CHAPTER 4

The Political Underrepresentation of Young Adults in Nigeria's Subnational Parliaments

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1 Introduction

The underrepresentation of young adults in political offices is gaining attention. Scholars are increasingly analysing youth descriptive underrepresentation both for appointive (Stockemer & Sundstrom, 2021) and elective positions (Stockemer & Sundstrom, 2022); albeit the focus has been on national offices, especially national and supranational parliaments (Stockemer & Sundstrom, 2019; IPU, 2023). These studies have named several macro-level mechanisms, like electoral systems, level of democracy,

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and candidacy ages, as factors contributing to the disparity in age representation in parliaments (Krook & Nugent, 2018; Stockemer & Sundstrom, 2022). Yet, the extent of youth underrepresentation and how candidates' age and other candidate characteristics may contribute to the disparity in age representation in subnational parliaments is scantily addressed (but see Anlar, 2024; Anlar and McSweeney, Chap. 10; Ferrinho Lopes and Silva, Chap. 23; Kurz, Chap. 19). Where and when research has considered age disparity at the subnational level, it is to compare it to the national and with the expectation that subnational parliaments serve as 'stepping stones' in the political trajectories of young people (Sipinen et al., 2024). Yet, subnational parliaments hold a considerable measure of power and resources that make their politics significant to the general population (Angerbrandt, 2020; Odeyemi & Abati, 2021). More so, they are the most proximate level of government to the people, yet it is not clear how accessible they are to interested young political aspirants. We address this gap by describing the extent of, as well as providing explanations for, youth underrepresentation at the subnational level. We ask, does youth underrepresentation exist at the subnational level? If yes, is it precipitated by supply-side factors or demand-side issues?

Our empirical analyses focus on Nigeria, a typical case for examining youth underrepresentation in subnational politics due to its federal governance arrangement and unicameral legislative system at the subnational level. As a federation, aside from the subnational parliaments being the closest 'substantively powerful' government to the people, they are allowed significant powers to make important laws and command enormous resources (Odeyemi & Abati, 2021). Though there are provisions for elected councillors at the local government level, the powers at this level have been eroded by state governors who mostly appoint caretaker committees to oversee the administration. This has often been the case, at least until the recent 2024 Supreme Court ruling, which prohibited state governors from dissolving democratically elected local governments (Ekele, 2024). Also, Nigeria is the largest democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa and has one of the youngest populations; people between the ages of 18 and 35 make up the largest group in the voting age population. Despite this, the country continually ranks among the countries with the lowest youth parliamentary representation in the world (IPU, 2023). This significant discrepancy in representation motivated a globally recognised advocacy movement dubbed #NotTooYoungToRun by a coalition of civil society organisations spearheaded by the Youth Initiative for Advocacy,

Growth and Advancement (YIAGA) Africa, which resulted in the reduction of minimum candidacy ages for selected elective offices, including the subnational legislatures in 2018. With two nationwide elections conducted since this age reduction reform, Nigeria's subnational-level politics present a unique opportunity for examining the mobilising effect of reduced candidacy ages for descriptive representation of young candidates in parties and through elected members in parliament. This chapter will provide empirical evidence for the effect of reducing candidacy age on candidacy and representation of young people in parliaments, thereby testing Krook and Nugent's (2018) theory of a mobilising effect at the subnational level.

The chapter continues in three main sections. We start by outlining earlier scholarship, highlighting not only its lopsidedness for national politics but also the absence of African case studies. As such, we draw significantly on a mix of youth representation and state politics literature to theorise the importance of examining youth underrepresentation at the subnational level, narrowing in on Nigeria's subnational legislative context. Next, we discuss data and methods, before presenting our results and discussing our findings. Lastly, we raise implications for our findings and draw relevant conclusions.

2 Youth Political Representation Literature

Like other group representation studies, youth representation literature highlights the importance of institutional measures like the electoral systems (Joshi, 2013; Stockemer & Sundström, 2018), youth quotas (Belschner, 2018; Belschner & Paredes, 2020), as well as voting and candidate age requirements (Krook & Nugent, 2018). Several single case and comparative studies have confirmed that proportional representation (PR) electoral systems yield younger members of parliament (MPs) (Joshi, 2013; Kurz & Ettensperger, 2023), especially because PR systems incentivise political parties to broaden the composition of their candidate lists by including minority candidates like women and young people (Stockemer & Sundström, 2018). Also, lower candidacy ages have been found to produce both 'immediate' and 'downstream' mobilising effects for young people (Krook & Nugent, 2018). The immediate mobilising effect speaks to the favourable effect of age eligibility reduction on young people's representation by allowing them to enter the candidate pool at an early age, thereby affecting the representation of the youngest cohort in parliament.

The downstream effect speaks to how age reduction regulations also have a positive effect on the representation of the next younger age cohort. In their analysis, Krook and Nugent (2018) add that high candidacy age regulations both hinder young adults from running for office and implicitly reinforce the belief that politics is not a suitable field for young people. To mitigate this, calls have been made for the alignment of voting and candidate age requirement (Krook & Nugent, 2018; IPU, 2023) as well as the adoption of youth quotas (Belschner, 2018; IPU, 2023).

To explain how these different dynamics interact for individual candidates, much of the research on group representation adopts Norris and Lovenduski's (1995) supply and demand model to explain variations in political recruitment and representation. The underlying logic of the model is that recruitment and representation are a function of the interaction between supply-side and demand-side factors. On the one hand, the former include factors that shape an individual's decision to run, including political interest or motivation, which are mediated by an individual's background characteristics like age, sex, race, class, and career, as well as personal resources, both in the form of money and time (Krook, 2010, p. 708). Thus, an under-supply of candidates could indicate an unwillingness to run or systemic barriers that prevent participation (Stockemer et al., 2024). Lawless and Fox (2015) even showed that instead of young people running for office, they are running from office. Their poor perception of political leaders leads them to pursue leadership in other fields outside of politics (Sipinen et al., 2024). Furthermore, Shames (2017) argues that young people consider politics as exhausting and mentally draining and the perception of how it functions is negative. Like all rational decision makers, they examine the cost-benefit analysis when considering a candidacy, and even after winning office, they are not convinced they can achieve meaningful changes within the political system. These factors help explain why some studies have attributed the absence of young people in parliaments to supply-side factors, given their insufficient presence in the candidate pool (Stockemer et al., 2024).

But supply-side factors do not tell the whole story, as it is one thing for young people to present themselves to parties and voters at selection and election stages, it is another thing for them to be selected or elected. These two stages constitute important demand-side issues that young people also consider when deciding to run. The party selection stage is where parties decide who is deemed appropriate to run for office, streamlining the pool of candidates who can be voted for by the electorates. In Manow's

(2007) study on legislative turnover in Germany, an MP reported that the selection/nomination at the party level is more crucial than the election itself. Similarly, Berz and Jankowski (2022) regard the party candidate selection as the pivotal election that has already taken place before voters express their will on election day. To facilitate such selection, parties establish their eligibility criteria as a way to limit the number of candidates who can run in elections (Vandeleene & Haute, 2021). Young people may be disadvantaged in this process in at least two ways. First, party gatekeepers, who are predominantly older party members, tend to favour candidates of a comparable age to them (Rehmert, 2022). Second, from a strategic perspective, party selectors often prefer partisan candidates who support party unity, popular candidates who enhance party electoral success, and those who help with party policy implementation (Vandeleene, 2024). As such, these calculations may disadvantage young people as selectors and voters end up considering them as politically inexperienced, incompetent, and lacking a track record. Even when chosen as candidates, young people tend to be sacrificed by being assigned to districts where the party is unlikely to win (Gélix & Chassé, 2024).

At the election stage, research on voting behaviour shows evidence of affinity voting (Webster & Pierce, 2019; Sevi, 2021; Kurz et al., 2025). Sevi's (2021) analysis showed that a wider age gap between leaders and voters lowers voters' possibility of providing a favourable assessment of the leader and embracing his political party. Furthermore, Kurz et al. (2025) found that German youths exhibit strong aversion for being represented by candidates above the age of 60 years, while older voters prefer to cast their support for candidates of the same age group. Conversely, age may also present an advantage. McClean and Ono's (2024) experimental analysis revealed that age worked in favour of younger candidates, as they are perceived to be more inclined to prioritise a wide range of policy concerns over a longer period. However, as voting population is usually tilted in favour of older voters, this disparity may give more advantages to older candidates (Sinipnen et al., 2024).

While these theoretical perspectives have mostly been tested in national contexts, there is limited understanding of how these mechanisms will influence youth candidacy and representation in subnational contexts. This understanding is particularly important in countries that operate federal governance arrangements, as there are indications that national and subnational elections can significantly differ on various counts, including campaign intensity and strategy (Elklit, 1991), turnout (Lefevere & Aelst,

2014), and minority candidates election success (Cancela & Geys, 2016). On the one hand, the geographical size and population covered by national constituencies is often larger than those covered by subnational constituencies and with young people less resourced, especially financially and human resource-wise than their older counterparts, subnational-level politics may require lesser cost of campaigning than national-level politics (Frandsen, 2002). Although the increasing public reliance on digital media for political information and education may decrease campaign cost disparities between national and subnational politics (Anlar, 2024), there is still a sense that subnational politics—particularly in rural communities—tend to involve lower campaigning costs.

Beyond cost, on the other hand, there may also be reasons to expect that subnational-level politics would yield a higher supply of and demand for young candidates. Young candidates may be calculating that they have a higher chance of winning at the subnational level compared to the national level, especially at their first attempt. Or, parties and voters may be more willing to give young candidates opportunities for subnational-level positions compared to national level, on the assumption that the former is less at stake than the latter. Either way, subnational-level politics portends better opportunity and lesser competition for young candidates than the national level. Additionally, some countries set different minimum candidacy ages for national and subnational positions, suggesting they assume that lesser political experience is associated with leadership at the subnational compared to the national level. For example, Anlar (2024) argues that the age requirements of candidates have a small but significant positive relationship with the proportion of young adults in U.S. state legislatures, suggesting that one of the institutional mechanisms that could help ensure more young people's representation at the subnational level is the alignment of voting and candidacy ages.

3 The Nigerian Subnational Context

Nigeria is a classic case for studying youth underrepresentation, not only because it is the most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa but also because it has one of the youngest populations on the continent with a median age of 19. However, despite young people playing key leadership roles in the nationalist and immediate post-independence politics of the country (Abdullahi et al., 2014), they have remained on the margins of politics across all levels of government since the fourth republic

(established in 1999). Even though the oldest generation are the smallest demographic group (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022), the country has consistently been ruled by them. For example, in the 2019 general election, 76-year-old Muhammadu Buhari, a former military leader in the 1970s, flagged the banner of the All Progressives Congress (APC), with his major contender from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) being another 71-year-old, Atiku Abubakar, a former vice president. Similarly, in 2023, all the major presidential contenders were old men in their 60 s and 70 s. Like in the executive sphere, old and middle-aged men also dominate the legislative institutions, leaving Nigeria among the bottom 20 countries on global youth representation measures for national legislatures (IPU, 2023).

As the following paragraph will show, there are reasons to expect variance in terms of the supply of and demand for young candidates at Nigeria's subnational level. First, subnational constituencies vary in size and population. With population being the basis for the distribution of subnational constituencies, some constituencies are large leading to varied membership composition of the subnational legislatures (see second column in Appendix A, online supplementary material). For instance, Lagos and Kano, as the two most populous states, have the largest number of representatives, with 40 members each, while Nasarawa, Kebbi, and Ebonyi, each have 24 members, reflecting their smaller populations. Second, Nigeria's southern and northern regions are historically thought to be politically dissimilar (Falola & Heaton, 2008). The politics of southern regions (particularly southwest) have historically been progressive in nature, marked by an emphasis on social change and welfarist policies. In contrast, the northern region has traditionally operated under a more centralised political structure and maintained a conservative posture, especially during the post-independence period when political competition was shaped by ideological distinction. Also, the northern regions are less educationally developed when compared to the southern regions (Onwuka, 2019). This may result in lesser motivation for young people to come out to run for political office in such regions compared to southern regions, where most young people are more educated and politically aware. Thus, we may expect a higher number of young candidates and representatives in southern states where the political culture has historically been more receptive to progressive participation.

Another reason making Nigeria an interesting case is the electoral system. The electoral system is a majoritarian, First Past the Post system

which centres political parties. Unlike other majoritarian systems like the US where independents can run, in Nigeria all candidates must be registered with a political party to run for elections. Despite the presence of a massive pool of parties, two of the parties—APC and PDP—have maintained electoral dominance since 1999, recycling old political elites and their anointed sons, who are mostly middle-aged men (Fashagba, 2015). Only a few minor parties have managed to gain dominance at the subnational level and only in some states. For example, parties like Labour Party (LP), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), and All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) have, at different times since the start of the fourth republic, gained dominance of subnational politics in states like Ondo, Anambra, and Yobe, respectively, winning a majority of legislative seats in subnational elections as well as governorship positions. Several factors have been linked to this two-party dominance. One is the electoral finance regulations that benefit the major parties (e.g. the previous electoral law made provision for state grants with 90% of the allocation based on the number of seats won) (Aiyede, 2007). Similarly, major parties tend to use state institutions and informal structures as instruments for securing electoral victory (Malachy, 2013). So, while major parties benefit from enormous funding and resources which they use to sustain patronage, in the form of large member bases, loyalty, and incumbency advantage, minor parties do not have any of these to their advantage (Rabiu, 2024). In addition, minor parties are also faced by poor internal organisation and inadequate mobilisation and campaign capacities (The Nation, 2022). In fact, there are recent allegations that the ruling party (APC) is trying to weaken opposition and minor parties from within by co-opting their leaders and sponsoring moles to prevent electoral threats (Majeed, 2025).

So, the continued dominance of the two major parties often makes them the first point of entry for aspiring political contenders, including young aspirants. This, in turn, creates disequilibrium between available elective positions and the number of aspirant willing to run on the platforms of the major parties. Expectedly, whenever demands outweigh supply, price/cost increases. The continued increment of nominations fees by the major parties is a consequence of this disequilibrium (Ayantola, 2022). In recent times, the increments have been made worse with government subventions to parties stopped in 2010. Parties are now heavily reliant on the sale of nomination forms for operational sustenance. As such, despite efforts by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to regulate the election expenses of political parties and candidates by

pegging the maximum spending limits of candidates to 70 and 30 million naira (150,000 and 65,000 in USD) for national House of Representatives (HoR) and state House of Assembly (SHoA) elections, respectively (PLAC, 2022), parties continue to increase nomination fees at every election cycle. In 2019, APC and PDP SHoA aspirants bought nominations forms for 850 and 600 thousand naira, respectively. By 2023, the APC SHoA nomination form had increased by a staggering 135% to 2 million naira (4200 in USD) while the PDP HoA form remained unchanged (Itodo, 2022). Considering that these are only pre-primary costs, the eventual overall contest when campaign resources are factored in would be too capital intensive for an average young aspirant. This has the tendency to restrict party competition in the major parties to the grip of older and middle-aged aspirants, who have accumulated wealth over a longer political/professional career, or at best, a few wealthy young aspirants.

This, among other exclusionary characteristics of the Nigerian electoral system, has informed increasing calls for inclusive reforms, most recent of which was the attempt to synchronise voting and candidacy ages midwifed by the 'Not-too-young-to-run' movement, which culminated in the law on the reduction of the eligible age for elective offices in Nigeria. The Age Reduction Law (hereafter the Law) altered sections 65, 106, and 131 of the 1999 Constitution, thereby reducing the minimum eligible age for the office of the President from 40 to 30, the national HoR and the state Houses of Assembly (SHoAs), from 30 to 25—the Senate and the Office of Governors were surprisingly unchanged at 35 (Asadu, 2018). While the intention was to help break up the old boys' club and to offer opportunities for younger leaders to come forward, it is uncertain whether this age reduction reform has led to changes in young people's presence in politics. Krook and Nugent's (2018) investigation of the #NotTooYoungToRun campaign argues that the lowering of candidate age requirements will have downstream, 'mobilizing' impacts. In some ways, young people's engagement in recent general elections suggests that this may be true, as Electoral Commission data shows that young people were the largest share of registered voters in the recent general elections (Toromade, 2019; Suleiman, 2023). Yet, there is less insight into the impact the Law has had on young people's candidacy and election to legislative institutions, especially at the subnational level.

After two general elections (2019 and 2023) since the law's implementation, there is now an opportunity to assess Krook and Nugent's (2018) 'mobilising effect' thesis in Nigeria's subnational context. In addition to

previously discussed theoretical justifications for why subnational politics present better chances for young people, subnational parliaments not only share significant concurrent powers with the federal government, but they are exclusive holders of residual powers such as rural development which provides for each state at the subnational level to develop at its own pace (Odeyemi & Abati, 2021). As such, they are important sites for policy formulation and oversight of policy with wide-ranging consequences. We argue that paying attention to the subnational level in Nigeria's heterogeneous system can unveil national and within-country variations in descriptive representation of marginalised groups like young people. We also beam a searchlight on political parties as gatekeepers to legislative positions in democracies and add to the ongoing discourse on the significance of political parties using detailed trend analysis of young people's candidacy and descriptive representation at subnational levels in Nigeria from 2011 to 2023.

4 Data and Methods

We draw on candidate data from INEC, the country's electoral management body. The data covers the last four subnational legislative elections—2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023—to account for the last two elections before and the only two elections since the implementation of the age reduction reform. The data has information about individual candidates who contested in the elections. Specifically, we have information about candidates' age, gender, party affiliation, constituency, and education level. Additionally, we manually included the electoral performance of each candidate using online searches and membership lists from the SHoAs' websites, where available. In total, we retrieved information for all candidates of all political parties that contested in the 2019 and 2023 SHoA elections but could only retrieve information for 25 of 36 SHoAs for the 2011 and 2015 elections, meaning we have comparable data for 22 SHoAs across all 4 election cycles, which brings the dataset to a sample size of 35,503 candidates. We could not bring the other SHoAs into our analysis as the data could not be retrieved during our data gathering. Though Nigeria is overwhelmingly a two-party system, we included candidates of other parties because recent findings suggest that young candidates often prefer to run in younger and smaller parties (Belschner, 2023) and also because a few candidates who contested on the platforms of minor parties indeed won against candidates of the major parties.

Our aim in the quantitative analysis is to examine the extent of youth underrepresentation at the subnational level and the influence of candidates' age and other characteristics on electoral performance. For the former, we conduct descriptive analyses; for the latter, we conduct inferential analyses. The descriptive analysis is divided into two stages: first is the disaggregation of candidates in the candidacy pool along age, party, and geopolitical divides. In the second descriptive analysis, we examine the proportion of elected representatives to understand how candidacy translates into descriptive representation for young people. The former provides a first-level analysis that shows where young candidates are given opportunities both at the party level and geopolitically, especially because southern and northern regions are historically thought to be politically dissimilar (Falola & Heaton, 2008). This way, the descriptive analyses not only show the extent of youth underrepresentation at the subnational level but also parties and geopolitical zones that are more receptive to youth's political inclusion, as well as the stage of representation where such inequality sets in.

For the inferential analysis, our primary variable of interest is candidate age, which we operationalise both as a continuous variable and as a dichotomous variable of whether a candidate is a young adult or not. We define a young adult as being between the ages of 25 and 35 years, particularly because 25 is the new minimum age of candidacy and 35 is midway between the previous minimum age of candidacy (30) and the age of 40, which some other scholars have previously used as cut-off (Joshi, 2013). This definition also aligns with recent changes in the country's national youth policy. The 2009 youth policy categorised youth as people aged 18–35, but the 2019 policy changed this to people aged 15–29 (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019). Some of the explanation provided for the adjustment stated that it was to ensure that intervention programmes targeted at young people get to them rather than "adults masquerading as youths" (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019, p. 3). So, the definition fits into Nigeria's sociocultural context, where the age cohort of 30–35 is generally perceived to be at the entry points into maturity where financial stability, social independence, and marital independence are expected to have been achieved. More so, taking a midpoint age between 30 and 40 years helps to account for Krook and Nugent's (2018) argument that when minimum candidacy ages are reduced, it is not only the youngest age cohorts (25–29) that

benefit from the age reform but the next younger age cohorts (30–35) as well. Thus, we test for both young age cohorts.

The other variable of interest was electoral success, which we operationalised as a dichotomous variable of 1 if a candidate was elected and 0 if not. Given the politically dissimilar histories of the regions, we include the country's geopolitical zones as a control variable. Geopolitical zone is operationalised as a six-value categorical variable where 1 is northeast, 2 is northcentral, 3 is south-south, 4 is southeast, 5 is southwest, and 6 is northwest. Similarly, previous studies have hinted at the importance of party affiliation and gender as determinants of candidates' electoral performance (Cheibub & Sin, 2020; Belschner, 2023, Abati & Adeniji, 2025; thus, we include party affiliation and gender as control variables in the inferential analysis. Gender and party affiliations are operationalised as dichotomous variables, where gender is coded 1 if a candidate is male and 0 if female, and party affiliation is coded 1 if the candidate contested on the platform of either APC or PDP as major parties and 0 if on the platform of any of the other parties. Similarly, we included disability status to account for the inclusive nature of the leadership pool. Disability status was operationalised as a dichotomous variable, where those who identified as persons with disability were coded as 1, while those who did not were coded as 0.

To complement the quantitative data, we analysed published newspaper interviews with young candidates, party leaders, and representatives of civil society organisations. From individual candidate interviews, we gleaned information about the nature of party selection practices, the roles of gatekeepers, money, and godfathers, as well as what leverage young candidates use to navigate the selection process in subnational elections. From party leaders, we were interested in their statutory and non-statutory roles in selecting party candidates and how they decide which candidate selection method is to be used. While we triangulated the opinions gleaned from all interviews with relevant provisions of individual party constitutions, we also triangulated some of the opinions expressed by young candidates about the influence of godfathers, delegates, and money in candidate selection processes with those of party leaders.

5 Findings: Data Presentation and Analysis

5.1 Analyses and Discussion of Descriptive Results

Descriptively analysing the dataset, the first noticeable observation is the record-high emergence of young political candidates in the candidacy pool. In earlier elections, the total number of candidates that contested for the available 993 SHoA seats averaged around 5500 candidates, but in 2019 and 2023, this more than doubled, with 14,443 and 10,220 candidates, respectively. Interestingly, candidates aged 35 and under accounted for over 40% of these figures in both elections, compared to 24% and 18% in the 2011 and 2015 elections. Figure 4.1 shows that the mean age of all candidates decreased from 41 and 42 years in 2011 and 2015 to 37 and 39 years in 2019 and 2023, respectively. Though these mean ages are higher than this study's youth cut-off age of 35, they are still relatively young ages compared to the average age of candidates in the candidacy pool before the age reduction reform. Already, this initial result confirms Krook and Nugent's (2018, p. 64) argument, at least in part, that lower candidacy age limits have an immediate 'mobilising effect', as young candidates have evidently changed the calculations of when they first decide to run for office to earlier ages.

However, contrary to the expectation that younger candidates would emerge from the southern zones, disaggregated data along geopolitical zones reveal that more young candidates were nominated from northern compared to southern zones (see Appendix A). Here we find that while

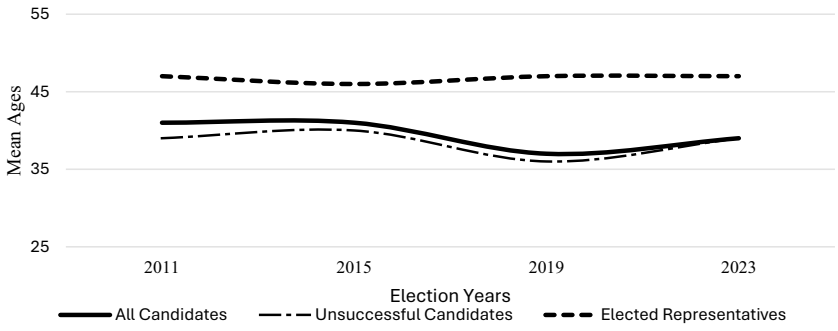

Fig. 4.1 Mean ages of candidates and elected representatives in SHoAs, 2011–2023 elections. (Source: Abati [2024])

the average age of candidates dropped in all the zones, the average age of candidates in the northern zones was lower than in the southern zones. To illustrate better, the northern zone with the lowest share of young candidates (northwestern) averaged 38%, which is about 6% more than the southern zone (southwest) with the highest share of young candidates at 32%. This defies our earlier simplistic view of states in the northern zones as comprising less educated young people and the subsequent assumption that there may be a short supply of prospective ideal young candidates that can represent young people in the region, and vice versa for the south. Nonetheless, this finding suggests that the underrepresentation of young people in Nigeria's subnational parliaments is less of a supply-side problem. This is because, whether we are considering the north or the south of the country, there are sufficient young people who could represent youth's interests in parliament.

This accomplishment is important for youth candidacy in Nigeria, considering that in 2018 when the age reduction law was passed, the 2019 general election was less than a year away; little was to be expected in terms of young people's capacity to navigate party candidate selection processes to emerge as party candidates (Babalola, 2018). Even the then-President Muhammadu Buhari, when signing the bill into law, had said, "[…] please, can I ask you to postpone your campaigns till after the 2019 elections!" (Ewodage, 2018). Still Samson Itodo, the Executive Director of YIAGA Africa, argued that the proportion of young candidates would have been more than what is recorded if not for the way parties hiked their nomination fees to deliberately shut out young people:

> Whilst many young people expressed interest to run for office, most of them could not purchase party nomination forms because the cost of forms was very high – a deliberate attempt by the ruling political elites, who are scared that the young adult would retire them in the 2019 election. For those who defied the odds and purchased the forms, they had to combat stiff opposition from party hegemons and oligarchs, [who were] hell-bent on circumventing the processes to impose their 'anointed' candidates. (Itodo, 2019, p. 20)

This quote points to several demand-side issues as the obstacles remaining in the way of young people's political candidacy. First, the prohibitive nature of the nomination fees imposed by parties has switched the issue from Too Young To Run to "Too-Poor-To-Run" (Ajodo-Adebanjoko,

2019). Rinsola Abiola, a female young legislative aspirant in the 2019 election, aged 26, noted that "funding is a major challenge with young candidates across board … we don't have the kind of resources that the older generations have and politics here [referring to Nigeria] is notoriously expensive" (Kazeem, 2019; para 7). Another young legislative aspirant in the same election, Jesse Nwaenyo, aged 30, also mentioned how "the nomination forms are too expensive in the leading parties" (Kazeem, 2019; para 16).

Second, as political newbies that most young legislative aspirants are, they often try out their luck first with the two major parties before they resort to the minor parties. This means that even before obtaining the nomination forms, they are confronted with the need to familiarise themselves with the party hierarchies and structures. In essence, they often have to pay courtesy visits to influential party hegemons and oligarchs to canvass for political support, and such visits cannot happen without the aspirants parting with substantial financial resources and/or gift items (see Abati & Adeniji, 2025). Rinsola in her case had initially sought to contest under the platform of the APC but had to switch to the Action Democratic Party (ADP) when according to her "I was told point-blank that people like me should probably be considered to be running for councillorship" (Sanni, 2019), while in Jesse's case, the high nomination cost led him to seek the nomination of the United Progressive Party (UPP) (Kazeem, 2019). His party eventually came 6th with 50 votes, in an election won by the PDP with 41,024 votes. So, it's not only the nomination fees that create financial burdens for young aspirants, but there are several other associated costs before and after the payment of nomination fees, thus further limiting the chances of young political aspirants in major parties.

This portends a twofold implication for young aspirants. Either they turn to money-bag godfathers within the major parties to sponsor their candidacy bids with a promise to abide by their conditionalities or resort to minor parties who charge moderate nomination fees to secure candidacy spots. The latter appears to have been the case in the 2019 and 2023 elections, as Table 4.1 reveals that minor parties accounted for the majority of the candidates in the candidacy pool and Table 4.2 shows that they also had majority of their candidates below age 40 with an average age of 36.

Table 4.1 shows that 86.9% and 80.7% of all candidates who contested in the 2019 and 2023 elections (respectively) did so on the platform of minor parties, with only around 13% contesting on the platform of APC

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics of candidates and elected MPs, 2019 and 2023 SHoA elections

	All candidates		*Unsuccessful*		*Elected MPs*	
Age groups	*2019*	*2023*	*2019*	*2023*	*2019*	*2023*
Median age (years)	37	39	36	39	47	47
Under 30 (in %)	12.8	16.3	13.6	17.8	1.5	2.7
Under 40 (in %)	58.9	54.9	61.7	58.2	20.6	24.6
APC (in %)	6.4	9.6	4.3	6.7	53.6	36.2
PDP (in %)	6.8	9.7	3.0	5.0	40.2	53.5
Other parties (in %)	86.9	80.7	61.0	88.3	6.2	10.4
Total	14,441	10,182	13,469	9189	972	993

Source: Abati (2024)

Table 4.2 Descriptive statistics of candidates and MPs by parties, 2019 and 2023

	All candidates		*Unsuccessful*		*Elected MPs*	
	2019	*2023*	*2019*	*2023*	*2019*	*2023*
APC						
Mean (years)	46	47	44	46	48	47
Under 30 (%)	0.8	2.1	1.0	2.6	0.4	1.1
Under 35 (%)	23.0	23.1	27.1	25.2	19.8	21.3
Total	919	991	398	460	521	531
PDP						
Mean (years)	46	47	46	46	46	47
Under 30 (%)	1.6	3.0	1.4	2.3	2.0	4.2
Under 35 (%)	22.6	26.3	24.5	27.1	19.7	24.8
Total	975	975	584	616	391	359
Other (minor) parties						
Mean (years)	36	37	36	37	44	43
Under 30 (%)	14.6	19.6	14.6	19.8	6.7	2.9
Under 35 (%)	64.3	62.2	64.5	62.5	33.3	40.8
Total	12,546	8219	12,486	8113	60	103

Source: Abati (2024)

and PDP. This result may appear intuitive given that there are over 40 minor parties and just 2 major parties, so it is expected that minor parties will have more candidates. But it must be understood that only APC and PDP field candidates in all the available 993 SHoA constituencies, with

most minor parties fielding candidates in less than half of these constituencies. So, pushing young aspirants out of competition in the major parties still lowers their overall chances of becoming a candidate because not all the other 40 parties contest for all the available 993 SHoA seats.

More so, even if they are granted preferences in the minor parties, as shown in Table 4.2 (the first two sections show that the average APC and PDP candidates were respectively 46 years old in 2019 and 47 years old in 2023, whereas the bottom section shows that the average age of candidates in minor parties was 10 years younger at 36 and 37 years old, respectively), they potentially still have lower chances of electoral victory in the main election. This is further evidenced in Table 4.2, as major parties produced 90–94% of elected MPs, with the minor parties having less than 10% of elected representatives in both elections. To put into perspective, both Jesse and Rinsola lost their elections with Jesse eventually coming in 6th with 50 votes, in an election won by the PDP with 41,024 votes. With young people pushed out of competition in the major parties, it means that the age reduction reform may have only shifted the locus of youth underrepresentation from the candidacy stage to the election stage, because the two major parties continue to hold electoral dominance at the elections and continue to lock out young candidates.

It is even more telling when we compare the mean age of unsuccessful candidates to that of elected representatives across major and minor parties. Already, we understand that because major parties mostly nominate older candidates, the mean ages of both elected representatives and unsuccessful candidates from these parties would be similar. However, we did not expect that despite the minor parties overwhelmingly nominating younger candidates that the mean age of their elected representatives would be higher than the mean age of their unsuccessful candidates. Table 4.2 shows that the mean age of elected representatives from minor parties is as high as 43 and 44 years old in both elections, despite the mean age of their candidates being only 36 and 37 in 2019 and 2023, respectively. This suggests that despite most candidates in minor parties being young, the older candidates in these minor parties are still the ones getting elected.

5.2 Analyses and Discussion of Inferential Results

The evidence presented thus far not only shows that there is an age penalty for young candidates, both at the party and election level, but it also hints

at the possibility that beyond age characteristics, other individual characteristics may determine the electoral success of young candidates in legislative elections. We therefore conduct further bivariate and multivariate tests to examine how other characteristics of candidates may explain why young candidates are unsuccessful, especially at the election level (see Table 4.3). Before we discuss the effect of other variables (models 4–6), the result of the first logistic regression analyses (models 1–3) confirms the descriptive evidence presented earlier. That is, candidates' age matters for their chances of winning a seat in the election. All three proxies of age evaluated are statistically significant. On the one hand, the coefficient for the first age proxy is 0.07, which is positive. This means that an increase in age significantly increases the likelihood of a candidate being elected. On the other hand, the coefficient for the other two age proxies is −2.25 and −1.88, which are negative. This means that the probability that candidates will be elected decreases if their ages are under 30 and 35, respectively.

Table 4.3 Binary Logistic Regression models measuring the influence of age, its proxies, and other individual factors on a candidate's chances of winning a seat in state legislative elections

	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*	*Model 6*
Age	0.07*			0.025*		
	(0.002)			(0.003)		
Under 30		−2.25*			−0.873	
		(0.105)			(0.166)	
Under 35			−1.88*			−0.835*
			(0.153)			(0.070)
Gender				0.14	0.14	0.135
				(0.091)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Party affiliation				3.66*	3.75*	3.63*
				(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.055)
Geopolitical zones				0.040*	0.046*	0.050*
				(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Disability status				−17.76	−17.74	−17.82
				(6777.7)	(6757.5)	(6753.4)
Constant	0.005	0.115	0.230	0.004	0.013	0.016
Log likelihood	20,730.69	21,673.22	20,723.27	13,829.61	13,889.92	13,766.09
Pseudo R^2	0.083	0.028	0.084	0.449	0.447	0.453
N	35,503	35,503	35,503	35,503	35,503	35,503

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *$p < 0.01$

Although these likelihood effects are small, the significance indicates that both youth age cohorts (25–29 and 30–35) have fewer chances of being elected at legislative elections.

Importantly, when the four other predictors—gender, party affiliation, geopolitical zones, and disability status—are added to the model, the outcome of the model changes. While party affiliation and geopolitical zones proved to be significant predictors of electoral success, gender and disability status did not matter. The first noticeable change is that the predictive power of age (measured as a continuous variable) on candidates' electoral chances reduces despite being statistically significant. The other age proxies also react differently after adding more predictors. At the same time, a candidate younger than 35 years still reduces the chances of electoral success, albeit at a weaker rate. However, being younger than 30 did not matter for electoral success once the other predictors were introduced, confirming the earlier findings that running on the platform of either type of party (minor or major) does not matter for the electoral chances of the youngest age cohorts. These results suggest that while age as a candidate characteristic already disadvantages the electoral chances of young candidates, intersectional identities like party affiliation and geopolitical zones further reduce their elective chances with the electorate. If anything, party affiliation has the most considerable influence on electoral success or failure in Nigeria. This implies that young candidates cannot expect to perform well electorally if they do not contest on the platform of the major political parties.

6 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the major changes that have occurred in youth political candidacy and youth descriptive representation in subnational parliament since the implementation of the candidacy age reform in Nigeria. Our findings show that youth political candidacy has improved; therefore, we are able to confirm that the underrepresentation is not a supply-side problem. Though we had reasons to expect that the southern regions would produce more young candidates (and representatives), our findings, however, show that the northern regions did better than the states in the southern regions. This is salient when it is considered that during the 2023 elections, Adamawa, a state in the northeast zone, almost became the first state to elect a female governor (see Adetayo, 2023). While candidacy has improved, we found that this has not

translated to a commensurate improvement in the descriptive representation of young adults in subnational parliaments. This is because major parties that wield the best chances at electoral victory, nominate only few young candidates compared to minor parties that field the highest numbers of young candidates. To buttress the findings from the descriptive evidence, we also presented inferential evidence that confirmed there is an age penalty in legislative elections, with young candidates having lesser chances of electoral victory than their older candidates, not minding whether they contest on the platform of major or minor parties.

While our findings align with earlier studies in several important ways, they vary from other findings in some instances. On the one hand, our findings support the argument of Krook and Nugent (2018) that lower candidacy ages will increase youth candidacy, as young people have now reduced the age at which they first decide to run for election. However, because lower candidacy ages cannot change deeply embedded attitudes of political parties and voter preferences, it did not produce increased representation of young people in parliament. At best, it opened opportunities for young people to stand for office. On the other hand, our findings differ from those of Stockemer et al. (2024) about youth underrepresentation being both a supply- and demand-side problem in the US. Even though other scholars have come to disagree with Stockemer et al. (2024) about the youth underrepresentation in the US being a demand-side problem (Anlar & Rosen, 2024), our study emphatically demonstrate that in Nigeria's subnational parliamentary elections, youth underrepresentation is not a supply-side but a demand-side problem. This is similar to what has been found at the national level (Abati, 2024). Also, we offer added insights that show that the demand-side problem is double-edged, with major parties nominating young candidates sparingly and the possibility that voters prefer older candidates to younger candidates, especially when contesting on the platform of minor parties.

Taken together, the descriptive and inferential results suggest a unique demand-side challenge for young people—a lower chance of winning a seat in legislative elections than older candidates, which potentially points to the voter turnout and age affinity in voting, as found in the case of Finland (Sipinen et al., 2024). Though the preference of voters is beyond the scope of our study, we may infer that voters are not as willing to vote for young candidates when contesting on the platforms of minor parties as when they are contesting on the platform of major parties. For example, over the last 2 election cycles, our sample included 9823 candidates aged

35 or younger in both minor and major parties. Of these numbers, only 27 and 155 candidates, respectively, from both parties won their elections, representing 0.28% and 1.58% chance of winning for either party's candidates. When we compare this likelihood of winning a seat to the likelihood among the older candidates, we see that older candidates in both minor and major parties have a higher chance of winning. To illustrate this, our sample consisted of 14,799 candidates older than 35 years across both categories of parties, with 136 and 1647 getting elected from minor and major parties, respectively. This results in about a 1% chance of winning for those contesting on minor parties while those of major parties have an 11% chance of winning. These figures demonstrate a preference for older candidates by voters.

This preference stems from African gerontocratic traditions that privilege age and deference for the elderly in the social sphere. This mentality also connects to the political realm, as Adebonojo Ademola, aged 30, a HoA aspirant in Accord Party in the 2023 election, remarked, "my age is also a big deal to the political gladiators. Selling myself and my ideas to party leaders and voters is like fetching water into a basket. Many of them are not comfortable relating with a young person" (Olatunji, 2023, para 10). However, it could have been expected that the difficulties with securing the support of 'political gladiators' would have a minimal effect, given that young people recorded impressive voter registration rates before the 2023 election, with individuals between 18 and 34 accounting for 39.7% of registered voters. However, young people/voters are not particularly keen on young candidates.

Thus, while the age reduction reform is a step in the right direction, there is still need for follow-up reforms that would either compel major political parties to nominate a quota of young candidates or review regulations about how much parties are allowed to charge for candidate nominations forms and associated expenses, including pegging the maximum allowable campaign spending. This way, the playing field can be levelled, reducing the dominance of the major parties in electoral politics. Without these follow-up reforms, young candidates would be better off contesting on the platform of major political parties as long as these parties continue to dominate electoral politics even at the subnational level. Furthermore, there is a need for more support for young political office seekers in Nigeria, especially from civil society organisations. While the impact of some, like YIAGA Africa, is noticeable, there needs to be a coordinated approach to support candidates from several players (such as through

transparent funding or logistic assistance) or through wider voters' sensitisation and mobilisation.

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