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High Cost of Nomination Forms and Youth Exclusion in Nigeria's Electoral Process: Issues for Legislative Intervention

Authored By:
Patrick N. Udefuna,
Okoh Samson Oche & Hassan Yerima, Ph.D.

Executive Summary

Despite the signing of the Not-Too-Young-To-Run Bill into law in 2018, the rising cost of nomination and expression of interest forms charged by political parties in Nigeria has become a major barrier to political participation, particularly for young Nigerians. Recently, in Ebonyi State, as reported in the media, the All Progressives Congress (APC) has set exorbitant nomination fees for its upcoming local government chairmanship elections, pegging the cost of nomination forms at around ₦30 million for aspirants. This fee is reportedly higher than the total official earnings a local government chairman would receive over a full four-year tenure, making it far beyond the reach of most ordinary youths and grassroots politicians. Civil society and youth organisations, including the Ohanaeze Youth Council, have criticised this pricing as a deliberate exclusion of young people and a factor that could encourage rent-seeking behaviour by those who can afford it. This deliberate high nomination and expression forms cost effectively turns local politics into a contest for the wealthy or well-connected, undermining democratic inclusion at the grassroots level. While the Constitution guarantees the right to contest elections, exorbitant nomination fees effectively restrict this right to wealthy individuals or those backed by powerful sponsors. This undermines democratic inclusion and weakens youth representation. It is against this backdrop that legislative intervention is necessary to regulate expression of interest and nomination fees to promote youth inclusion. This brief hereby recommends the following:

i. The National Assembly may amend the Electoral Act 2022 to expressly empower INEC to regulate and approve nomination fees charged by political parties. Given that the current law excludes INEC from this process. The amendment should mandate political parties to submit their fee structures to INEC for oversight to prevent excessive and exclusionary charges.
ii. The National Assembly may amend the relevant sections of the 1999 Constitution and the Electoral Act, 2022, to introduce and operationalize independent candidacy in Nigeria's electoral framework, thereby creating alternative pathways for candidate selection outside party structures.

1. Introduction

The persistent increases of party nomination forms in Nigeria have significantly constrained youth political participation, despite the constitutional recognition of a multiparty democracy (Section 221, 1999 [1] Constitution as amended) and legal reforms such as the enactment of the Not-Too-Young-To-Run Act. While Sections 85–93 of the Electoral Act, 2022 regulate party finance and

[1] Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended)*. Government Printer.

campaign expenditure, the law is largely silent on binding ceilings for nomination and expression-of-interest fees. While the two main parties, APC and PDP, introduced concessions for women and 50% discount for young aspirants, aspirants were still subject to paying other sundry fees for administrative costs and state secretariat fees before nomination forms were submitted for processing. These pre-primaries expenses represent a small fraction of the cost of politics (Adolphus cited in Samson 2022).[2]

Currently, parties determine fees autonomously under Section 84 of the Electoral Act 2022 nomination of candidates and fees are subject only to internal party guidelines. However, the absence of an institution, such as INEC, to have a regulatory responsibility in the nomination of candidates and fees allows excessive monetization. This regulatory gap enables political parties to impose prohibitive charges that undermine equal political opportunity and the youth's inclusiveness within the Nigerian political space.

2. Justification of the High Cost of Nomination Form by Political Parties

Political parties claim that the high monetary value placed on the nomination forms is a due diligence measure to distinguish pretenders from contenders. To the parties, it is a parameter for measuring interest, seriousness, and commitment to contest for office. In the absence of state funding of parties, parties generate revenue from the sale of forms to fund party activities. (Gbajabiamila cited in Samson, 2022).[3] In an interparty dialogue in Abuja hosted by Action Aid Nigeria in 2022, YIAGA Africa, and PERL, some parties argued that the exorbitant cost of forms is attributed to inflation. Most of the parties argued in the dialogue that, ideally, political parties fund candidates, but the reverse is the case in Nigeria, where candidates fund political parties. Political parties cannot generate revenue through membership dues, levies, and donations, hence the high cost. The removal of state funding for political parties in 2010 remains the root cause of the high cost of nomination forms.

3. 2023 General Elections and Youth Representation in Brief

The YIAGA Africa report in May 2023 shows that Youth representation in the legislature improved slightly. Compared to 2015 and 2019, young people won more seats in the National and State Houses of Assembly in the 2023 elections. Youth representation in the House of Representatives increased from 3% in 2019 to 3.92% (0.9% increase), while in the state assemblies, there was a 0.3% increase from 8.9% to 9.2%. Young people between the ages of 25 and 35 won 14 out of the 360 seats in the House of Representatives, and 92 out of 993 constituency seats in sub-national legislative houses[4]. While the YIAGA Africa report shows a small rise in the number and percentage of youth elected to the National Assembly in 2023 compared to 2019, young people still occupy only a tiny fraction of seats, under 4% in the House of Representatives, indicating ongoing under-representation despite reforms like the Not-Too-Young-To-Run law.

4. Factors Leading to the High Nomination Forms Fees in Nigeria.

i. *Elite capture and the Politics of Exclusion*

These are some of the major factors leading to the high cost of nomination in Nigeria.

[2] Itodo S. (2022). Political Party Nomination Fees and the Shrinking Political Space. *International IDEA*

[3] ibid

[4] YIAGA Africa (2023). Youth representation in Nigeria legislature. Yiaga.org

Deliberate structuring of politics to favour economic elites. High nomination fees function as informal screening mechanisms that reduce the number of aspirants, exclude youth and women without access to wealth, and consolidate control within established political networks. While the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and the "Not-Too-Young-To-Run Act" reforms reduced constitutional age barriers, economic barriers remain significant. The high cost of nomination forms effectively replaces age restrictions with financial restrictions. This reflects broader patterns of patronage politics, Godfatherism, and political clientelism.

In Nigeria today, political office is often treated as an investment opportunity, where only financially strong individuals (or those backed by powerful sponsors) can participate. As competition among wealthy aspirants increases, parties may raise fees further, knowing that elite contenders can afford them.

ii. *Monetization of Politics:*

Another factor of rising nomination form fees is the monetization of politics in Nigeria. Section 87 of the Electoral Act, 2022, provides for party primaries; the Act does not impose a statutory ceiling on nomination form fees charged by political parties.[5] Over time, major political parties have transformed nomination forms into significant revenue sources. In some election cycles, presidential nomination forms have cost tens or even hundreds of millions of naira. Governorship, senatorial, and House of Representatives forms have also witnessed steady increases. APC, as reported in the media, pegged the fees for its expression of interest and nomination forms for the 2023 general elections at N100 million for presidential aspirants, comprising N30 million for the expression of interest form and N70 million for the nomination form. The party also fixed N50 million for governorship aspirants, N20 million and N10 million for senatorial and House of Representatives aspirants, respectively, and N2 million for state House of Assembly aspirants. Aspirants under 40 years old will get a 50 per cent discount on fees, while women and persons living with disabilities will pay only for the expression of interest forms. Even with the discount, it was huge for the youths.

5. Effect of High Cost of Nomination Fees on Youths' Inclusion in Politics

In Nigeria's politics, individuals who want to run for elected offices (especially under major political parties) often pay nomination fees and costs required to be listed as a candidate for primaries. These fees are often high, especially for key positions like the National Assembly, governorships, and the presidency. The result is that many young people who often lack financial resources face barriers to participating meaningfully in politics. Some of the effects of the high cost of nomination fees on youths' inclusion in politics are as follows:

i. *Elite dominate*: High nomination fees create a significant financial barrier that prevents the average Nigerian youth from contesting elections. With high unemployment rates and limited access to capital, most young people cannot afford the millions of naira required for party nomination forms. This restricts political participation to wealthy individuals or those backed by powerful sponsors. As a result, capable but financially disadvantaged youths are excluded from the electoral process. Consequently, political competition becomes less inclusive and less representative of Nigeria's youthful population.

ii. *Weakening of Youth Interest and Engagement*: High nomination fees

[5] Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2022). *Electoral Act, 2022*. Government Printer.

discourage youths from engaging in politics by reinforcing the belief that the system favours the wealthy. When access to candidacy depends largely on money, many young people feel excluded and disillusioned. This leads to political apathy, lower participation in party activities, and declining trust in the democratic process.

6. Areas for Legislative Intervention

To mitigate the effects of the high cost of nomination forms fees on youth exclusion in Nigeria's electoral process, this brief hereby recommends the following:

i. Both chambers of the National Assembly should amend the Electoral Act, 2022, to expressly empower INEC to regulate and set maximum limits on the cost of expression of interest and nomination forms charged by registered political parties. Such an amendment is to create a uniform guidelines, transparency in fee structures, and sanctions for non-compliance.

ii. The National Assembly should amend the 1999 Constitution and the Electoral Act, 2022 to introduce and operationalize independent candidacy in Nigeria's electoral framework, thereby creating alternative pathways for candidate selection outside party structures. This amendment would reduce the over-reliance on money-driven party nomination processes and shift emphasis toward competence, capacity, and character.

7. Conclusion

Electoral reform is essential to reduce the excessively high cost of nomination fees in Nigeria's candidate selection process and to broaden democratic participation. Legislative intervention to regulate nomination costs and provide for independent candidacy will promote fairness, youth inclusion, and merit-based leadership. These measures will enhance youth confidence in Nigeria's electoral process and democratic governance.

Contact
National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies
National Assembly
NILDS Permanent Site, No.2 Abubakar O. Sulaiman Avenue, Piwoyi District, off Umaru Musa Yar`adua Expressway, Airport Road, Abuja.

E-mail: info@nils.gov.ng
Website: http://nils.gov.ng

NILDS Liaison Office
Suite 214 Senate Wing
National Assembly Complex
Mobile: +234 807 364 4822