

**Nigerian
Mental
Health**

GUIDE TO MANAGE ELECTION- RELATED STRESS

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Introduction:

Elections are the cornerstone of any democracy, a time when the voices of the people can shape the course of a nation. It's a moment of hope, change, and renewal, but it can also be a source of profound stress and anxiety. The political landscape is often marked by divisive rhetoric, and the weight of uncertainty. For many, the very act of voting can feel like a deeply personal commitment, and the outcomes of an election can have far-reaching consequences.

As election cycles unfold, the heightened emotional climate can take a toll on individuals, affecting not only their mental and emotional well-being but also their relationships, work, and daily lives. Whether you're an engaged citizen, a campaign volunteer, a voter, or an observer, election-related stress is a shared experience in our modern world.

This guide is designed to be a compass, offering guidance and strategies to help you navigate the turbulent seas of election-related stress. It recognizes that, while elections are pivotal, your mental health and overall well-being are equally essential.

In the pages that follow, you will discover valuable insights on how to stay informed without becoming overwhelmed, maintain healthy boundaries in political discourse, and cope with the ups and downs of the election journey. You'll learn about the importance of self-care, self-awareness, and seeking support when needed.

Our aim is not to eliminate your concerns or fears but to empower you to navigate them with grace and resilience. Elections may be sources of stress, but they are also opportunities for growth, learning, and, most importantly, positive change. By the end of this guide, you will have a toolkit for managing election-related stress and emerging from the experience with your well-being intact.



Guide to Manage Election-Related Stress

- **Stay informed, but know your limits:**

If your preoccupation with national events disrupts your daily life, it may be time to scale back on your news consumption and reduce social media engagement.

Consider establishing specific time blocks in the morning and evening for catching up on news, rather than constantly checking for daily updates. Prior research has demonstrated that exposure to consistently negative news cycles can adversely affect mood and amplify personal concerns. Consequently, reducing media exposure can be a preventative measure to mitigate this impact.

During your "digital breaks," dedicate time to engage in enjoyable activities, such as pursuing hobbies, exercising, or spending quality time with family and friends.

- **Find commonalities with others:**

When political disagreements emerge with others, opt for listening to the other person's perspective and seek areas of shared understanding rather than engaging in heated debates. Respectfully acknowledging someone's viewpoint does not require you to endorse it. If maintaining a calm and productive conversation becomes challenging, it might be advisable to step away from the discussion.

- **Find meaningful ways to get involved in your community:**

This could be through local organizations, town hall meetings, local politics, etc. Taking active steps to address your concerns can lessen feelings of stress.



- **Seek solace:**

Identify organizations in your community that provide emotional and spiritual support. These could be faith-based or non-faith-based organizations.

- **Take care of yourself:**

Engage in physical activity, such as exercise; enjoy the tunes of your favorite music; invest quality time with your close family and friends; get sufficient rest and maintain a healthy diet; and avoid unhelpful coping strategies like excessive alcohol or substance use.

- **Vote:**

With all of the stress associated with elections, it may start to feel that a person's power and control over the situation is minimal. People can experience depressed thoughts full of hopelessness as they wonder about their ability to truly make a difference.

Voting is a great stress reducer during elections because it is an active, behavioral gesture that fulfills each person's civic duty. The act of voting can also represent the conclusion of another election cycle, and it presents an opportunity for people to shift their habits away from politics.

- **Stay Informed Responsibly:**

Using reliable and balanced news sources can help individuals stay informed without succumbing to the stress associated with sensationalized or biased reporting.

- **Maintain Healthy Boundaries:**

Limiting exposure to negative campaign rhetoric and political discussions on social media can help reduce stress and anxiety levels.

- **Seek Support:**

Encourage open and respectful dialogue with friends and family, even when there are political disagreements. Social support is crucial for maintaining mental wellness during divisive times.

- **Self-Care:**

Prioritize self-care routines, including regular exercise, mindfulness practices, and adequate sleep, to help manage stress and anxiety.



- **Advocate for Change:**

Actively participate in efforts to combat hate speech, discrimination, and violence during elections. Advocating for a more civil and respectful political discourse can positively impact mental wellness.

- **Seek perspective:**

Some individuals have a tendency to resort to catastrophic thinking when their expectations go unmet. Catastrophic thinking involves anticipating the worst possible outcome, even when the likelihood of such an outcome is minimal. In the context of dissatisfaction with election results, individuals not only dwell on negative thoughts but also fixate on how those results might potentially jeopardize the well-being of the nation and its democratic system.

During moments when thoughts are spiraling and intensifying stress and anxiety, it becomes essential to take a step back and assess them rather than allowing them to overwhelm us. Therefore, dedicating time to introspection and asking questions such as, "Is the outcome I'm envisioning realistically probable?" and, "Have my previous concerns materialized when I disagreed with election results in the past?" Actively engaging in this kind of "metacognition" can help guide us toward achieving a more balanced perspective and experiencing reduced negative emotions and stress.

- **Seek professional support:**

If your anxiety is significantly impacting your daily life or persisting beyond a reasonable timeframe, it may be helpful to seek support from a mental health professional. They can provide you with coping strategies and tools to manage your anxiety.

- **Set boundaries:**

The connection between personal life and politics is undeniable, and it's crucial to be emotionally engaged with your local, national, and global communities. However, it's equally vital not to allow the stress of the constant news cycle to overwhelm your life. Take deliberate steps to allocate time for staying informed and discussing political matters, as well as time for disconnecting from them. Establish clear boundaries with family and friends regarding political discussions. Before engaging in any political conversation, consider your objectives and ensure they are realistic.

Take a social media break:

This is often one of the hardest things to do in a hyper-connected world. Social media is full of news and election-related content right now. Even the stuff we agree with can add to our overall distress, distraction, and exhaustion. When it's time to set aside politics for a moment and take a break, we recommend connecting with friends on different platforms, or keeping secondary accounts where political content is blocked or unfollowed in favor of content you enjoy.



- **Limit your news consumption:**

Create moments for intentional disconnection from media, especially when you find yourself distressed, anxious, or emotionally overwhelmed. Prolonged periods of high stress can have adverse effects on both your physical and emotional well-being. Dedicate time to pause and direct your attention towards aspects of life that you can directly influence, such as your daily routines and relationships with loved ones. Prioritizing these areas during stressful times can help minimize the impact of distressing news and enable you to maintain a sense of calm and equilibrium.

Ask yourself these two questions when reading the news: 'Is this article helpful?' and 'Is this article real (or reflective of my own truth)?' If you answer 'no' to either of those questions, permit yourself to move on.

- **Pick up a new hobby or watch a funny movie:**

Stimulate and distract your brain by learning something new, forcing it to refocus. Watch a favorite feel-good TV show, or stream a funny movie. Read something that makes you laugh.

- **Limit Negative Coping Skills Like Drinking:**

As stress, tension, and sadness accumulate, individuals may resort to negative coping mechanisms such as alcohol or other drugs to alleviate their emotions. These substances may provide a fleeting sense of relief, offering a seemingly quick solution to discomfort, as a drink after a challenging day can temporarily soothe the body and mind. However, over time, these substances can exacerbate the underlying issues, leading to greater stress and anxiety.

It is essential to recognize that elections, despite their challenges, can also serve as opportunities for positive change. Civic engagement, advocating for mental wellness, and working to mitigate hate and violence can all contribute to a healthier and more inclusive political environment. By addressing these issues proactively and collectively, societies can work toward elections that not only shape their political landscapes but also support the well-being of their citizens.

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