electoral participation. Young Nigerians who want political change must also take practical steps to participate, including ensuring that they have collected their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs). Political parties, meanwhile, must offer credible policies rather than assume that young voters will support them simply because they oppose the incumbent.

More than 10.7 million new registrants: Will they vote?

The expansion of Nigeria's voter register is one of the important developments ahead of the 2027 election. According to Agbo (2026), the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) recorded 10,772,421 new registrants through its Continuous Voter Registration exercise, bringing the national register to approximately 103.4 million voters after verification and cleaning.

The scale of these registrations raises an important question about the potential influence of new voters, particularly young Nigerians. Their participation could shape the election, but their numbers alone cannot predict the outcome. Registration, PVC collection and actual voting are distinct stages of electoral participation. A large number of new registrants will make a difference only if eligible voters obtain their cards, remain engaged and turn out on election day.

The figures also do not establish which candidate stands to benefit. Several studies have shown that new voters have different political preferences, regional interests and expectations of government (see Taden et al., 2025; Hamzawi et al., 2026). Some may support the incumbent, others may favour opposition candidates, while some may decide not to vote. The electoral significance of the expanded register will become clearer through PVC collection figures, turnout and the distribution of valid votes across the country.

For INEC, the challenge is to convert registration into effective participation. This requires accessible card collection arrangements, accurate voter information and timely resolution of registration errors. The commission must also demonstrate that its preparations are sufficiently robust to support an election in which citizens can participate and have confidence in the process.

PVC collection and INEC's responsibility

INEC Chairman Professor Joash Amupitan has reportedly reiterated that voters must possess their PVCs to vote in the 2027 election. The warning makes PVC collection an immediate concern for newly registered voters and others who need to collect or replace their cards.

For citizens, the message is straightforward: those who intend to vote should not wait until election day to discover that they are unable to do so. Young people who demand political change online must ensure that their registration and PVC collection are complete. Political participation requires more than expressing dissatisfaction; it requires using the available democratic process to influence the choice of government. However, the responsibility does not rest with voters alone. INEC must ensure that collection arrangements are clear, accessible and adequately communicated. The commission also needs to address public concerns about electoral credibility, technology and the management of results. Confidence is built through the consistent implementation of procedures, transparent communication and credible responses to complaints, not through assurances alone.

The distinction between willingness to vote and confidence in the electoral process is very important. A Yiaga Africa survey, as reported by Streamline Feed Official (2026), found that approximately 84% of Nigerians expressed an intention to participate in the 2027 election. However, concerns about electoral credibility and security remain important considerations in the lead-up to the polls. This suggests that although many Nigerians are willing to vote, their participation will depend partly on whether they feel safe and have confidence in the electoral process.

What Nigeria can learn from Ghana's 2024 election

Nigeria's electoral preparations can also be considered in light of Ghana's December 2024 general election. The comparison is useful not because the two countries have identical political systems or face the same challenges, but because their electoral experiences reveal different expectations about political competition, security and the conduct of voting. One striking observation came from Nigerians living in Ghana who reacted online to the peaceful atmosphere surrounding the 2024 election. A YouTube video published on 10 December 2024, titled "Nigerians living in Ghana react to how peaceful Ghana's election 2024 was," captured their surprise at seeing people return to their normal activities after casting their ballots. Markets and shops continued operating, and election day did not bring the kind of widespread shutdown they associated with elections in Nigeria (see Headless Youtuber, 2024). These reactions offer an accessible illustration of how electoral arrangements can shape citizens' experiences. In Ghana, voting took place between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m., while much of everyday economic activity

continued. The contrast with the extensive security measures and restrictions often associated with Nigerian elections raises questions about whether election security can be maintained without unnecessarily disrupting citizens' lives and economic activities.

Another important feature was the early concession by the governing New Patriotic Party's presidential candidate, Mahamudu Bawumia, who conceded defeat to John Dramani Mahama while counting was still in progress. Nigeria's Punch newspaper praised this action as a demonstration of statesmanship that helped de-escalate tensions. The newspaper also contrasted Ghana's election-day experience with Nigeria's more heavily securitised elections and referred to the European Union Election Observation Mission's concerns about the credibility and transparency of Nigeria's 2023 general election (see Punch Newspaper, 2024)

Ghana's experience offers several lessons. Political leaders can help reduce tension by acting responsibly when the results begin to emerge. Election security should protect voters without creating unnecessary fear or restricting ordinary life. Electoral institutions must also work to ensure that the process is credible enough for political competitors and their supporters to accept legitimate outcomes. Ghana's 2024 election should not be portrayed as a flawless democratic process. Although the election demonstrated the value of peaceful participation and the early concession of defeat by the losing candidate, pockets of violence occurred on election day. These incidents are a reminder that Ghana continues to face electoral challenges. The lesson for Nigeria is therefore not that Ghana has resolved all its electoral problems, but that peaceful political conduct, respect for electoral outcomes and responsible leadership can help strengthen public confidence, even where challenges remain.

Why Nigeria's election matters beyond its borders

Nigeria's 2027 election is a national contest with wider regional implications. As one of West Africa's most influential countries, Nigeria plays an important role in regional diplomacy, economic relations and democratic politics. Its electoral experience can therefore affect how citizens and political leaders elsewhere in the region understand the prospects for democratic governance. A peaceful and credible election could reinforce public confidence in constitutional politics and demonstrate that intense competition can be managed through established democratic institutions. An election marked by serious violence, opaque procedures or a widespread loss of public trust could have the opposite effect, adding to regional concerns about political instability and the resilience of democratic institutions.

The stakes can be understood through the image of a dam. Pressure may build within one part of a system, but the consequences of a failure can travel well beyond its immediate location. Nigeria's challenges are not destined to produce a wider regional

crisis, but the country's size and influence mean that its ability to manage political tensions matters to its neighbours especially Ghana. West African countries therefore have a legitimate interest in Nigeria conducting an election that is peaceful, credible and accepted by the public. This does not mean that neighbouring countries should interfere in Nigeria's domestic political choices. Rather, it underscores the importance of regional cooperation, responsible political leadership and shared commitments to democratic processes.

Conclusion

Nigeria's January 2027 election will be a test of whether the country can turn public demands for change into meaningful democratic participation. Economic hardship, insecurity, youth dissatisfaction and doubts about electoral credibility will shape the political environment, while the addition of millions of new registrants creates both an opportunity and a responsibility for electoral authorities and political parties.

The enlarged voter register will matter only if citizens can obtain their PVCs, participate safely and trust that their votes will be counted. Young Nigerians who want change must move beyond online criticism and prepare to vote, while INEC must ensure that administrative arrangements do not prevent eligible citizens from exercising their rights. Candidates, in turn, must demonstrate that they can address the problems voters face in their daily lives.

Ghana's 2024 election offers useful lessons about peaceful election-day conduct, responsible concessions and the importance of public confidence. Nigeria's circumstances are different, but the broader principles remain relevant. A successful election requires more than a large register, competing candidates and assurances of preparedness. It requires institutions that work, political actors who act responsibly and citizens who can participate without fear. Nigeria must not fail in this democratic test. The consequences of its election will extend beyond the winner and losers of the presidential contest. They will also shape public confidence in democratic governance and influence the wider political climate in West Africa.

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