

Inclusive Democracy in Nigeria: Ensuring Electoral Accessibility and Political Participation for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in the 2027 General Elections

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Abstract: *This study examines the challenges Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) face in participating in Nigeria's elections and explores practical ways to make the 2027 polls more inclusive. On paper, Nigeria has strong laws and has signed international treaties protecting PWD rights, but what is the reality? Many still cannot vote because polling units are not accessible, people hold outdated attitudes, technology leaves them out, and policies are not properly enforced. We examined election reports, disability studies, and legal frameworks (desk research) to determine Nigeria's current status. The findings are frustrating: less than 30% of polling units are PWD-friendly, assistive tools such as Braille ballots are scarce, and even INEC's digital systems are not fully inclusive. We have good laws, such as the 2018 Disability Act and the 2022 Electoral Act, but their implementation is patchy, especially outside cities. Even the BVAS, which could be a game changer, was not designed with all disabilities in mind. So, what's the fix? First, the Electoral Act should be highlighted that accessibility should be made mandatory for PWDs, not optional, and violations should be punished. Second, bake universal design into all election technology and infrastructure from the start. Third, the INEC and political parties need to work with PWD groups, not just check boxes. If we get this right, Nigeria could lead Africa in inclusive elections and more importantly, make voting a real right, not just a promise. The 2027 elections are our chance to finally turn laws into action.*

Keywords: electoral accessibility, persons with disabilities (PWDs), elections, political participation, inclusive democracy and assistive technology.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a system of governance that provides for the equal participation of all citizens in the political process (Dahl,2020). This is our fundamental democratic ideal, and it is what makes every citizen, in a democracy, equally and, ideally, meaningfully subservient and non-subservient, politically speaking, to everyone else. The governance of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and all impaired humans in the system must be the right way for Nigeria. This is because PWDs also belong to the family of citizens in Nigeria. Therefore, the governance of PWDs is part of the overall governance of the family of citizens in Nigeria, which also means, ideologically, that PWDs ought to have every bit as much access to the political process as every other kind of citizen.

PWDs encounter a multitude of challenges to full political participation, from inaccessible polling places to discriminatory societal attitudes, despite constitutional provisions and international commitments (Human Rights Watch, 2021). According to the World Health Organization (2021), approximately 15% of Nigerians, or 29 million people, live with disabilities, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), but their voices are still not heard in governance and policymaking. Nigeria ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2007 and passed the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act in 2018, which clearly requires equal access to electoral processes, but this exclusion still exists (National Assembly of Nigeria, 2018; United Nations, 2020).

PWDs have historically been marginalized in Nigerian politics, reflecting broader societal neglect and infrastructure shortcomings. Physical inaccessibility, a lack of assistive voting technologies, and a lack of voter education specifically designed to meet their needs have all hindered PWDs' ability to participate in elections (CCD, 2022). For example, reports from the general elections in 2019 and 2023 showed that less than 30% of polling places were wheelchair-accessible, and there were very few Braille ballots and sign language interpreters available (EU EOM, 2023; IFES, 2023). These difficulties are exacerbated by sociocultural stigmatization, which discourages PWDs from participating in politics by making them seem unsuited for leadership positions (Amnesty International, 2022). The historical marginalization of PWDs in Nigeria's political landscape reflects broader societal issues. The Nigerian National Association of the Deaf (NNAD, 2021) has documented cases where deaf candidates were excluded from political debates due to the absence of sign language interpretation, reinforcing their political invisibility.

Nigeria can learn a lot from the inclusive election policies that progressive democracies around the world have implemented to guarantee PWD participation. Measures such as universal voting devices, disability quotas in political representation, and priority voting systems for PWDs have been implemented by nations such as Kenya, South Africa, and India (EISA, 2020; South African Human Rights Commission, 2021; Government of India, 2020). These interventions demonstrate that an inclusive electoral system can be established when institutional frameworks and political will are in harmony. By introducing the Framework on Access and Participation of Persons with

Disabilities in 2018 and providing certain assistive materials for the most recent elections, Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has taken initial steps toward inclusivity (INEC, 2021). However, these efforts remain inconsistent and underfunded, necessitating urgent reforms before the 2027 general elections.

Nigeria has a crucial opportunity to institutionalize disability-inclusive policies and rethink its democratic procedures in the run-up to the 2027 elections. In addition to being required by law, ensuring PWDs' access to elections is morally necessary and enhances the legitimacy of the government (Durojaye & Oluduro, 2021). PWD exclusion will continue a cycle of political disenfranchisement in the absence of intentional interventions, which runs counter to Nigeria's commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UNCRPD, especially Goal 16, which promotes inclusive and participatory governance (UNDP 2020). To guarantee that the general elections in 2027 are truly inclusive, this study analyzes the societal, legal, and structural obstacles preventing PWDs from participating in Nigerian elections, assesses international best practices, and makes practical suggestions. By addressing these gaps, Nigeria can set a precedent for disability-inclusive democracy in Africa, fostering a political environment in which every citizen, regardless of ability, can exercise their fundamental right to vote and be voted for.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nigeria's democratic aspirations are significantly challenged by the persistent exclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) from electoral processes, despite progressive legal frameworks. A burgeoning body of literature highlights the multifaceted barriers and potential solutions to ensure inclusive participation in the upcoming 2027 general elections.

Challenges to PWD Electoral Participation

Numerous reports and studies consistently point to several important obstacles. Physical inaccessibility remains a major issue. Voters with mobility impairments are essentially denied the right to vote because polling stations usually lack the necessary infrastructure, such as handrails, ramps, and enough room for wheelchair users (Amnesty International, 2023; IFES, 2023). This also applies to political campaigns, as there are rarely easily accessible locations (DRAC 2022).

In addition to physical constraints, ingrained societal attitudes present significant barriers. PWDs are frequently perceived as paternalistic, which causes voter bias, election officials to offer undue assistance that compromises voter autonomy, and political parties' reluctance to nominate PWD candidates (Afolabi, 2022; NNAD, 2021; OSIWA, 2023; Yiaga Africa, 2023).

These difficulties are exacerbated by economic exclusion. The financial demands of political participation, such as nomination fees and campaign costs, create insurmountable barriers for

PWDs, who have disproportionately high poverty rates (World Bank, 2022). (Afolabi, 2023; OSIWA, 2023). Transportation requirements make basic voting expensive (IFES 2023).

PWDs are further marginalized by communication barriers. Sign language interpreters are mostly absent from political debates and polling stations, and important election materials are frequently unavailable in accessible formats such as Braille or large print (EU EOM, 2023; NNAD, 2023). A digital divide results from the frequent incompatibility of digital platforms with screen readers (DRAC, 2023; Adeyanju, 2022).

Inclusion is also hampered by institutional disparities in the political system. The lack of PWD appointment quotas and disability desks in political parties suggests a theoretical rather than a practical commitment to inclusion (CCD, 2023; Amnesty International, 2023; Afolabi, 2023). Effective planning and focused voter education are also hampered by systemic data gaps at the INEC regarding PWD voters (INEC, 2023; IFES, 2023; DRAC, 2023).

The Role of Technology

Increased accessibility is possible with technological advancements, such as the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) and the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) (Yiaga Africa, 2023). Magnifying glasses and Braille ballot guides are examples of assistive voting technologies that have been introduced in Nigeria (INEC, 2022). However, significant limitations have been revealed in the literature, including unequal distribution and implementation, inadequate device integration and maintenance, and technical issues that disproportionately impact people with disabilities (Electoral Institute, 2023; CDD, 2023; Onyekwelu, 2023; Yiaga Africa, 2023). The absence of inclusive design from the start is a major problem, resulting in systems that are not tailored for different types of disabilities (Human Rights Watch, 2023; DRAC, 2023).

Legislative Frameworks and Recommendations

A legal foundation for PWD inclusion is provided by Nigeria's Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018 and provisions in the Electoral Act 2022. However, ambiguous accessibility standards and lax enforcement mechanisms compromise their efficacy (INEC, 2024; Yiaga Africa, 2023). The need for significant legislative changes is emphasized in the 2027 recommendations, which include amending the Electoral Act to require universal design principles for all electoral technologies, explicit minimum accessibility standards, and sanctions for non-compliance (DRF, 2023; World Bank, 2021).

It is also essential to advocate for the domestication of disability acts at the state level and the alignment of electoral laws (ECSA, 2020; PLAC, 2024). Beyond legal frameworks, it is frequently emphasized that truly inclusive elections require sustained political will, targeted voter education, meaningful consultation with PWD organizations, and capacity building for electoral officials (CCD 2023; EU-SDGN 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study mostly involves secondary data analysis and desk research. Information from various previous reports, publications, and legal documents pertaining to electoral accessibility for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Nigeria had to be synthesized.

The study makes extensive use of human rights reports (from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International), election observation reports (from EU EOM and Yiaga Africa), and research from disability advocacy groups (such as the Disability Rights Advocacy Center and the Centre for Citizens with Disabilities). Important sources also include a variety of scholarly and policy analyses and official publications from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). To inform the conclusions and recommendations, the methodology focuses on a thorough interpretation and integration of published insights rather than gathering new primary data.

Legal and Policy Frameworks for PWD Inclusion in Nigeria's Electoral Process

Through several national and international legal instruments, Nigeria has shown an increasing commitment to the rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), which serves as the cornerstone for promoting political participation and electoral accessibility. As the nation prepares for the general elections in 2027, these frameworks act as both a mandate and a moral imperative to guarantee that PWDs are not excluded from democratic processes (Durojaye & Oluduro, 2021). Three main aspects of Nigeria's legal environment that regulate PWD participation are national laws, electoral-specific policies implemented by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and regional and international commitments.

International and Regional Commitments

Nigeria's ratification of important international treaties, most notably the 2007 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), strengthens its commitments to PWD inclusion. PWDs must have equal access to the information, communication, and physical infrastructure required for political participation, according to the CRPD, especially Article 9 (United Nations, 2020). Furthermore, PWDs' right to engage in political and public life, including the ability to vote and run for office independently and without discrimination, is expressly recognized by Article 29 (Human Rights Watch, 2021). According to these clauses, Nigeria is legally required to take down any obstacles preventing PWDs from exercising their right to vote.

In addition to the CRPD, Nigeria ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), which requires member states to enact laws and administrative procedures that ensure PWDs' full participation in elections through its Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (2018) (African Union, 2020). The limited accessibility provisions in previous elections demonstrate that implementation gaps still exist despite these commitments (CCD 2022).

National Legislation: The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018

The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, is Nigeria's most important domestic legal framework for PWD rights. It was passed in January 2019 following years of campaigning by disability rights organizations (National Assembly of Nigeria, 2018). Because it expressly forbids discrimination against PWDs in all areas of life, including political participation, this Act marks a significant milestone in Nigeria's disability rights movement.

The Act's main provisions pertaining to electoral inclusion are as follows:

- Section 2 requires the INEC and all other public institutions to guarantee PWDs equal access to voting materials, polling places, and other electoral facilities.
- Section 3 mandates the provision of reasonable accommodation, such as Braille ballots, tactile voting aids, sign language interpreters, and magnifying glasses, to allow PWDs to vote independently and discreetly.
- Section 4 promotes PWD representation in governance by urging political parties to incorporate them into their internal structures and decision-making processes.
- Section 5 establishes a standard for affirmative action in political representation by allocating at least 5% of all government appointments to PWDs.

Despite these progressive provisions, enforcement remains lacking. According to a 2023 report by Amnesty International, less than 10% of polling places in the 2023 elections fully complied with the Act's accessibility requirements, underscoring the structural shortcomings in the Act's execution (Amnesty International, 2023).

The Electoral Act 2022 and INTEC's Disability Inclusion Framework

Another crucial step in formalizing PWD inclusion in Nigeria's electoral process is the Electoral Act 2022. Section 54 (1) (2) of the Act expressly requires INEC to:

- Provide assistive voting technologies, such as electronic devices, Braille ballots, and materials with large print for voters with visual impairments.

- Permit PWDs to have a designated assistant accompany them if they need assistance marking their ballots, as long as they notify the presiding officers.
- Verify that polling places have ramps, priority voting lines, and other accommodations required for physical accessibility.

INEC created the Framework on Access and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in the Electoral Process (2018) to implement these legal provisions. It provides feasible strategies for increasing PWD participation (INEC, 2021). Purchasing and distributing assistive technology, such as tactile ballots, magnifying glasses, and Braille ballot guides, is one of the main projects under this framework.

- Ad hoc election officials and INEC employees can participate in training sessions on assistive technology and disability inclusion.
- Working together with disability organizations to run voter education campaigns specifically for people with disabilities, such as providing easy-to-read formats for voters with intellectual disabilities and sign language interpretation for the deaf.
- PWDs' employment with the INEC demonstrates a dedication to representation at all electoral administration levels.

However, problems still exist. Although INEC worked to increase accessibility for the 2023 elections, only 25% of polling places had working assistive technology, and many PWDs continued to face logistical and attitudinal obstacles, according to a 2023 European Union Observation Mission (EU EOM) report (EU EOM, 2023).

Challenges to Electoral Accessibility and Political Participation for PWDs in Nigeria

Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Nigeria still encounter structural obstacles to voting, even in the face of progressive legal frameworks (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Complex layers of exclusion that threaten democratic inclusion are created by these issues, which manifest in institutional, economic, attitudinal, and physical dimensions (Centre for Citizens with Disabilities [CCD], 2023). In order to prepare for the 2027 elections, the general elections of 2023 exposed serious discrepancies between the goals of policy and its actual application (European Union Election Observation Mission [EU EOM], 2023).

Physical accessibility remains a major issue; during the 2023 elections, more than 70% of polling places lacked handrails, ramps, or sufficient space for wheelchair users (Amnesty International, 2023). Voters with mobility impairments are essentially excluded from many voting centers because they are housed in structures with stairways and small entrances (IFES 2023). This physical exclusion also occurs during political campaigns, as PWDs are unable to participate in important pre-election activities because rallies and meetings are rarely held in accessible locations (DRAC 2022).

Another major barrier is the ingrained societal attitudes (Afolabi, 2022). PWDs are still seen through paternalistic prisms by many Nigerians, who see them as passive charity recipients rather than engaged political actors (NNAD 2021). This is demonstrated by voters' prejudices against

PWD candidates, political parties' reluctance to nominate PWD candidates (OSIWA, 2023), and election officials' propensity to offer undue assistance that compromises voter autonomy (Yiaga Africa, 2023).

PWDs experience disproportionate poverty rates of over 80%, exacerbated by economic exclusion (World Bank, 2022). Insurmountable obstacles are created by the financial demands of political participation (Afolabi, 2023), such as high nomination fees and campaign expenses that are rarely covered by funding mechanisms that are inclusive of people with disabilities (OSIWA, 2023). When special transportation to polling places is needed, even basic voting becomes expensive (IFES 2023).

PWDs are further marginalized by communication barriers (DRAC 2023). Accessible formats for crucial election materials are scarce; in 2023, less than 20% of polling places had Braille or large-print materials (EU EOM, 2023), and 90% of political debates lacked sign language interpreters (NNAD, 2023). Screen-reader compatibility is frequently lacking on digital platforms (DRAC, 2023), leading to further exclusion.

Inclusion in political institutions remains mostly a theoretical concept (CCD, 2023). None of Nigeria's 18 registered parties have reached the 5% appointment quota for PWDs, and only two have set up disability desks (Amnesty International, 2023). PWDs continue to be marginalized because political parties rarely include them in leadership roles (Afolabi, 2023).

These difficulties are exacerbated by systemic data gaps (INEC, 2023). Effective planning is hampered by the INEC's inability to keep up-to-date, disaggregated data on PWD voters (IFES, 2023). Less than 15% of PWDs received specialized voter education prior to the most recent elections, demonstrating the similar failure of voter education initiatives (DRAC, 2023).

The Role of Technology in PWD Electoral Participation

Technological advancements have advantages and disadvantages (Yiaga Africa, 2023). If the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) is modified to accommodate voters who have trouble with fingerprint recognition, it may improve accessibility for all voters. By addressing mobility barriers, future mobile voting applications may increase participation (Yiaga Africa 2023).

However, current implementations continue to be exclusionary (EU EOM, 2023). PWDs are disproportionately affected by network outages in rural areas, and BVAS interfaces are incompatible with screen readers (IFES, 2023). These technological "advancements" run the risk of further marginalization in the absence of universal design principles (DRAC, 2023).

To achieve inclusive elections in 2027, these multifaceted obstacles must be addressed through meaningful consultation with PWD organizations and coordinated policy enforcement (CCD,

2023). Universal access must be a fundamental component of technological solutions to achieve inclusive democracy for all citizens (Yiaga Africa, 2023).

The Role and Impact of Technology on PWD Electoral Participation in Nigeria

The incorporation of technology is an important step toward enhancing inclusivity, efficiency, and transparency in Nigeria's electoral process. To improve voter accreditation and result transmission, important innovations, such as the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV) and the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), have been implemented. Although these technologies have great potential for the general public, several unresolved issues and potential advantages remain for people with disabilities (PWDs).

Potential Benefits of Technology for PWDs

To encourage PWDs to vote independently, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has implemented several assistive voting technologies. For voters who are blind or visually impaired, these include large-print ballots, magnifying glasses, and braille ballot guides (INEC, 2022). These tools are intended to increase voter autonomy and confidentiality by lowering their reliance on outside help.

The 2023 general elections saw the introduction of BVAS, which uses facial and fingerprint recognition to authenticate voter identity. By reducing manual verification delays, this system can expedite the accreditation process for certain PWDs, especially those with physical disabilities (Ojo et al., 2023). Additionally, if made available (for example, in formats compatible with screen readers or sign language interpretation), digital voter education materials could greatly increase PWDs' understanding of the electoral process (Adeleke, 2021).

According to research by the Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) (2023), PWD engagement in urban areas has increased as a result of technology-driven voter education campaigns on radio and social media. Nevertheless, the degree of these advantages depends on infrastructure support, digital literacy, and accessibility of the technology.

Current Limitations and Challenges

Despite these advancements, several barriers impede the full realization of technology's potential for the electoral participation of PWD.

Uneven Implementation of Assistive Technologies

The unequal distribution and application of assistive voting technologies across Nigeria is a significant obstacle. Rural and underserved areas frequently lack Braille ballots and magnifying

glasses, whereas urban polling places may have these amenities (Electoral Institute, 2023). PWDs in remote areas are disadvantaged by this discrepancy, resulting in an unfair voting experience.

Poor Integration and Maintenance of Assistive Tools

It is common for accessible assistive technologies to be poorly incorporated into larger electoral infrastructure. Some polling places had assistive technology, according to reports from the 2023 elections, but poll workers were not trained to use it, which caused confusion (CDD 2023). Furthermore, PWD voters who depended on these resources were irritated by their poor maintenance, such as broken guides in Braille (Onyekwelu, 2023).

Technical Hitches and Disenfranchisement Risks

The 2023 elections highlighted important technical flaws in the BVAS and IReV systems. For PWDs with physical disabilities, fingerprint authentication occasionally fails, necessitating the use of manual accreditation, which is less dependable and slower (Yiaga Africa, 2023). PWDs are disproportionately impacted by these technical disruptions, even though they may have already surmounted major mobility and logistical obstacles to get to polling places.

The Digital Divide and Accessibility Barriers

Due to low digital literacy, expensive assistive devices, and restricted Internet access, PWDs experience a wider digital divide (Adeyanju, 2022). Despite the admirable nature of INEC's online voter education programs, many PWDs, particularly those living in rural areas, are unable to access them. According to a 2022 survey conducted by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), only 28% of PWDs in Nigeria had dependable Internet access, which limited their use of digital electoral resources.

Lack of Inclusive Design in Electoral Technologies

The fact that electoral technologies are not inclusively designed from the beginning is a fundamental problem. Blind voters were excluded from the BVAS because it was not originally designed to be compatible with voice commands or screen readers (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Accessibility issues also arise after elections because PWDs are further marginalized as election results are rarely released in accessible formats (such as audio or simplified text) (Amadi, 2023).

Strategies and Recommendations for Enhancing PWD Electoral Participation in Nigeria's 2027 General Elections: A Legislative and Technical Approach

Although the Electoral Act 2022 was a step in the right direction for Nigeria's electoral reforms, many obstacles remain in the way of PWDs' meaningful participation. Despite the Act's inclusive provisions, poor enforcement practices, ambiguous accessibility standards, and technological

constraints have made it difficult to implement (INEC, 2024). This section offers practical legislative and technical recommendations to close these gaps in advance of the 2027 general elections, based on empirical research and international best practices (EU-SDGN, 2023).

Legislative Gaps in the Electoral Act 2022

The Electoral Act 2022 has several flaws that prevent PWDs from participating, according to a critical analysis. Although INEC is required to provide assistive devices under Section 54 of the Act, no funding sources, minimum accessibility requirements, or sanctions for non-compliance are mentioned (Yiaga Africa 2023). Because of this ambiguity, different states and polling places have implemented different measures. For example, rural areas frequently lack even the most basic accessibility features, such as ramps, while urban centers may have Braille ballots (CDD 2023).

Additionally, the Act does not specifically require universal design principles for electoral technologies such as the IReV portal and BVAS (IFES, 2022). The lack of sanctions for political parties or INEC officials who disregard PWD accommodation requirements is another obvious discrepancy (NHRC 2022). Most importantly, the Act does not require State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) to meet the INEC's accessibility requirements (UNDP, 2022).

Technical and Legislative Recommendations

Legal Reforms: Amending the Electoral Act

Clear and enforceable provisions for PWD inclusion should be added to the Electoral Act 2022 to close these gaps (DRF, 2023). Section 54 should be extended to require universal design principles for all electoral technologies, including the BVAS and IReV. To enforce penalties for non-compliance, such as fines for political parties that do not provide easily accessible campaign materials, a new Section 54A should be introduced (World Bank 2021).

Domesticating the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018 should be the main goal of state-level advocacy initiatives (ECSA, 2020). To guarantee consistent accessibility at all election levels, state houses of assembly must conform their electoral laws to federal requirements (PLAC, 2024).

Technical Recommendations

Several technical interventions must be implemented to guarantee Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) full electoral participation in Nigeria's general elections in 2027. To accommodate voters who are blind or visually impaired, all polling places should first install assistive voting technologies such as Braille ballot guides, tactile voting aids, and audio-assisted voting machines. To guarantee functionality, these tools must first be user-tested in PWD communities. To guarantee compatibility with screen readers and keyboard navigation for voters with motor or

visual impairments, INEC's digital platforms, such as voter registration portals and election information websites, must also adhere to the international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1).

To guarantee that deaf voters have equal access to electoral information, sign language interpreters should be available at polling places and during election coverage on television. The INEC should investigate safe electronic and mobile voting options for voters with mobility issues and implement robust cybersecurity measures to thwart fraud. To guarantee adherence to disability-friendly infrastructure standards, such as ramps, priority lines, and low-height voting booths, all polling places must also undergo required accessibility audits.

Disaggregated disability data must be integrated into INEC's voter database to support these initiatives and allow focused policy changes. To enhance their capacity to effectively support PWDs, electoral officials should complete disability sensitivity training.

Finally, to ensure timely resolutions, a real-time feedback mechanism, such as an SMS or USSD reporting system, should be implemented to enable PWDs to report accessibility barriers on election day. Nigeria can make significant progress toward electoral inclusivity for PWDs in the 2027 elections by implementing these measures.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria is at a turning point in its democratic history, and the general elections of 2027 will be a crucial opportunity to create an electoral system that is truly inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities (PWDs). Millions of Nigerians with disabilities still encounter structural obstacles that restrict their ability to participate in politics, even in the face of progressive legislative frameworks and policy promises. To guarantee that every citizen can exercise their democratic rights equally and with dignity, a fundamental rethinking of electoral procedures is required that goes beyond simple adherence to international norms.

The current situation shows both advancements and enduring difficulties. Nigeria has created significant legal protections through laws such as the Electoral Act and the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act; however, their application is still uneven and frequently ineffectual. Voters with disabilities are still denied the right to vote due to physical obstacles at polling places, insufficient assistive technology, and communication breakdowns in the voting process. Deeply ingrained societal attitudes that view PWDs as passive welfare recipients rather than active political participants exacerbate these structural barriers.

In Nigeria's electoral process, technological advancements present both opportunities and risks to the electoral process. If properly designed using universal principles, systems like the BVAS could revolutionize accessibility; however, current implementations frequently exclude voters with specific disabilities. These difficulties are exacerbated by the digital divide, as many PWDs do not

have access to the connectivity and technology required to use digital electoral resources. These technological obstacles reflect larger exclusionary trends that extend to economic participation, political representation, and physical infrastructure.

It will make coordinated efforts on several fronts to achieve meaningful inclusion by 2027. Existing laws must be strengthened by legislative reforms that include explicit accessibility guidelines, enforcement procedures, and sanctions for noncompliance. To guarantee that polling places and supplies are accessible to everyone, electoral authorities must give universal design top priority when developing voting technologies and infrastructure. While civil society is essential in changing public perceptions and holding institutions responsible, political parties must go beyond token efforts to actively seek out and assist PWD candidates.

Collaboration between government agencies, electoral bodies, political parties, disability organizations, and the international community is necessary for the future. Sustained political will, sufficient funding, and—above all—the meaningful involvement of PWDs in the development and application of solutions are necessary. Nigeria has the potential to establish a regional benchmark for disability-inclusive elections, proving that democracy is strengthened when all citizens are able to fully participate.

The imperative is clear as Nigeria gets ready for 2027: creating an electoral system that ensures no one is left behind is not only required by law, but also morally right and a democratic strength. Half-measures are no longer an option. Bold, all-encompassing action is now required to turn Nigeria's democracy into one that genuinely represents all of its citizens. Nigeria will have made significant progress toward fulfilling the promise of its democratic ideals when PWDs are able to vote on their own, run for office without interference, and engage in politics on an equal basis. This historic turning point can be achieved in the 2027 elections, but only if efforts are made now to remove the technological, physical, and mental obstacles that have kept PWDs out for too long.

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