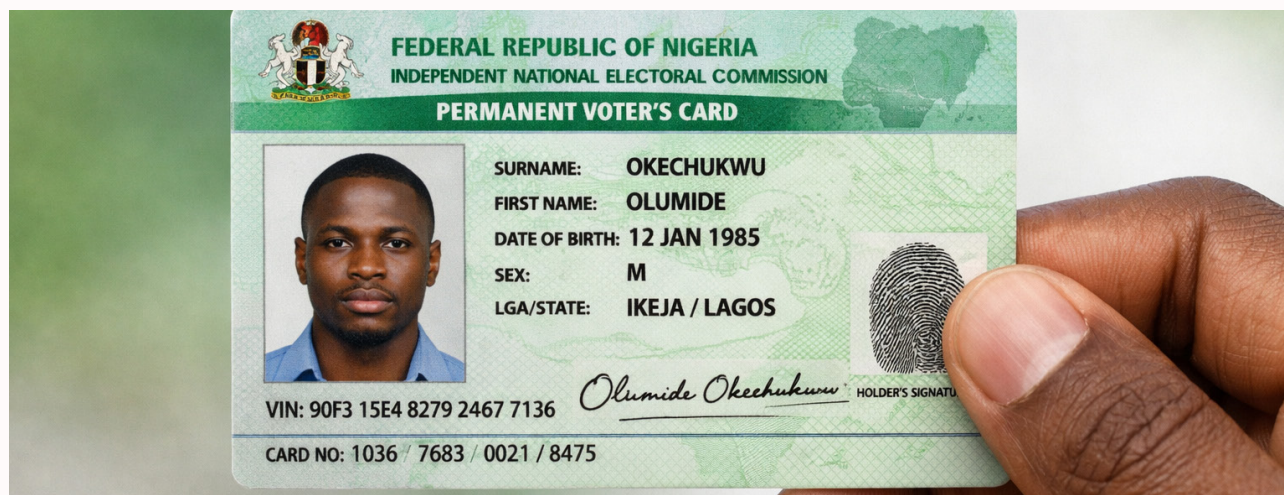


DOWNLOADABLE PVC: WHAT THE NEW ELECTORAL LAW REALLY SAYS



There is growing public belief that the newly enacted Electoral Act now permits voters to use downloadable/printed PVCs for accreditation and voting. However, this is not supported by a holistic reading of the law as written, as it does not expressly define such copies as substitutes for the Permanent Voter's Card required for accreditation.

1) PVCs remain the required accreditation document

Section 47 is explicit: anyone intending to vote must present for accreditation and **provide a Permanent Voter's Card (PVC)**. The law does **not** say "PVC or downloadable copy," and it does not redefine a downloadable printout as a PVC. In fact, a proposal for an electronically generated voter identification, including a downloadable voter's card with a unique QR code for accreditation was proposed and deliberated but rejected by NASS.

2) The Law still treats PVCs as Commission-issued, not self-printed

Section 16 (1) dealing with "**Power to print or issue voters' card**" provides that INEC should design, print, and control issuance of PVCs.

Section 18(3) dealing with "**Power to issue replacement permanent voters' cards**" goes further: any replacement PVC must be **issued by an electoral officer**, marked "**REPLACEMENT**," and dated. That is the opposite of a self-printed card.

3) So where did a "downloadable copy" clause appear, and what does it mean?

Section 18(1) of the passed Electoral Bill – also dealing with lost/damaged PVCs and their replacement – contains a proviso that nothing shall prevent a card owner from printing a downloadable replacement copy. But it fails to clarify what that copy is for and importantly, it does not link it to accreditation under Section 47.

4) There is also a strict 90-day cut-off for replacement PVC issuance

Section 18(2) prohibits the issue of replacement PVCs **less than 90 days before polling day**. If a downloadable copy were meant to serve as a voting credential, this safeguard would be easily bypassed, yet the law does not say that the downloadable copy overrides the 90-day rule.

5) This looks like a drafting gap, not a new voting right

Read as a whole, the law maintains a physical, INEC-issued PVC system for accreditation, while inserting a “downloadable copy” line without defining its legal effect. That internal inconsistency is best understood as a drafting gap or a clean-up/editing oversight, not a clear authorisation to vote with printed downloads.

Bottom line

- Accreditation still requires a PVC (Section 47).
- Replacement PVCs are officer-issued and time-restricted (Sections 18(2)–(3)).
- The “downloadable copy” line is not drafted clearly enough to make it a lawful alternative accreditation credential.

If uncorrected, this ambiguity could fuel misinformation and disputes at polling units.



About PLAC

Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) is a non-governmental organization committed to strengthening democratic governance and citizens' participation in Nigeria. PLAC works to enhance citizens' engagement with state institutions, and to promote transparency and accountability in policy and decision-making process.

The main focus of PLAC's intervention in the democratic governance process is on building the capacity of the legislature and reforming the electoral process. Since its establishment, PLAC has grown into a leading institution with capacity to deliver cutting-edge research, policy analysis and advocacy. PLAC receives funding support from donors and other philanthropic sources.

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