WYDE
Civic Engagement

The cost of politics in Nigeria

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WFD

Cost of Politics

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List of acronyms

APC	All Progressives Congress
CSO	Civil society organisation
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
ICPC	Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
LGA	Local government area
LP	Labour Party
NNPP	New Nigeria People's Party
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PWD	Persons with disability
USD	United States Dollar

Preface

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), with generous support from the European Union, is excited to share this report on the cost of politics in Nigeria. This research was initiated because we recognise the pressing need to explore how the rising and often substantive financial demands of political participation are hindering the inclusiveness, competitiveness, and credibility of Nigeria's democratic processes.

At the core of this study is a growing worry that the steep cost of politics has turned into a significant barrier for meaningful participation from women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other historically marginalised groups. The consequences are extensive: from limiting diversity in political leadership and policy representation to exacerbating inequality and eroding citizens' trust in democratic institutions, as well as "win by all means" approach which often lead to tension and security concern during elections.

This report offers evidence-based insights into the financial challenges faced by both aspiring and current politicians in Nigeria. It captures the voices and experiences of political actors from various parties and regions, highlighting the crucial links between money, access, and power within the electoral and governance systems. Specifically, it reveals how sky-high campaign costs and monetised party processes continue to push capable and qualified individuals—especially women—out of the political arena.

Beyond just identifying the problem, this research provides practical, actionable recommendations aimed at political parties, electoral and anti-corruption institutions, civil society, and development partners. These suggestions are designed to foster a more transparent, inclusive, and equitable political landscape where merit, rather than money, dictates access to leadership. We hope that the insights in this report will ignite renewed discussions and bold reforms that will help Nigeria strengthen its democracy through fairer competition, broader representation, and more robust institutions.

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone involved — from political leaders and researchers to civil society members and our institutional partners — who dedicated their time, insights, and expertise to this vital work. It's essential that we keep pushing forward together, finding and applying creative solutions to reduce the costs of politics and make Nigeria's democratic space accessible to everyone.

Adebowale Olorunmola
Country Director, Nigeria
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Executive summary

The report examines the cost of politics in Nigeria and its impacts on the political inclusion of traditionally marginalised groups – women, youth and persons with disability (PWDs). It approaches the cost of politics from the perspective of the financial cost associated with contesting for an elective position in Nigeria, right from the preliminary party stages up to, and including, time in office. Reflecting on the high costs of politics in Nigeria the report offers a comprehensive overview of the dimensions of election financing from the nomination period, throughout the election campaign and even on voting day, and in both the immediate and long-term aftermath of the poll, and the impacts and implications this is having for Nigerian democracy.

The study reveals a complex interplay between financial expenditures, political participation and inclusivity. It finds that the high cost of running for political office in Nigeria creates substantial barriers for many potential aspirants particularly those from the marginalised within the society, which partially explains why these groups continue to be underrepresented in political offices. The capital-intensive nature of politics ensures that individuals with substantial financial resources, regardless of their qualifications or capabilities, predominantly win elections. Consequently, these elected officials often prioritise recouping their political investments over promoting good governance. The report highlights the significant correlation between high political costs and corruption. The study finds that candidates frequently resort to corrupt practices to fund their campaigns or recoup investments once elected. This cycle perpetuates a culture where only those willing to engage in unethical behavior can afford to participate politically.

The study underscores the need for the implementation of more stringent measures that will curtail campaign financing and combat electoral malpractices such as vote buying. This can be achieved by establishing a comprehensive monitoring system that tracks campaign contributions and expenditures, and the creation of an Electoral Offences Commission tasked with ensuring enforcement of compliance with electoral laws in Nigeria which, when it comes to campaign spending limits are observed only in breach. The recommendations put forward also highlight the importance of public awareness campaigns to educate voters about the implications of vote buying and money dominating politics – such as a lack of accountability, worsened service delivery and ultimately a development deficit - and to build wider momentum for less transactional politics.

Introduction

Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, there have been growing concerns about the excessive monetisation of politics and its impact on the quality of governance and democracy. Contesting and winning elections has become a highly monetised process that has encouraged a complete take-over of the political space by those with direct or indirect access to significant sums. The high cost of politics, owing to the monetisation of electoral politics, not only highlights the weak nature of Nigeria's democracy but also entrenches corruption in the system as individuals seek to recoup the investment made in seeking political office. This reality, which persists despite efforts to introduce regulatory measures to curb it, presents a barrier for average citizens looking to engage in electoral contests given that 63% of Nigeria's population is multidimensionally poor.[1]

While the public as a whole has limited chances of participation, traditionally marginalised groups, defined here as women, youth and persons with disability (PWDs), are also affected by the high cost of politics. At the federal level, only 16 women are currently members of the 360 seat' House of Representatives, while only four women, or 3.7%, are members of the Senate.[2] Whilst at the state level, only 54 of the 988 state assembly seats, 5.5%, are held by female lawmakers, with no female legislators in one third of the state houses of assembly across the country.[3] In the case of youth, only 14 are members of the House of Representatives, just 4% of the total, are aged 18-35. Whilst this figure is higher at the state level, with youth representation averaging 9.2% in state assemblies, it still falls well short of being representative.[4] Finally, of the 13 self-identified PWDs who contested for various positions in the federal legislature in the 2023 general election cycle, none were elected.[5]

The essence of democracy lies in its inclusivity—when only a select few can afford to engage, it leads to a skewed representation that does not reflect the will of the people. As political power becomes concentrated among those with substantial financial resources, there is a tendency for state institutions to be captured by these individuals. A democratic system that fails to represent its constituents adequately can lead to citizens not feeling invested in, or supportive of, democratic institutions. This disconnection can lead to apathy, instability and even civil unrest. Researching the cost of politics is, therefore, essential for understanding how financial barriers inhibit and shape democratic governance.

The cost of politics refers not only to the financial cost for running for a political office, but seeks to encompass and analyse the impact of the financial cost on electoral integrity and quality of democracy. In this case, the WFD's cost of politics approach undertakes a systematic analysis "of the individuals contesting for political office rather than those of political parties."[6] The approach uses a holistic understanding of political spending right from the initial stage of political aspiration to the end of tenure of the elected individual. In doing so, it aims to unpack and better understand the relationship between the funds required for seeking and maintaining elective office and democratic governance. By better understanding the costs involved, and the drivers of these costs, measures aimed at reducing corruption, increasing transparency in the electoral process and fostering greater

equality in representation across all levels of government can be proposed. This is particularly important in a diverse nation like Nigeria where ethnic identities play a significant role in politics.

Methodology

This study presents an improved understanding of the financial aspects of politics and democracy in Nigeria, particularly, as it relates to the expenditure of individuals contesting for political office during elections and maintaining that office if and when elected. Its ultimate aim is to examine the extent to which the cost of politics shapes political exclusion of marginalised groups including women, youth and PWDs focusing on federal level legislative elections held in 2019 and 2023.

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach with an integration of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The qualitative approach provides a deeper understanding of the context and issues at hand, whilst the quantitative method offers evidence around the financial cost of politics, and its relationship with political inclusion. Qualitative data was gathered through in-depth interviews with key informants and focus group discussions (FGD) held with stakeholders that have experience of political participation or those who are experienced observers of politics. This included political aspirants and candidates, youth leaders and women leaders in political parties, leaders from civil society organisations (CSO), academics, and media personnel. In total 122 stakeholders were engaged, 26% of who were female.

Table 1: Key informants interviewed

Category	Number
Aspirants	**13** (two per state and one in the FCT)
Candidates	**13** (two per state and one in the FCT)
Election officials	**7** (one per state including the FCT)
Female parliamentarians	**6** (one each state including the FCT, excluding Borno where there was no elected female representative).
Youth representatives	**13** (two per state and one in the FCT)
PWD representative	**13** (two per state and one in the FCT)
Party officials	**13** (two per state and one in the FCT)
Parliamentarians	**13** (two per state and one in the FCT)
Community leaders	**13** (two per state and one in the FCT))
Academics	**5** (selected from across the target states)
CSO representatives	**13** (two per state and one in the FCT)
Aspirants	**13** (two per state and one in the FCT)
Candidates	**13** (two per state and one in the FCT)

Quantitative data were sourced from two rounds of surveys. The first survey targeted the voting public (18 years and above) in the six states selected as field sites for the study – Benue, Anambra, Lagos, Borno, Rivers and Kano. One state was selected from each of Nigeria's six geo-political zones based on population, diversity, economic status, political participation, and political party affiliation. Variations in these metrics provided an opportunity to interrogate the social, political and economic factors behind the cost of politics across the country. The survey was designed to assess respondents' opinions and perceptions about the cost of elections and political participation in Nigeria. The second round of survey was conducted in the FCT specifically to examine citizens' attitude towards vote buying, which was observed to constitute a major component of the cost of politics in Nigeria.

For both surveys, enumerators randomly visited higher institution campuses and religious centres to administer the questionnaire on people of voting ages. For each, a sample size of 385 respondents was targeted, with an 87% response rate achieved. Of the 2,347 completed questionnaires 40% of respondents were youth, with PWDs well represented covering 10% of the sample. In addition to this primary data, the study also relied on secondary data sourced from a review of institutional documents. These included reports produced by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), CSOs and academics. The approach to data analysis included descriptive and thematic analysis of the quantitative and qualitative findings gathered to identify themes and patterns. The study also utilised comparative analysis by comparing the spending patterns of individual contestants across different political parties and regions. A roundtable was then conducted with policymakers, CSO representatives, political actors, academics, election officials and election observers to further review and validate the report's findings.

However, the study is not without limitations. The time available to conduct the fieldwork – it was all conducted in a month - did not afford the researchers enough time to cover more states and stakeholders that could have further enriched the data. Additionally, insecurity restricted the researchers from accessing certain areas where they would have been able to gather more useful insights on the topic. Finally, given the sensitive nature of the topic to the political actors many were unwilling to provide detailed information because it could implicate them in illegal actions or activities. To mitigate against this as best as possible, the research team communicated to all those engaged that responses would be afforded anonymity.

Money and politics in Nigeria

It is an established fact that politics and democracy cost money. The whole gamut of the election cycle cannot happen without huge financial resources. It takes money to sustain multiple political parties that can unite groups of citizens around shared platforms that form the basis of the election contest. As argued by Wardle, "money may not guarantee electoral success; but it is rare that electoral success comes to those with very little money both in developed and developing democracy around the world."[7] While the significance of money to politics and democracy across

the globe cannot be de-emphasised, the concern has always been the risks associated with the inability of relevant institutions of the Nigerian state to enforce laws regulating the use of money in politics.[8] This unregulated use of money in politics undermines democracy as it "drowns votes and voices".[9] Increasingly only those who can afford to spend substantial amounts are deemed suitable candidates. As Adetula has argued "money politics is shrinking the political space, becoming a key variable in determining who participates in electoral politics and how."[10]

The extent to which electoral politics is determined by money is not only a major driver of political corruption, but has also helped facilitate the entrenchment of the culture of corruption in the Nigerian society.[11] As a result, and as Miller has argued, "elections in Nigeria are emblematic of how transactional politics, meaning elite dealmaking, dominate Nigeria's democratic institutions. In this way, Nigeria is an exemplary electoral political marketplace—a political system where political power is treated as a commodity that is bought, sold, and violently fought over."[12] The political economy of money politics in Nigeria is built on a complex interplay between financial resources, party dynamics, and electoral behavior that ultimately undermines democratic principles and effective governance. Political success is contingent upon one's ability to navigate these complex patronage networks rather than on policy proposals that gain mass public appeal.

Key findings: the cost of politics in Nigeria

There was unanimous consensus amongst all the research participants that electoral politics is expensive in Nigeria and outcomes are ultimately determined by money. One respondent described how "everything is money. Even if you want to rig the election it's money, nothing goes for free in Nigeria."[13] A youth leader agreed in saying that the three things that are required to compete for political positions are "money, money, and money."[14] Sustaining any position gained is also costly as one parliamentarian interviewed explained, "there is no end to political spending for parliamentarians because there is consistent demand for money by individuals and parties throughout your tenure and after."[15]

But whilst it was generally agreed that the cost of election is very high, putting a "price tag" on contesting for a legislative seat in Nigeria is difficult. This is because most of the transactions are undertaken through opaque and illegal processes, with many expenses continuous. However, some indicative figures were provided by individuals interviewed for this study. One former contestant for the House of Representatives stated that he spent almost N500 million or US$312,000[16] during the primaries alone in the 2023 election cycle but was still unable to secure the ticket of one of the dominant parties.[17] Whilst a female member of a state house of assembly stated that a colleague confided in her that they spent between N200-300 million on election campaigning[18] with additional costs then encountered in the immediate post-election period and during their time in office.

Aspirants and candidates mostly source their funds from the following: personal savings; sale of assets; bank loans; contributions from family friends, associates, and supporters; and liquidation of investments in bonds, shares, fixed deposits, crypto currency. For example, a civil society actor narrated that “a former speaker sold his hotel investment for N500 million to fund his [ultimately unsuccessful] election to the House of Representatives”.[19]

Determinants of the cost of politics

Six key, and sometimes interlinked, factors shape the cost of elections in states and constituencies: the economic status of the state, the number of local governments it contains, the capacity of the political party, the role of godfathers, the role of culture and religion, and the prevailing security dynamics.

Economic status of the state

The economic status of the state is a strong variable in considering the amount a political aspirant commits to an election. The economic status of a state can be measured by indices including the standard and cost of living; the available economic opportunities and the rate of employment; the salaries and emoluments of civil servants; as well as those of public officials in comparative terms. Our assessment found that states like Anambra, which has one of the most vibrant economic activities in the country, especially in the area of industrialisation, trade and agriculture, are where politicians require significant funds to compete and win political office by showcasing their financial muscles during election periods.[20]

Number of local government areas

The number of local government areas (LGAs) determines the number of wards a political aspirant has to deal with in financing elections. It also determines the number of delegates and party executives an aspirant considers in their election budgeting. Constituencies with a large number of LGAs, therefore, attract higher expenses for contestants. For example, engagements with political aspirants in Kano state – which has the highest number of local governments in Nigeria – show that they commit more resources to cover the many areas under their constituencies than their counterparts in places like Bayelsa or Ekiti states, which have far fewer LGAs.

Capacity of political parties

A high number of participants – both political actors and civil society actors – alluded to the varying costs of politics between dominant and non-dominant parties.[21] The cost of elections is higher for a contestant in the dominant parties because the potential to win the election is higher, which informs an intense competition for the party’s ticket. Nomination fees at the leading political parties are much higher and increasing each election cycle - the APC fees for House of Representative forms have increased from N3.2 million to N10 million between 2015 and 2023[22] - but are only one part of the cost incurred in securing the party’s ticket. Women, youth and persons with disability often

contest on the platform of the non-dominant parties because of the high cost associated with political competition within dominant parties.[23]

Role and nature of "godfathers"

The role of godfathers[24] in Nigerian politics has been subject to extensive study.[25] Demonstrating the importance of godfathers in shaping the cost of politics, a parliamentarian in Borno stated that "if you don't have money, you must have a godfather that will sponsor you".[26] In addition, it was argued that the kind of godfather in the state or constituency may increase or decrease the cost of elections. There are money-demanding godfathers who are driven by monetary gains and make direct demands on aspirants before supporting a candidate. This amount is dependent on the level and location of election but according to a former parliamentarian, it can reach N100 million.[27] On the other hand, there are godfathers that do not demand money to endorse. In some cases they even sponsor the election of their chosen aspirants. But in these cases, they are driven by the desire to have absolute control on the aspirant after they win the election and occupy the position.

Culture and religion

In the more conservative northern states, religious and cultural factors play a significant role in the mobilisation of votes for elections. These factors may reduce the amount a political aspirant would spend compared to similar aspirants in other states on this element of the campaign. But these religious and cultural barriers are also inhibitors for the participation of marginalised groups in politics. In Kano and Borno, key informants stated that socio-cultural barriers and attitudes around womens role in society - many do not work and lack financial independence - restrict their ability to possess the financial muscle to contest for elections in the first instance.[28] In the southwest, the prevalent gerontocratic culture that associates youthfulness with recklessness shrinks the space for youths to the extent that they may need to spend more to convince key figures of their seriousness. On the other hand, older contestants – benefitting from an enduring respect for elders in the Yoruba culture –spend less when contesting for elective office.

Security dynamics

The security situation in the location where election is conducted also contributes to the cost of politics. The higher the security threats in the state or constituency, the more the costs for running for office are. This is because political actors need to hire private security guards in addition to state security personnel for their own safety both during campaigns, and even in their aftermath.

Pre-election costs

Nomination forms

The high cost of nomination, particularly for those seeking the ticket of a dominant party, is a major impediment to the participation of financially weak contestants. A participant representing a women's group stated that women have been discouraged from participating because of "payment

of nomination forms which has increased overtime" despite the supposed waivers made to female contestants.[29] For those who do not benefit from any waivers, such as PWDs, the forms themselves are a barrier. Additional sundry fees, such as expression of interest, application fees, processing fees and party membership dues, that aspirants are compelled to pay in addition to the nomination fees before they are cleared for the primary election are additional, are more of a hidden barrier.

In short, "the high cost of nomination fees imposed by Nigerian political parties means that the commercialisation of politics is fast becoming an indelible feature of Nigeria's political culture"[30] argued one respondent. They cited a belief, held by many, that party nomination fees are deliberately expensive to ensure the candidates have the financial strength to run for the election from the beginning to the end of the process and to generate funding for the elections for the party itself.[31]

Buying the support of delegates

Party primaries are usually grounds for party delegates to make a huge amount of money. Individuals interviewed stated that the pre-election vote buying is far more expensive because it requires sizeable payments – mostly in foreign currencies – to party delegates. One former parliamentarian stated that the contestant has to quota the delegates and cover their transportation and accommodation expenses to, and during, the primary election, as well as provide daily stipends. These stipends must be competitive as other aspirants are willing to pay higher rates to secure their votes.[32] In the view of one political actor the primary stage of the election can often be more financially demanding for an aspirant because the party and governor only come in to support the candidate after their selection.[33] However, there is no guarantee that the party leader will provide this financial backing in the campaign period. Indeed, many candidates have lost elections because party leaders refuse to release the funds meant for the elections.[34]

Pre-election litigation

Although post-election litigation is more pronounced in discussions about election costs, pre-election litigation is also crucial. Political actors interviewed indicated an aspirant begins to face election litigations as soon as they declare their interest for a position. Given judicial precedents that have upturned primary election outcomes in favour of petitioners, political actors now see the courts as providing a route to power even if they lose primary elections.[35]

Campaign costs

Voter engagement

The campaign period is usually characterised by a number of activities that consume vast resources.[36] These include community engagements; door-to-door mobilisation campaigns; visits to traditional rulers and religious leaders; hosting town-hall meetings and larger scale campaign rallies; the engagement and mobilisation of party leaders; logistics; and advertisements. Spending

on these activities is not static and depends on the location, the level of election being contested and its competitive nature. For example, the estimated total campaign expenditure reported in Edo and Ondo states during off-cycle gubernatorial elections in 2024 was significantly different. In Edo state, it was estimated that N3.17 billion was spent on campaign events and N2.33 billion on advertisements, which was far more than the N461 million and N204 million spent on campaign events and advertisements respectively in Ondo state.[37]

What is consistent is the importance of grassroots mobilisation. Political aspirants spend huge amounts of money on upgrading services and developmental projects in order to get the support of the community. Narrating his personal experience, a former legislator indicated that he relied on the strength of community support to win his election to the national legislature in 2003 and 2007, support he earned by undertaking several community projects, including the building of schools and making donations for developmental projects.[38] In a similar vein, the significance of the traditional rulers to electoral victory has grown in importance. As such, cash gifts and other valuable items, including cars, are often given to the rulers, chiefs and elders in the community in exchange for their support during the election. As one former aspirant noted, “you have to show that you are also financially strong. A traditional ruler can indirectly demand for the car you are driving. You have no choice but to give it out and demonstrate your financial capacity.”[39]

Advertisements are also very important during the campaigns and require huge resources, particularly in urban constituencies. Aspirants spend excessively to secure airtime in the electronic media and spaces in the print media at very exorbitant rates. A full page advertorial in the print media costs between N500-600,000. Whilst a 45 second political advert on a popular programme “Politics Today” on Channels TV cost N236,890 and a ten-minute TV programme feature is between N850,000 and N1.5 million. In addition, contestants can pay for live coverage of their campaigns on major national televisions, but this incurs a premium charge. Printing of campaign posters also attract substantial expenses. Each poster costs around N100 with as many as 10,000 printed per LGA. Finally, with social media an increasingly key battleground in Nigerian politics, aspirants are increasingly paying social media influencers to promote their candidature, often with the help of fake news, among young voters in particular. In a BBC report, a political actor revealed that: "we've paid an influencer up to N20m for delivering a result.”[40]

Security

The extent of insecurity in the constituency, as well as the levels of political violence, drives the necessity of expenditure on this item. In Borno state, for example, where insurgency has increased security threats, political contestants allocate a huge amount of money to engage both formal and informal security personnel for their security during the campaigns. Similar realities exist in the northwest, south-south and southeast geopolitical zones that have seen a sharp increase in killings and conflicts.[41] Rates of private security guards vary, depending on the professionalism of the company and the level of urbanisation of the election area. In major cities, the average cost to hire a single, experienced armed guard with a military or paramilitary background is $60-$100 per day.

As a minimum a candidate is expected to hire at least two guards for the election campaign period and the period until any election litigation is finalised.

Spiritual consultations

Whether it is spirituality grounded in the Islamic, Christian, or African traditional religious faith, political actors engage the services of spiritual leaders to conduct prayer sessions for their success during elections. This aspect of the electoral process is a discreet and private affair for the contestants for which there is limited public information. However, most of the research participants insisted that spiritual services constitute a notable component of election cost in Nigeria and that these can be required to advance your own bid or to protect yourself against others. One female political actor told the researchers that her opponents used "juju"[42] to intimidate her during the elections and that she sought spiritual guidance as part of an effort to limit that threat.

Election day costs

Vote buying

The terminology of "logistics" conveys many meanings for political actors and is used for several purposes on election day, but it is mostly a budget dedicated to vote-buying, bribery of election officials and payment of thugs. Around N200-300,000 is allocated to each ward – each LGA has between 10 and 20 wards - for the purpose of buying votes. The amount paid to voters varies depending on economic status of the voting area, the capacity of the parties and the category of elective position but usually ranges between N5-10,000.

Payments can be made before voting, "prepaid", or after a ballot has been cast, "post-paid". Under the prepaid model the prospective voters are usually paid before casting their ballot on the trust that they would fulfil their own side of the deal.[43] To ensure compliance, parties often have their agents to systematically monitor voting patterns. The post-paid approach, introduced to mitigate defection by only making payment after the voting has been completed, requires that the voter provide evidence to party agents to prove their ballot has been cast for the candidate.[44] Vote buying has institutionalised high election day spending because candidates see vote buying as a necessary strategy to secure victory. In the 2023 elections, domestic observers reported that "vote trading was undertaken by all the political parties" in the areas observed.[45] Whilst a national survey conducted by NBS after the 2023 general elections reported a 22% vote buying incidence rate across the country, a 5% increase from the 2019 elections.[46]

Securing votes

Security is important on the election day, but it goes beyond securing the aspirants. In many cases, political thugs are hired to engage in voter intimidation and suppression, with some even involved in the disruption of the electoral process, attacks on political opponents and/or election officials. In addition, they provide informal security to their paymasters against potential attacks from opponents using similar gangs of thugs. The use of violence as a strategy to win elections is a

particular domain of incumbents or ruling party candidates, who often use a combination of state security and thugs to intimidate voters on election day and manipulate the process in their favour.[47]

Post-election costs

Electoral litigation

The judiciary is increasingly becoming a deciding factor in Nigerian elections given the declining trust in the electoral management body, the "do-or-die" mentality of Nigerian politics, and the fact that the Nigerian electoral jurisprudence empowers the courts to calculate votes and pronounce actual winners. Nigerian politicians are therefore prepared to spend significant amounts at this juncture because they believe that elections that cannot be won at the polling booths, can be won in the courts.[48]

Election results, at all levels, are therefore subjected to long, and expensive, litigation. Reporting by Daily Trust in 2023 stated that "an Abuja-based senior lawyer who pleaded anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter said a minimum of N500 million could be paid to each member of a legal team or the entire team." The newspaper further reported that: "there are some senior advocates you can pay up to N1 billion as individuals from the tribunal to the Supreme Court, let alone if they are to join with other senior external lawyers."[49] Factors taken into consideration in charging clients on electoral disputes include quality of the legal team, nature of the case and the relationship between the client and the lawyers. Several respondents confirmed that election litigation costs are one of the highest components of the cost of politics, with one stating that "judicial expenditures [largely bribes to ensure favourable rulings] are very expensive and complicated. It is complicated because it often involves paying middlemen to serve as links to persons who can influence judgements".[50] However, with these payments being illegal and largely obscured from view there is no guarantee that the money is delivered and used for the intended purpose.

Constiuent and community demands

The public perception about politics equating with quick wealth informs the attitude of ceaseless personal demands for financial assistance on elected parliamentarians by constituents. These range from request for support paying school fees, covering funeral expenses, hospital bills, house construction, holy pilgrimages and wedding or burial expenses. One parliamentarian summarised how "we have now become doctors, undertakers, and father to many orphans because we are elected to the House."[51]

In addition to personal demands, elected parliamentarians are also expected to finance community projects outside the approved and allocated budgets. They must build schools, hospitals, and similar facilities for the community, as well as organise empowerment programmes that involve sharing vehicles, tricycles, sewing machines, grinding machines and other similar items that can strengthen economic opportunities at the community level, if they want to strengthen their political

standing. In addition, serving parliamentarians are also expected to provide relief materials during economic hardships or national emergencies. These requests for support can endure even after the individual has left office. One former member of the House of Representatives stated that he incurred a debt of N80 million as a result of constituency engagements after his tenure ended. As a consequence many legislators try to avoid these costly constituency engagements, but this has the potential to further the disconnection between the elected representatives and their constituents and increase the transactional nature of the interaction.

Drivers of the cost of politics

Godfatherism

It was largely agreed that no political aspirant can get the ticket to run for elective office without the backing of a godfather. “The godfathers are the ones that collect the resources and impose candidates on the community”, argued a respondent, whilst another argued that “you must have a godfather or money”.[52] Even for those with money, going through a godfather or party elites in order to win and secure the party’s ticket, was viewed as critical for success. The politics of “godfatherism” has given prominence to the overbearing influence of money in electoral politics in Nigeria. Although not often or necessarily the moneybags of the parties, their political strategies involve excessive sharing of money, meaning that the godfather usually relies on the use of money and instruments of force to determine who gets what. This reliance on money to maintain control means that “godfathers force the cost of elections up.”[53]

Weak enforcement of electoral law

Table 2: Regulations on election spending according to the Electoral Act (2022)

Position	Maximum amount
President	N5 billion
Governor	N1 billion
Senator	N100 million
House of Representatives	N70 million
State House of Assembly	N30 million
Chairmanship (Local Government/Area Council)	30 million

The laws regulating party and campaign finance are guided by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the 2022 Electoral Act and INEC’s 2022 Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties (see Table 2). In addition, there are concurrent statutory provisions such as the 2000 Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, the 2004 Economic and

Financial Crimes Commission Establishment Act, the 2006 Advance Fee Fraud and Other Fraud Related Offences Act, the 2020 Money Laundering (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, the 2020 Companies and Allied Matters Act and the 2022 Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act.

Despite this plethora of laws, regulations and guidelines, they are largely not applied or effectively enforced by either INEC or the anti-corruption agencies. Narrating her experience, a female parliamentarian stated that the highest spender amongst those competing for the party's ticket at the primary election paid each delegate about N2.5m. With 36 delegates in total this amounted to a total sum of N90 million which suggests that the amount paid to buy delegates' votes alone has exceeded the provisions of the law.[54] This pattern is repeated across electoral races and across all geopolitical zones. All leading governorship candidates in the 2024 Edo and Osun off-cycle elections exceeded the formal limits according to a recent study.[55]

Table 3: Election expenses of governorship candidates in the off-cycle governorship elections in Edo and Ondo states

Candidate	Party	State	Amount spent
Monday Okpebholo	APC	Edo	N3.8 billion
Ighodalo	PDP	Edo	N3.5 billion
Olumide Akpata	LP	Edo	N2.3 billion
Lucky Aiyedatiwa	APC	Ondo	N2.6 billion
Alfred Ajayi	PDP	Ondo	N1.02 billion

Source: Data compiled from Kimpact Development Initiative study (2025)

Perception of politics as profitable

The popular perception is that politics is a money-making venture, with those who make it into government experiencing significant financial benefits. Salaries for elected officials are significantly higher than those in many other sectors and several times greater than the average income of Nigerian citizens. These emoluments include not only base salaries but also allowances for housing, transportation, security, and other perks the details of which are not publicly disclosed, but which are substantial. According to Simon Karu, a member of the 9th national assembly, a realistic figure for a member's monthly take home was N9.3 million.[56] But the fact that a parliamentarian controls constituency projects, which are specially budgeted for them, also increases the attraction of the office. Moreover, public office holders often have access to discretionary funds or control over contract award processes that have limited oversight. This access, combined with the need many feel to recoup the investments made to assume office, creates an environment ripe for corruption.

Political parties as enablers

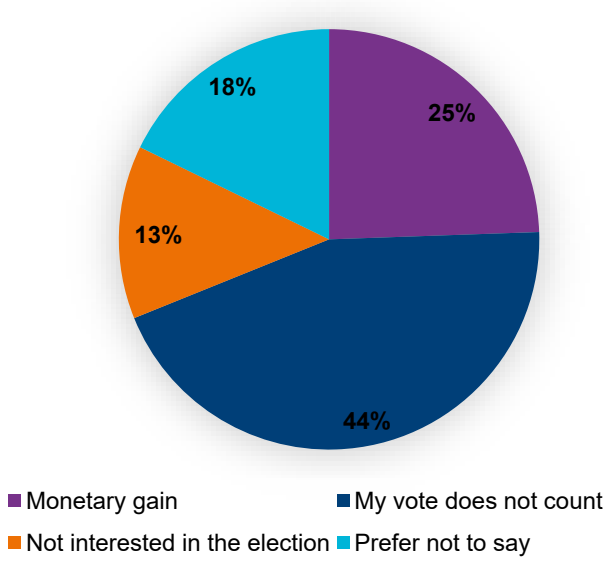
Participants noted that political parties in Nigeria significantly contribute to the financial burden of candidates through high nomination fees, internal levies, and the expectation of self-funded campaigns. Beyond the exorbitant fees for nomination forms, candidates are required to make financial contributions to party activities, including funding party offices, mobilisation efforts, and internal events. Most parties provide little or no financial support to their candidates, instead internal party politics often favours those who can afford to "buy influence" within party structures, either through direct payments to party leaders or by sponsoring party initiatives. A PWD representative in Kano state spoke to the issue, stating that:

> *Political parties have turned elections into a game for the highest bidder. The nomination fees alone are enough to discourage capable but financially disadvantaged candidates. Beyond that, parties expect aspirants to fund their own campaigns, sponsor party activities, and even make unofficial payments to secure internal support. This system locks out the poor and favours the wealthy elite.*[57]

Prevailing poverty

Poverty acts as a major driver of the cost of politics in Nigeria. The overwhelming majority of the population live in multidimensional poverty[58] and this enables politicians to utilise material incentives as tools for securing votes rather than engaging voters through meaningful policy discussions. Our survey data suggests that vote buying is less common in a community of more educated and employed voters (see Figure 1). This reality not only inflates campaign costs but also undermines democratic integrity and stifles genuine political engagement aimed at addressing the root causes of poverty itself.

Figure 1: Have you been offered money or gifts in exchange for your vote?



Source: Survey data collected for this study in FCT.

Impacts on marginalised groups

The high cost of politics has a negative impact on the participation and inclusion of marginalised groups in politics. Women, youth, and PWDs face major challenges in raising campaign funds due to limited financial resources, weak political networks, and systemic discrimination. Many struggle to secure party nominations or even sponsorship from wealthy donors, as funding often goes to established, wealthier, and largely male, candidates.

For female aspirants, cultural biases grounded in patriarchalism are the strongest factor limiting their access to the finances needed to compete. A female political actor highlighted the exorbitant funds associated with politics and the fact that most women lack the financial capacity to compete with male gender in the contest. “Raising funds is the hardest part—parties and donors rarely invest in candidates like us (women)”[59] she argued. Corroborating this, a female parliamentarian in Abuja explained that “women often struggle to access funds due to cultural norms that limit their financial independence. Many rely on family support, which is not always sufficient”.[60]

Whilst many parties have adopted waivers and other forms of concessions to encourage female participation this has not translated into change. Most female aspirants often resort to contesting on the platform of smaller political parties, but this also diminishes their chances of electoral success, a reality reflected in women’s representation at the federal and state level. Even for those who do successfully contest, the costs of post-election litigation can be another obstacle that is difficult to overcome. A 2019 study found that 70% of respondents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds – into which the majority of women, youth and PWDs sit – reported feeling unable to pursue legal action due to financial constraints.[61] This sentiment was echoed in the interviews conducted, as one participant stated that “many people feel that even if they have a case against election results, they simply cannot afford to fight it legally.”[62] As a result, these groups tend to opt not to contest elections in the first place, or when they do so, to not contest outcomes even when they have legitimate cases.

The intersection between economy and culture also affects youth as they seek to navigate the highly monetised political terrain. Despite the passage of the Not Too Young To Run Act in 2018[63], which aimed to encourage more youth participation in politics, the cost of elections has remained a major hindrance to achieving its objective. The lack of access to finance was viewed as a major barrier by one respondent who argued that “finances affect the active participation of youth in elections as majority of the youth don't have the financial might to do so except where sponsored.”[64] Just like women, youth aspirants often look for spaces in the less monetised, but also less successful, non-dominant parties.

Finally, PWDs face “double jeopardy” as they first have to source for funds to ensure that they can meet up with the challenge of nomination and eligibility to contest for the office. Secondly, they also have to source for funds in order to engage in extra-campaigns to prove their capacity to compete with anybody. Therefore, a PWD contesting for elections would require more money to win. But the

reality is that many people who fall into the category are economically constrained by societal biases and discrimination. Furthermore, while most parties have adopted waiver policies for women and youth, the policy is yet to be fully adopted by political parties to encourage the greater participation of PWDs. “There is no political party that creates an enabling environment for persons with disability”[65] contended one respondent.

Implications for Nigeria’s democracy

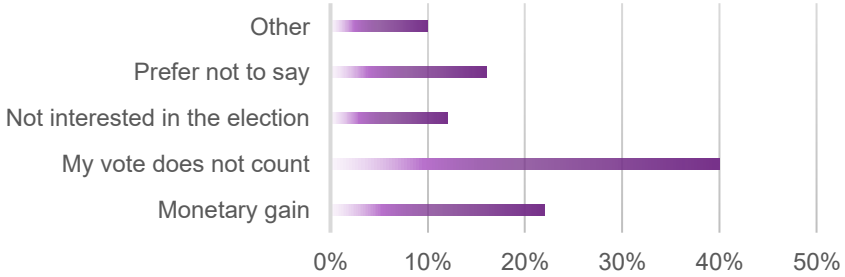
Absence of accountability

The heavy monetisation of the electoral process often leads to the emergence of candidates with a huge war chest that influences or induces voters with money. More popular, capable and grassroots oriented candidates often lose out due to their inability to mobilise the required resources to match these moneyed contestants. The reliance on financial inducements to get elected and maintain office fosters an environment where corruption not only thrives but is accepted as a norm. Politicians who secure office after making vast expenditures are largely beholden to their benefactors rather than their constituents, leading to policies that favour elite interests over those needed for broader societal improvement. It is also often the case that elected officials who buy their way into elective office have little or no connection or interaction with their constituents until the next election.

Citizen dissatisfaction and apathy

Electoral processes should provide an opportunity for citizens to elect the leaders of their choices whom they believe will impact positively on their lives. They can also serve as an accountability mechanism where leaders are held accountable for their stewardship. Unfortunately, there has been an increasing rate of voter apathy in Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999.[66] Over half of survey respondents who admitted to collecting money before voting indicated that their lack of interest in the electoral process or that their vote would not count was the reason for doing so.

Figure 2: Reason given for selling vote



Source: Survey data collected for this study in FCT.

Declining electoral integrity

The heavy monetisation of politics has greatly compromised electoral outcomes in Nigeria despite the huge investments in electoral reforms made since 2007. The inflated costs associated with campaigning can deter qualified individuals from entering politics, particularly those who are not wealthy or connected. This results in a political landscape dominated by individuals who prioritise personal gain over public service.

Diminished service delivery

According to the 1999 Constitution, the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government. Leaders are elected to provide effective governance in terms of service delivery, accelerate growth and development for the benefit of the people. Unfortunately, the monetised political and electoral system has led to the emergence of leaders who are primarily focused on recovering the huge resources spent during election campaigns. Poor power supply, dilapidated infrastructure, insecurity and poor health care delivery all have their roots in corruption, and this is closely linked to weak and compromised leadership that the monetisation of politics is fuelling. “Instead of providing effective oversight over the executive members of the legislature at the national state levels collude with the executive to get their own share of the proceeds of corruption” was how one respondent described the prevailing reality. In this view, oversight has now been co-opted a tool for negotiating for part of the loot.

Development defecits

The intersection between lucrative public offices and high political costs has profound implications for Nigeria’s socio-economic landscape. In lieu of substantive political discourse or policy proposals, candidates often invest heavily in providing immediate material benefits to potential voters. Such practices divert attention from critical development issues, and mechanisms that can provide oversight of effective service delivery, are ignored. As more resources are funnelled into securing political power rather than addressing pressing societal needs—such as education, healthcare, infrastructure—the gap between rich politicians and impoverished citizens is at risk of widening further.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, this report proposes a series of recommendations to reduce the high cost of politics in Nigeria and address the impacts and implications it facilitates.

For the executive

- Effective implementation and enforcement of compliance to existing laws on election expenditure in Nigeria.
- In order to reduce vote buying and excessive monetary demands on elected public officers, the executive should effectively tackle the problem of poverty and socio-economic inequality by pursuing a pro-poor development agenda.
- A robust whistle-blower protection framework should be institutionalised to encourage anonymous reporting of violation of the regulations on political spending to INEC.
- Extension of anti-corruption efforts around election financing through the existing agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission.
- Government agencies like the Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission should be giving the backing of the executive to enforce approved templates on the remuneration of public office holders and ensure that unauthorised emoluments and allowances are not paid to public officials.
- The executive should initiate substantial judicial reforms to increase the independence of the judiciary and work with the National Judicial Council to address lingering problems associated with electoral jurisprudence in Nigeria.

For the legislature

- The legislature should ensure the passage of the Electoral Offences Commission bill for the establishment of the National Electoral Offences Commission to effectively pursue cases of violation of election finance regulations and other election-related offences.
- The legislature should amend the Electoral Act to increase penalties for offences related to violation of election finance regulations and to ensure that missing components of election financing especially post-election litigation costs are included in the regulations and regulated accordingly.
- The legislature should pass the Political Parties Regulatory Commission bill that will not only regulate the activities of the political parties but enforce compliance of the specific laws on election financing.
- The legislature should explore the possibility of public funding for political parties to reduce the financial burden on political aspirants.

- The legislature should amend the constitution to create special seats for women and other excluded or marginalised groups such as youth and PWDs.

For political parties

- Political parties should reduce the cost of participation fees especially nomination and expression of interest fees and adopt other innovative measures for raising funds.
- Political parties should have clear regulations on election finance that aligns with the electoral law. They should have internal units that monitor and enforce compliance on the regulations on election financing and make public regular expenditure reports.
- Political parties should revise the delegate voting processes for primary elections which is riddled with corruption and introduce direct primaries, where party members elect candidates. This will minimise the incidence of vote buying, reduce the cost of elections and compel parties to have a credible and verifiable register of members.
- Political parties should introduce or enforce existing quota systems to guarantee spaces or opportunities for marginalised groups to emerge as candidates during party primaries.
- Political parties should embrace more issue-based campaigns and discontinue with the practice of cash-gifts for campaigns and voting.

For INEC

- INEC should develop digital transparency technologies to effectively monitor election-related financing.
- INEC needs to be unbundled for the establishment of a separate agency to deal with electoral offences including finance-related electoral offence.
- INEC should also initiate advanced digital platforms that allows accreditation, voting, and collation of votes. This will significantly reduce the cost of logistics, mobilisation, security and other election day related costs, and ultimately increase electoral integrity.

For civil society

- Increase public awareness against reliance on material gains for exercising voting obligations.
- Increase advocacy efforts towards politicians to commit them to the principles of transparency and responsible financing of elections.
- Increase advocacy toward the legislature to amend the electoral law and introduce stricter punishment for offences related to money politics.
- Provide training and guidance on fundraising and low-cost campaigning – for example how to use social media for mobilisation - for marginalised groups like women, youth, and PWDs.
- Support citizen journalism to investigate and report violations of the regulations on election financing.

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[14] KII with a youth representative, Benue State, 10 March 2025.
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[17] KII with a political aspirant, Anambra, 18 March 2025.
[18] KII with a former aspirant for Federal House of Reps, FCT, 20 March 2025.
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