



**Why we should all vote  
during the up-coming  
elections in Nigeria**



The independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reports that there are about 84.27 million registered voters in Nigeria for the up-coming elections. In 2015, there were about 67 million voters and only less than half of the total registered voters were accredited<sup>1</sup>. Voter apathy has been reported as a significant factor in many elections, and in fact a key determinant of election outcomes. For instance, the US Census data reports that <sup>2</sup>only about 61% of the eligible population (i.e. US citizens above 18 years old) voted in the last US presidential elections of 2016. The outcome of that election speaks for itself!

Many have argued that democracy as practiced today in Nigeria may not ideally yield the best governance and developmental results for the country; hence there have been several calls and discussions on restructuring and devolution of power. With the immediate past elections in Osun, Ekiti etc. marred with irregularities including pronounced vote buying, some say it is better to abstain from voting as “our votes do not count”. Consequently, many sociopolitical groups have even called for their supporters and sympathizers to keep away from voting in the coming elections due to the later scenario described above.

While this is all true to some extent, the reality of the day remains that our political officials at least for the next four years will be ushered in through the extant electoral laws and electoral institutions however flawed they may be. Yet, the more critical point is that four years is so much of a time in a country’s or person’s life, that one cannot simply wish away the direct

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.inecnigeria.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2016.

consequences of good or bad governance. The question of who to vote for is a troubling one for many voters, especially as historical evidence has shown that most politicians do not keep to their campaign promises after elections have been won. Unfortunately, with the current process, our choices as voters are limited to those who have presented themselves; and out of those, the likely winners are the candidates of the most popular political parties which further limits the process.

This entire process is no doubt frustrating. However, the people must begin to gradually walk their way back to holding their leaders accountable. The first step is understanding what service each candidate is offering and how these would impact on the country's development. Also, it is important to understand their antecedents and how they plan to achieve these service offerings or campaign promises. One should then vote their conscience. Post elections, we must also find ways to engage with our leaders on their performance. These may all sound far-fetched, but the Leadership Think Tank<sup>3</sup> will take a lead in this direction, specifically engaging with leaders to help improve accountability on how they are performing on different aspects of governance and development in the country.

Focus activities of the LTT will include leadership programs. In addition, LTT will regularly develop and disseminate scorecards to track select governance and development indicators; publish issues and position-based papers on issues contextual to Nigeria and Africa. The Leadership Think Tank consists of young people who are passionate about governance and development in Africa;

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<sup>3</sup> a non-profit that aims to develop a generation of Leaders who are adequately prepared and totally responsive in addressing common, shared challenges that hinder development in Nigeria and Africa.

and see the absence of leadership as a major cause of lingering underdevelopment in Nigeria and in the most part of the continent.

In conclusion, evidence confirms that voter apathy can lead to the underrepresentation of some population cohorts. As voting is a central pillar of democracy, we can begin to rewrite our destiny by first participating en masse in the electoral process including making sure that each vote counts. This, in our view, is the first step towards collective and active participation and in deciding the path we should follow as a people.