

ATHENA NOTES

Opinion Articles of Athena Centre Staff and Guest Writers

No. 9 | 9 March 2026

The Price of Power in Nigeria's Parties

By Dr Izuchukwu Christianus Anyanwu

The rising cost of political party nomination forms in Nigeria is not merely a question of affordability or political ethics. It is a structural issue with direct implications for democratic consolidation. It reflects a deeper institutional imbalance within the party system, where candidate selection is increasingly shaped by revenue imperatives and elite gatekeeping rather than inclusive political competition. The significance of nomination fees, therefore, lies not in their headline figures but in their cumulative effect on access, representation, and institutional credibility.

Recent electoral cycles illustrate the scale of the issue. Within the All Progressives Congress, nomination fees for certain local government positions have reportedly reached as high as N30 million in Ebonyi State, while comparable forms within the Peoples Democratic Party were priced at approximately N2 million. Although figures vary across parties and states, the underlying pattern is consistent: political entry, even at local levels, is increasingly contingent on financial capacity rather than organisational experience, grassroots legitimacy, or policy competence. Over time, this reshapes the social composition of political leadership and narrows the democratic field.



The core problem is not simply cost escalation, but the absence of an effective regulatory framework governing party behaviour. Nomination fees operate within a largely unregulated space defined by internal party discretion rather than enforceable democratic standards. As a result, political parties function simultaneously as public democratic institutions and private revenue-generating entities, with limited oversight over how these roles are balanced. This duality produces a candidate selection process that systematically privileges wealth over representativeness, weakening the inclusiveness on which democratic consolidation depends.

At the centre of this challenge is a failure of electoral governance rather than individual political conduct. Nigeria's democratic system assigns political parties a central role in leadership recruitment, while vesting oversight in the Independent National

Electoral Commission (INEC). In practice, however, this mandate has not translated into effective regulation of the financial barriers embedded in nomination processes. Whether due to legal ambiguity, political sensitivity, or institutional restraint, the absence of binding standards has allowed parties wide latitude to monetise access to candidacy.

This regulatory gap carries clear systemic consequences. By pricing nomination forms beyond the reach of most citizens, parties effectively redefine eligibility for political office. Women, young people, persons with disabilities, and candidates outside entrenched patronage networks are disproportionately excluded, regardless of competence or public support. This is particularly significant in light of reforms such as the "Not Too Young to Run" legislation, which reduced age barriers to entry but left financial barriers largely intact. Formal inclusion has therefore been undermined by informal economic exclusion.

Responsibility for this institutional drift is shared but distinct. Political parties bear direct responsibility for designing nomination structures and pricing frameworks. As institutions performing constitutionally significant public functions, their internal rules carry public consequences.

However, the persistence of excessive fees also reflects regulatory inaction. INEC possesses guideline-making authority over party conduct yet has not established enforceable limits or transparent standards for nomination fees, allowing discretion to substitute for regulation.

The legislature also bears a consequential responsibility. The National Assembly defines the statutory framework within which both parties and the electoral commission operate. The absence of explicit provisions in the Electoral Act addressing nomination fee regulation has created interpretive ambiguity, weakening enforcement and exposing regulatory action to perceptions of arbitrariness or political bias.

The immediate policy question is therefore institutional, not rhetorical: whether nomination processes should remain governed by internal party discretion or be re-anchored within a regulatory framework that recognises their public democratic function. This requires clarity on whether nomination fees fall within the proper scope of electoral regulation and, if so, how enforceable standards should be designed and implemented.

In practical terms, this points to time-bound institutional decisions rather than symbolic reform. INEC must consider whether to issue binding guidelines setting upper limits on nomination fees, differentiated by office and electoral level. Such measures would not eliminate party autonomy but would define boundaries beyond which financial barriers undermine democratic access. Legislative clarification may also be required to place such authority on firmer statutory ground, reducing ambiguity and strengthening legitimacy.

The relevance of the Ebonyi State example lies not in its extremity, but in its representativeness of a wider trend. When nomination fees for local government offices approach levels beyond the lifetime earnings of ordinary citizens, political participation becomes

structurally stratified. Over time, this stratification feeds back into governance, reinforcing perceptions of elite capture and weakening public confidence in democratic institutions.

If left unaddressed, the consequences will be cumulative rather than immediate. Democratic erosion rarely occurs through sudden rupture; it unfolds through incremental exclusion that gradually detaches citizens from political processes. High nomination fees reduce candidate diversity, weaken electoral competitiveness, and intensify the monetisation of politics, increasing incentives for rent-seeking behaviour once in office. Without regulatory recalibration, Nigeria risks sustaining a democracy that is procedurally intact but substantively constrained, with long-term implications for representation, legitimacy, and political stability.

Conclusion

The financial structure of party nomination forms has become a quiet but decisive filter of political participation in Nigeria. It is reshaping who can compete, who can lead, and ultimately who is represented. The issue is no longer peripheral to democratic debate; it sits at its centre. Addressing it requires regulatory clarity, institutional discipline, and legislative resolve. Without such intervention, the democratic system risks narrowing not through force, but through cost.



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Key Insights

1. Rising nomination fees are reshaping political access in Nigeria, shifting competition from merit and grassroots legitimacy towards financial capacity.
2. Political parties are functioning as both democratic institutions and revenue-generating entities, with limited regulatory checks on pricing practices.
3. INEC's weak enforcement capacity has allowed a regulatory vacuum, enabling parties to set nomination fees without binding standards or ceilings.
4. Financial barriers are deepening political exclusion, disproportionately affecting youth, women, and candidates outside entrenched patronage networks.



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When Electoral Reform Waits Too Long

By Nonso Momah

Nigeria's democratic consolidation is approaching a critical stress point. With the 2027 general elections less than a year away, continued delay in the Electoral Act (Amendment) Bill 2025 is narrowing the window for meaningful reform, weakening institutional preparedness, and eroding public confidence in the electoral process. The legislative stagnation reflects not only procedural inefficiency within the National Assembly but also deeper structural weaknesses in Nigeria's electoral governance architecture.

The Electoral Act 2022 was widely regarded as a step forward, particularly for its introduction of technological reforms intended to enhance transparency and reduce malpractice. However, the 2023 general elections exposed significant gaps in its implementation framework. Chief among these was the absence of unequivocal legal provisions mandating real-time electronic transmission of results from polling units to central collation centres. While the law permitted the use of technology, it did not compel uniform application, leaving room for administrative discretion. This ambiguity contributed to inconsistent practice and intensified public mistrust in electoral outcomes.



Such legal uncertainty had broader institutional consequences. It fuelled disputes, encouraged litigation, and deepened confidence deficits in electoral management. In environments already marked by political contestation, excessive administrative discretion weakens rule consistency and undermines the credibility of electoral institutions, often shifting dispute resolution from the ballot to the courtroom.

The Electoral Act (Amendment) Bill 2025 was introduced to address these deficiencies. It seeks to clarify result transmission procedures, strengthen sanctions for electoral offences, and improve the coherence of the legal framework governing elections. First presented in October 2025, the bill was expected to move swiftly through the legislature, given the proximity of the electoral cycle.

That expectation has not been met. While the House of Representatives concluded third reading by late 2025, the Senate suspended consideration in October 2025, citing procedural concerns and the need for further consultations,

before adjourning without resolution. This legislative delay is consequential. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is required to issue election notices at least 360 days before polling, placing immediate pressure on preparation timelines for the expected February 2027 election cycle.

Beyond legislative delay, Nigeria's institutional framework reveals persistent enforcement weaknesses. INEC has repeatedly noted its limited capacity to sanction electoral infractions, particularly premature campaigning. While campaigning before the statutory 150-day window is prohibited, enforcement mechanisms remain weak. The penalty for campaigning within 24 hours of polling day—N500,000—is widely regarded as insufficient to deter serious political actors. This gap between legal intent and enforcement reality weakens compliance and normalises infractions that distort electoral competition.

Operational constraints further compound these structural weaknesses. INEC continues to face logistical challenges, including procurement delays and training

gaps for election personnel. Without legal certainty and sufficient preparation time, these constraints increase the risk of administrative errors and procedural inconsistencies, as witnessed in the 2023 elections.

The delay in passing the amendment bill has drawn criticism from political parties, civil society organisations, and electoral watchdogs. The African Democratic Congress (ADC) has accused the National Assembly, particularly the APC-led Senate, of deliberate delay tactics that undermine key reforms, including electronic voter accreditation and results transmission. The party warns that continued inaction risks weakening INEC's preparedness for 2027 and compromising electoral integrity.

Civil society organisations, including the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, have similarly intensified advocacy, with public demonstrations under consideration. Their concern is straightforward: delayed reform compresses implementation timelines, creating uncertainty for political parties, INEC, and voters alike, while increasing the likelihood of disputes.

International experience reinforces the importance of timely electoral reform. In Ghana and Kenya, where electronic transmission systems are legally anchored and operationalised, election transparency and acceptance of results have improved significantly. Ghana's 2020 elections, for instance, benefited from structured transmission systems that strengthened confidence in the final outcome. Similarly, electoral commissions in countries such as South Africa and India demonstrate that institutional independence, clear legal authority, and robust enforcement capacity reduce electoral volatility even in complex democracies.

Conclusion

Nigeria's 2027 electoral credibility will be shaped less by last-minute assurances than by decisions taken now. The continued delay of the Electoral Act (Amendment) Bill 2025 compresses preparation timelines, weakens institutional readiness, and increases the risk of electoral disputes.

Electoral integrity depends on timely legal clarity, enforceable rules, and adequate institutional preparation. The experience of 2023 demonstrated the cost of ambiguity; 2027 risks repeating it on a larger scale if reforms remain stalled.

The legislative choice is therefore clear. Passing the amendment bill, strengthening INEC's enforcement capacity, and closing legal loopholes are not optional reforms—they are prerequisites for credible elections. Failure to act decisively now risks not only procedural dysfunction but also a deeper erosion of public trust in Nigeria's democratic process at a moment when it is most vulnerable.



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Key Insights

1. Delayed passage of the Electoral Act (Amendment) Bill 2025 is compressing preparation timelines for the 2027 elections, weakening institutional readiness.
2. Ambiguity in the 2022 Electoral Act—particularly around electronic results transmission—contributed to mistrust and post-election disputes in 2023.
3. INEC's limited enforcement powers, especially on campaign violations and sanctions, continue to undermine electoral compliance and deterrence.
4. Legislative inertia in the Senate risks undermining reforms aimed at strengthening transparency, technology use, and electoral integrity.



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NB: *The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect the position of Athena Centre on the issues canvassed.*

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