

Money Politics and the Not Too Young to Run Act in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper interrogates the impact of money politics on youth inclusion as candidates for elective positions through the instrumentality of the 'Not Too Young to Run Act.' It argues that while the signing of the Act removed a basic hindrance to youth candidacy by lowering the age eligibility for contesting for public offices. It, however, observed that undue use of monetisation of the electoral process undercuts youth capacity to compete. To that end, it suggests that the provision on the limitation of election expenses for various elective offices must be strictly enforced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Political parties are also admonished to lower the cost of their expression of interest and nomination forms to prevent the unwholesome system of highest bidder. Lastly, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and sister agencies must see to it that those that involve in vote buying and selling are arrested and prosecuted.

Keywords: Election, Inclusivity, Money politics, Not Too Young To Young to Run, and Representation

Introduction

Election constitutes a fundamental means of ensuring the participation and representation of individuals and groups in political processes. Contrary to this, the Nigerian political space since the return to democracy in 1999 has been dominated by gerontocrats, older politicians, and patriarchs. Besides, the minimum constitutional age requirement for contesting election in the country makes it difficult for youths to participate in elections as candidates as evident in the low number of youth candidates in all elections in the Fourth Republic even as about 70% of the Nigeria's population is below 35years.

To counter this apparent structural conflict situation, youth and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) launched extensive campaigns aimed at lowering the statutory age of candidates for various elective positions under the aegis of the Not Too Young To Run Movement. The struggle eventually resulted in the signing of the Not Too Young To Run Act (NTYTRA). It was hoped that the Act will enhance youth inclusion and participation, and representation in Nigerian politics.

Unfortunately, experience over the course of two general elections: 2019 and 2023 that were conducted under the NTYTRA demonstrate that other variables other than age, principal of which is money politics undermines the aims of the NTYTRA. Although money is desideratum in electoral democracy, undue application of money in electoral processes weakens inclusivity and fairness. The monetisation of elections in Nigeria means that the already peasantised youth are systematically eliminated. Considering this, Okibe, (2022) noted that the gatekeeping functions of political godfathers and financial heavyweights that truncates and favours older politicians at the expense

of the youth. It is against this background that the paper interrogates the effect of money politics on the NTYTRA.

Understanding the Concept of Youth

The term youth has no universally accepted definition. It varies from one location, country, organisation, and region to another. Hence, it has cultural, social, economic, and political meanings depending on who is defining. For instance, the African Youth Charter, sees a youth as anyone that is within the ages of 18 – 35years. According to the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) young parliamentarians refers to legislators that are under 45 years of age.

The Nigerian National Youth Policy defines a youth as someone between 18 – 35 years. For electoral purposes, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) classifies youth as persons within the ages of 18 – 35years. Extrapolating from the result of the 2006 population census, an estimated 70 percent of Nigeria population are youth. It, therefore, infers that the level of youth representation in Nigerian politics is abysmally low.

The Not Too Young to Run Act and Expansion of the Democratic Space in Nigeria

Democracy is popularly seen as government of the people, by the people and for the people. The phrase ‘by the people’ is used both in plural, and as common noun, meaning that it is inclusive of all categories of persons that reside within the political system irrespective of gender, race, region, religion, and age. It, therefore, presupposes that all members of the society are eminently qualified to participate in political activities. However, states through constitutional, and legal instruments (regulatory guidelines) limit the capacity of individuals and groups to participate in the political life of their society. To that end, there exist a world of difference between existence of formal democratic institutions, and substantive democratic processes in a state. A fundamental aspect of democratic space is the ability of people to participate in the decision-making process where they can express their needs and opinions on issues of public concern.

Accordingly, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) provides four basic criteria for contesting election into elective offices in the country. These are: citizenship, age, educational and political party sponsorship. Specifically, the Constitution stipulates that to qualify for election, a person must be a citizen of Nigeria, has been educated to at least the school Certificate level or its equivalent; and must be sponsored by a political party to which (s)he is a member (Nigerian constitution, 1999 as amended). With regards to age, the constitution under Section 65(2a&b) provides that a person aspiring for Senate must have attained 35 years of age, and 30 years for House of Representatives. Under Section 106(b) for a person to contest election into the House of Assembly, the person must have attained the 30years of age. Section 131(b) stipulates that a candidate for the office of the President must have attained 40 years, while Section 177 (b) give 35 years as the age requirement for the office of the Governor (Nigerian constitution, 1999 as amended). Expectedly, the passage by the National Assembly and the Presidential Assent to the Not Too Young To Run bill, appears to have opened the democratic space for youths participation in elections as contestants considering the reduction in age requirements for contesting some elective positions.

The signing of the NTYTRA altered the provisions of Sections 65, 106, 131 and 177 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It lowered the age of eligibility for elective political office from 30 year to 25 year of age. With the modification, the eligibility age for the office of the President was reduced from 40 to 35 years, eligibility for Governorship was reduced from 35 to 30 years, Senate, 35 to 30 years, while that of House of Representatives, and House of Assembly were reduced from

30 to 25 years, respectively. The implication of the age limit alteration is that the issue of age that previously hindered youths under the age of 30 from participating in politics has been removed. With this development, youths were expectant that the tomorrow they have often heard of had finally arrived. Through the instrumentality of the NTYTRA, an increasing number of youths appear to join the race for elective political offices at various levels of government. Corroborating this view, YIAGA Africa also observed that the reduction of the age of limitation, has seen a massive increase in the interest of youth that ran for various positions across board in the 2019 General Elections (YIAGA, 2023a). The trend continued during the 2023 general election, which was the second general election to be conducted under the NTYTRA regime. It has been observed that the expanding number of youth candidacy and youth representation in federal and state legislatures is the consequence of the Not Too Young to Run legislation (YIAGA, 2023b). This is because the NTYTRA resolved a fundamental constitutional hinderance that limited the capacity of youth to actively get involved in politics as candidates.

The basic benefit of the age reduction legislation lies in the vibrancy, fresh ideas, energy, innovation, dynamism, robustness, and creativity that the youth will bring into the decision-making arena.

Money Politics as threat to the Not Too Young To Run Act

“What money cannot do, more money can. And what more money cannot do, much more money will” is a popular political slogan within Nigeria politico-electoral ecosystem. The idea behind the sloganeering is that politics and all that have to do with it is reducible to the power of money. Hence, it is not the man of character, but the man of means that society reveres. Politics in post-civil war Nigeria, starting with the defunct Second Republic elections, and the aborted Third Republic were monetised. The monetisation rascality was such that the then Military President Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida gave it as one of the reasons for annulment of the 1993 Presidential election, when he observed:

There were authenticated reports of election malpractices against agents, officials of the NEC and voters... there were proofs of manipulation, offers, and acceptance of money and other forms of inducement. Evidence available to the government put the amount of spent by presidential candidates at over 2.1 billion naira (Davies, 2012 p.70).

Since the restoration of democracy on May 29, 1999, after years of military interregnum a major defining character of Nigeria politics has been resurgence and entrenchment of money politics in the current fourth republic. Between 1999 and 2023, Nigeria conducted seven general elections which is the longest in the country's series of democratic experimentation. In all these elections, namely, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023, there has been an expanding incidence and allegation of electoral commodification and monetisation by contesting candidates and political parties. Money is a necessary correlate of democratic politics as it enables candidates and parties to execute their strategic plans. Funds are required for purchase of expression of interest, and nomination forms, production of campaign materials, jingles, renting of campaign venues, music troupes, equipment, and so on. The problem, however, is the use of illicit and unregulated electoral campaign funds in the process. To countervail the untoward use of money during elections, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) under Sections 225 empowers the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to monitor, audit, and follow campaign financing, and sources of funds to political parties. In case of breaches, Section 228 of the Constitution authorises the National Assembly to punish violators. Although the Constitution did not expressly stipulate the maximum amount a candidate can spend, that shortcoming is however corrected by the provision

of Section 88 of the 2022 Electoral Act that stipulates limitations on election expenses for various elective offices.

Table 1: Limitations on Election Expenses for various offices

S/n	Elective Office	Maximum permissible election expense to be incurred by a candidate
1	President	N5,000,000,000
2	Governorship	N1,000,000,000
3	Senate	N100,000,000
4	House of Representatives	N70,000,000
5	State House of Assembly	N30,000,000
6	Chairmanship to an Area Council	N30,000,000
7	Councillorship election to an Area Council	N5,000,000
8	Individual or Corporate entity donation to a candidate	N50,000,000

Source: Section 88(2-8) of the 2022 Electoral Act

The critical analysis of conduct of candidates and political parties with regards to election campaign financing demonstrates that they contravene the provisions of the legislation that regulate campaign funding. It has been evident that candidates standing for various elective offices overspend their permissible financial limits. This is necessitated by the nature and character of Nigerian post-colonial state where politics and election to be precise is approached with a zero-sum mindset. The state in post-colonial formation is seen as an instrument of wealth and capital accumulation. This triggers politics of desperation, and absence of moderation among political actors that compete in elections as everyone seeks to do everything within their power to outdo the other. Under this condition, politics, and electoral contestation are without moderation because even the party in power that are supposed to regulate and moderate the democratic rule of the game is itself entangled in the corrupt practice as they seek to retain power. To achieve this, candidates mobilise and spend financial resources that are way beyond the permissible electoral limits for the offices they are vying for. For instance, it was alleged that the over 8,000 delegates that participated in the All-Progressives Congress (APC) primary prior to the 2015 election pocketed US\$5,000 each. Each of them was said to have received US\$2000 from Atiku Abubakar camp, and another US\$3000 from Buhari camp. Considering the number of delegates, both camps could have spent about US\$16million and US\$24million on delegates at the primary (Matenga, 2016). Similarly, Hon. Adejoro Adeogun, a former member of the House of Representatives that represented Akoko West/East Federal Constituency of Ondo State revealed in an interview with the Premium Times that he spent an estimated ₦300 – ₦350 million to get elected in 2019 (Adewale, 2023). Besides, the audacity of money in determining the direction of electoral victory in the country was once again highlighted by the Governor of Imo State, Hope Uzodinma when he noted that if money is all that is required to win the 2023 Imo State Gubernatorial election, he is sure of victory (Odinibueze, 2023).

Money politics constricts the political space in terms of who can participate in elections as candidate. The charges for purchase of expression of interest, and nomination forms for various elective offices by political parties especially the two dominant parties: APC and PDP, are so exorbitant that only moneybags can afford them. This has led to the description of Nigeria’s electoral politics as cash-and-carry democracy (Onuoha & Ojo, 2019). Although the 2022 Electoral Act placed a limitation on the amount candidates for various offices can spend. It however failed to restrict amount that political parties can charge aspirants for expression of interest and nomination forms. This has resulted in continued increase in the cost of these forms every election season.

Table 2: Cost of party nomination form for the two leading parties in the 2023 general election

Political Positions	APC (in Naira)	PDP (in Naira)
Presidential	100 million	40 million
Governorship	50 million	21 million
Senate	20 million	3.5 million
House of Representatives	10 million	2.5 million
State House of Assembly	2 million	600,000

Source: As compiled by authors

Information contained in the table indicate that between 2015 and 2023 general elections, the cost of APCs presidential nomination forms has gone up by over 300%, while there is more than 800% increase in the cost of the governorship nomination forms, a 506% increase for the senate forms, and a 354.5% increase and 263.6% increase for the House of Representatives and House of Assembly forms (Chukwuma, 2023). These amounts despite being exorbitant do not cover the cost of campaigns and mobilization that cost higher. As a result, older politicians that have the financial muscle continue to dominate the political space.

Table 3: Estimated presidential election expenses by the two dominant political parties

Political Party	Elections	Legal provision	Excess spending	Remarks
APC	2015 Presidential election 2.9 billion naira	1,000,000,000	1,900,000,000	Yet to submit its election expense for 2023 general election
	2019 Presidential election 4.6 billion naira	1,000,000,000	3,600,000,000	
	2023	5,000,000,000		
PDP	2015 Presidential election 4.8 billion [9.53billion] naira	1,000,000,000	3,800,000,000	Yet to submit its election expense for 2023 general election
	2019 Presidential election 3.3 billion naira	1,000,000,000	2,300,000,000	
	2023	5,000,000,000		

Source: As compiled by authors

The changing pattern of election spending between the two dominant political parties makes it apparent that the ruling party, either at the state or federal level, considering its access to state resources, and special interest donations to campaign funds for political patronage tends to spend higher than the opposition. The trend in spending beyond the permissible limits of electoral expenses (Chukwuma, 2023). Considering their culpability in violation of the limit of election expenses. Political parties in Nigeria often find it difficult to comply with provisions of Section 89(3) of the 2022 Electoral Act that mandates all political parties to submit to INEC their audited election expenses within six months after every election. These monies were spent on campaigns, billboards, print media advertisement, electronic media advertisement, musical performances, social media, and television coverage.

In relational terms, the incidence of money politics vitiates the capacity of youth to compete against the older politicians that have amassed wealth through various forms of state patronage. Besides, the character and structure of political parties in Nigeria indicates that party financiers and godfathers largely influence who emerges their party’s flagbearers during primaries. Often, it is these party financiers that determine the amount that aspirants pay to obtain these forms. The price is often fixed to eliminate certain class of contenders who cannot afford it. Meanwhile, according

to statistics on youth unemployment rates by the National Bureau of Statistics for 2022, Nigeria has an estimated 53.40 percent of unemployed youth (Foundation for Investigative Journalism, 2023). Considering this, it becomes obvious that most youth in Nigeria cannot afford the forms. Those that manage to obtain the forms, later realised that they cannot compete with older politicians backed by financial heavyweights in the game of cash for vote (commonly known as vote buying) that has been entrenched in Nigeria's electoral ecosystem. Reacting to the contribution of money politics to the shrinking political space, Onuoha & Ojo, (2019) observed that it undermines the capacity of contestants with average pocket to contest elections in the country.

The logical outcome of money politics is that despite signing of the NTYTRA on May 31, 2018, by President Muhammadu Buhari who promised youth inclusion as contestants in the electoral process. The monetization of the electoral space throughout the electoral cycle limits the ability of youth to compete favourably with veteran politicians both intraparty and interparty elections.

The commodification of elections and the Not Too Young To Run Act

With the signing of the NTYTRA expectations were high among youth and members of the civil societies that initially articulated and organized the Not Too Young To Run Movement rallies that culminated in sponsorship, and passage of the NTYTRA at the National Assembly. The passage of the law meant that with their numerical strength on party membership, and list of registered voters, youth will going forward occupy reasonable decision-making positions. At the heart of these expectations is the pertinent issue of elections. Elections are meaningfully democratic if they are free, fair, participatory, competitive, and legitimate (Omotola, 2010). Contrarily, both the politicians and political parties that supported the Not Too Young To Young Bill in the national assembly appear to have different plans. Nigeria's political parties, and politicians thrive on primitive accumulation of votes that manifest in various forms. At the start of the Fourth Republic, violence was the vehicle for primitive vote accumulation. As democratization takes root as evident in electoral reforms and the introduction of election technology, such as the Permanent Voter Card, Smart Card Reader (SCR), and currently the Bimodal Verification and Accreditation System (BVAS), INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), among others that render violence largely ineffective, politicians switched to monetization of the electoral process. To that end, money becomes the basic instrument of primitive vote accumulation. Considering the high rate of youth unemployment in the country, it becomes obvious that despite signing of the NTYTRA, the impoverished youth cannot compete favourably with the financially enabled old brigades.

After the 2019 elections which was the first election conducted under the NTYTRA, youths occupied 0.6 of seats in the National Assembly. They also have a 6% representation in thirty-four State Houses of Assembly and 29.7% at the local government level (Yiaga, 2023a).

In comparative terms, available data indicate that there is a decline that there was a decline in youth candidacy in the 2023 general election. It reduced from 34% in 2019 to 28.6% in 2023. Youth candidacy for House of Representatives declined from 27.4% in 2019 to 21.6% in 2023 (YIAGA, 2023a&b). Similarly, youth candidacy for State House of Assembly also dropped from 41.8% in 2019 to 35.6% in 2023 (YIAGA, 2023a&b). The breakdown of candidates that contested in the 2023 general election indicates that there were 18 Presidential and 18 Vice-Presidential candidates, 837 Governorship and Deputy Governorship candidates, 1,101 Senatorial candidates, 3,122 candidates for House of Representatives, and 10,240 candidates for State House of Assembly elections (YIAGA, 2023a&b). Hence, a total of 15,336 candidates contested in the election. Out of the 837 candidates vying for the position of Governorship and deputy governorship positions, 51 representing 12.2 percent were youth; of the 1,101 senatorial candidates, 41 representing 3.7 percent were youth, of the 3,122 candidates that contested for House of Representatives 674 representing 21.6 percent

were youth, while of the 3,632 candidates that contested for seats in States House of Assembly 3,632 representing 35.6 percent were youth (YIAGA, 2023a&b). What this means is that 4,398 of the 15,336 candidates that contested in 2023 election, representing 28.8 percent were youths (YIAGA, 2023a&b).

It is obvious that the NTYTRA did enhanced the consciousness of Nigerian youth as evident in how they mobilised and organised for the 2023 general election. Most youth that either contested or won elections into different elective positions were direct beneficiaries of the NTYTRA. In the same vein, youth identified more with the Presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), Peter Obi whom they assume is the youngest, and closer to their generation among the three leading candidates. These youth leveraged on every available media to campaign and mobilise especially on the social media for him, a development that kept the two establishment parties of APC and PDP on their toes. For the first time, in the country's politico-electoral history, the old brigades were worried and unsure of the likely outcome of a Presidential election.

Despite the existence of the NTYTRA, the absence of internal party democracy during political party primaries undermined the capacity of youth to successfully dislodge the older politicians. Often, the financial heavyweights and moneybags that bankrolled the financial needs of the parties used their positions to influence the process. The financial dependence of Nigeria political parties on these individuals popularly known as godfathers (patrons) offer them to leverage to deploy their financial resources and deep network of patronage to impose and sponsor candidates for elective positions. Worse still, the practice of vote buying limits the effectiveness of the NTYTRA. The lack of strong financial base to engage in the undemocratic practice of vote trading also exclude youth from contesting elective positions. Hence, Okibe, (2022) noted that monetized politics is an impediment to youth involvement in elections. This demonstrates that aside age limitation that was previously enshrined in the constitution, that economic factor much more than any other variable, determines and exerts greater influence on who gets what, when and how? To that end, the financial heavyweights within each party, leverage on their position as the political gatekeepers to impose and secure the election of the clients.

Conclusion

The paper examined how the practice of money politics undermines the operations of the NTYTRA that is intended to ensure youth inclusion, participation, and representation in Nigeria politics. It argued that despite signing of the NTYTRA that lowers the eligible age for contesting election, the monetisation of elections through exorbitant charges by political parties for expression of interest and nomination forms and the huge funds required for campaigns and vote buying appear to discourage youth candidacy. Moreover, it observed that even when youth succeed in clinching their party tickets, the incidence of vote buying where cash (money) is exchanged for votes equally prevents them from emerging victorious at the polls. The paper, therefore, concludes that the unbridled role of godfathers and moneybags that finance party's campaign expenses in imposing and influencing who emerges from party primaries does not offer youth equal, fair, and competitive opportunity. Hence, the continued low participation and representation of youth in Nigeria's elective democracy even after signing of the NTYTRA.

To that end, the study recommends that more electoral reforms to prevent vote trading and buying should be done to the 2022 Electoral Act before the 2027 elections. Also recommended is that to ensure fair competition, INEC must strictly enforce the law on electoral campaign finance. The audacity of political parties and candidates in violating the stipulation on limitation of expenses is alarming. Also, institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), and others

that monitor and regulate illicit financial transactions must track, arrest, and prosecute those who are found to be involved in vote commodification.

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