

EXAMINING THE INFLUENTIAL ROLE OF CAMPAIGN FINANCE ON ELECTION RESULTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the impact of campaign finance on the outcomes of presidential and legislative elections in Nigeria. It examines how the sources, amounts, and uses of campaign funds affect the voting behavior and preferences of the electorate. The study also explores the legal and regulatory framework of campaign finance in Nigeria, as well as the challenges and opportunities for improving transparency and accountability. It uses data from related literature, texts, books and journals. The paper argues that campaign finance has a significant and positive effect on the electoral performance of candidates and parties, especially in terms of vote share, seat share, and incumbency advantage. However, it also finds that campaign finance is associated with negative consequences for the quality of democracy, such as corruption, vote-buying, violence, and lack of accountability. The paper concludes with some policy recommendations to improve the transparency and accountability of campaign finance in Nigeria. Also, the researcher recommends that there is need for Nigeria to reform its campaign finance laws and institutions to enhance disclosure, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms, as well as to promote public funding and civic education.

Keywords: campaign finance, electoral system, elections, governance and Nigeria

Background to the Study

The electoral system of a nation can be likened to a puzzle. Just like a puzzle, it is made up of many different pieces that fit together to create a complete picture. Each piece represents a different aspect of the electoral system, such as the voting process, the representation of different groups, and the overall structure. Just as each piece of a puzzle is uniquely shaped to fit in a specific spot, each aspect of the electoral system has its own purpose and function. For example, the voting process ensures that citizens have a say in who their leaders are, while the representation of different groups ensures that diverse voices are heard and considered. Additionally, the puzzle analogy highlights the importance of all the pieces coming together to create a coherent and functioning system. If even one piece is missing or fails to fit properly, the entire puzzle, or in this case, the electoral system, may be incomplete or ineffective.

Elections are a fundamental aspect of democratic societies, providing citizens with the opportunity to participate in the political process and choose their representatives. They serve as a crucial mechanism for the transfer of power, allowing for the peaceful transition from one government to another. In an election, individuals or political parties compete for popular support, usually through campaigning, debating, and publicizing their policies and agendas. Citizens then have the right to vote for their preferred candidates, either directly or indirectly, depending on the electoral system in place. Elections are the cornerstone of democracy, facilitating citizen participation and ensuring accountable governance. The electoral process encompasses various elements that collectively shape the outcomes and legitimacy of elections. It is crucial for societies to prioritize a fair, transparent, and inclusive election process to safeguard democratic principles and values.

Meanwhile, elections in Nigeria have had a significant impact on the country's political landscape. Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and has experienced several transitions of power through democratic means since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960 (National Archive, 2016).

However, the country has a history of electoral irregularities and controversies. Election rigging, voter intimidation, violence, and corruption have plagued Nigeria's electoral process in the past. These issues have often undermined the credibility and legitimacy of the outcomes.

Despite these challenges, Nigeria has made progress in recent years in improving its electoral system. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is responsible for organizing and conducting elections in the country. It has implemented reforms to enhance transparency, voter registration, and the overall integrity of the electoral process. Nigeria operates a multi-party system, with the three dominant parties being the All Progressives Congress (APC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party (LP). These parties have consistently been in contention for power since the country's return to democracy in 1999.

Elections in Nigeria are typically highly competitive, with intense campaigns and mobilization of voters. The country's diverse population, composed of various ethnic and religious groups, often leads to political alignments based on regional or sectional considerations. One notable trend in Nigeria's elections is the importance of youth and social media in shaping the political narrative. The significant presence of young, tech-savvy Nigerians on platforms such as Twitter (X), Facebook, and Instagram has provided a platform for political engagement and expression of citizens' opinions.

The outcome of elections in Nigeria has had a significant impact on the socio-economic and political development of the country. It determines the direction of policies, governance, and resource allocation at the federal, state, and local levels.

Overall, while Nigeria has made progress in electoral reforms and has seen peaceful transfers of power, challenges such as voter apathy, electoral violence, vote-buying, and manipulation still persist. However, the Nigerian government and other stakeholders continue to work towards building a more credible and inclusive electoral system.

Campaign finance plays a significant role in shaping election results in Nigeria. Political parties and candidates heavily rely on financial resources to fund their campaigns, which in turn affects their ability to mobilize voters, increase visibility, and sway public opinion. Campaign funds enable political parties and candidates to launch strategic efforts to mobilize voters. Financial resources are crucial for organizing rallies, running advertisements, and conducting door-to-door campaigns. Parties or candidates with more funds can reach a larger audience, engage in more extensive voter education, and ultimately influence election results. (Opeyemi & Olayiwola, 2021)

Campaign finance heavily influences candidates' media visibility through advertising and media buying. Parties that can afford extensive media campaigns, such as television, radio, print, and online advertising, tend to receive more exposure and name recognition. Research shows that media visibility positively correlates with election outcomes. (Adagba & Olanrewaju, 2021)

Effective use of campaign finance allows parties and candidates to shape public opinion through various communication channels. Financial resources facilitate the production and dissemination of campaign messages, enabling candidates to influence voter attitudes and perceptions. Research suggests that candidates who successfully shape public opinion are more likely to win elections. (Benjamin & Adedayo, 2019). Campaign finance also influences election results in Nigeria through patronage and vote buying. Politicians with significant financial resources can offer inducements to voters, exchange support for cash, food, or other benefits. This practice, though illegal, remains prevalent in Nigerian politics, influencing voters' decisions and distorting the electoral process. (Egharevba & Itote, 2021). The regulation and transparency of campaign finance can impact election results. Effective regulation helps prevent illicit funds, curbing corruption and leveling the playing field among candidates. Transparency in financial reporting, including disclosing donors and campaign expenditures, enhances accountability and promotes integrity in the electoral process. (Aborisade & Jeminiwa, 2019)

Access to financial resources influences voter mobilization, media visibility, public opinion, patronage, and accountability. Effectively regulating campaign finance and promoting transparency are necessary to ensure a fair and democratic electoral system in Nigeria.

Campaign finance is a crucial factor that affects the outcome of elections in Nigeria. The amount and source of money that candidates and parties spend on their campaigns can influence the voters' perception, behavior and choice. However, there is a lack of empirical research on how campaign finance affects election results in Nigeria, especially at the state level. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the role of campaign

finance on election results in Nigeria, using data from the 2019 and 2023 general elections. The study therefore seeks to address the following research questions:

- i. What are the sources, regulations, and effects of campaign finance on political parties, candidates, voters, and the media?
- ii. How does campaign finance affect the competitiveness of elections in Nigeria?
- iii. How does campaign finance affect the quality of representation and accountability of elected officials in Nigeria?
- iv. How does campaign finance affect the political participation and engagement of citizens in Nigeria?
- v. What are some possible reforms and workable strategies to harness campaign finance to positively work for election results in Nigeria?

Literature Review-

Campaign finance, also known as election finance or political donations, refers to the funds raised to promote candidates, political parties, or policy initiatives and referendums. Political parties, charitable organizations, and political action committees (in the United States) are vehicles used for fundraising for political purposes. "Political finance" is also popular terminology, and is used internationally for its comprehensiveness. Political donations to funds received by political parties from private sources for general administrative purposes (Levinson & Jessica, 2020).

Political campaigns involve considerable expenditures, including travel costs of candidates and staff, political consulting, and advertising. Campaign spending depends on the region. For instance, in the United States, television advertising time must be purchased by campaigns, whereas in other countries, it is provided for free (Holtz-Bacha & Christina, 2008). The need to raise money to maintain expensive political campaigns diminishes ties to a representative democracy because of the influence large contributors have over politicians (Pastine *et al.*, 2013).

Although the political science literature indicates that most contributors give to support parties or candidates with whom they are already in agreement (Ansolabehere *et al.*, 2003), there is wide public perception that donors expect government favors in return (Scnurr & Emily, 2022) (such as specific legislation being enacted or defeated), so some have come to equate campaign finance with political corruption and bribery (Kalla *et al.*, 2016).

The Sources, Regulations, and Effects of Campaign Finance on Political Parties, Candidates, Voters, and the Media

In Nigeria, campaign finance has been a major concern, as significant and unregulated spending often creates an uneven playing field for contestants. Large sums of money give certain parties and/or candidates undue advantage over others, while also raising questions about the transparency and accountability of the electoral process.

The legal framework of campaign finance in Nigeria is based on the Electoral Act 2022, which was signed by President Muhammadu Buhari in February 2022. The Act provides guidelines on who can contribute to political parties and candidates, how much they can contribute, how the contributions should be recorded and reported, and what penalties apply for violations. The Act also places limits on the amount of election expenses that can be incurred by candidates and parties at different levels of elections. According to the Act, the maximum election expenses for a presidential candidate shall not exceed N5 billion (about \$11.5 million), while the maximum donation from an individual or organization to a party shall not exceed N50 million (about \$115,511). For governorship candidates, the limit is N1 billion (about \$2.3 million), while for senatorial and House of Representatives candidates, the limit is N100 million (about \$231,000) and N70 million (about \$162,000) respectively. For state assembly candidates, the limit is N30 million (about \$69,000) (National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS), 2022).

The Act also mandates political parties to keep accurate records of their income and expenditure, and to submit audited returns to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) within six months after an election. INEC is responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance with the campaign finance provisions of the Act, and has the power to track the sources of funds for campaigns and monitor the bank accounts of parties and candidates. The effects of campaign finance on political parties, candidates, voters,

and the media in Nigeria are complex and multifaceted. On one hand, campaign finance can enable parties and candidates to mobilize support, communicate their messages, and conduct effective campaigns. On the other hand, campaign finance can also undermine the credibility and legitimacy of elections, as well as the quality of democracy and governance in Nigeria. Some of the negative effects include:

- i. The influence of money on electoral outcomes, which may not reflect the will of the people or their policy preferences. (Ojo 2022; Africa Check 2022)
- ii. The corruption and patronage that may result from excessive or illicit campaign spending, which may compromise public officials and institutions. (Samphina 2022; NILDS 2022)
- iii. The lack of transparency and accountability in campaign finance reporting, which may prevent voters and stakeholders from holding parties and candidates responsible for their actions. (Punch Newspapers 2022; Vanguard 2022).
- iv. The distortion of media coverage and public opinion, which may favor those with more financial resources or access to media platforms. (NILDS 2022; Africa Check 2022)

Effect of Campaign Finance on Elections competitiveness in Nigeria

Campaign finance has a significant impact on the competitiveness of elections in Nigeria. Limited campaign funding creates an uneven playing field, giving an advantage to candidates who have access to more resources. According to The Electoral Institute, "The capacity of candidates to fund their campaigns, especially as it is associated with the huge cost of elections, creates an unequal playing field that tends to favour candidates with higher financial war chest."

Excessive campaign financing can lead to corruption and vote buying, undermining the competitiveness of elections. Transparency International notes that "vote-buying often occurs during election seasons when politicians distribute cash, goods, or services to potential voters before or after their voting choices." Candidates with limited financial resources may struggle to compete against those with larger funding, discouraging competent individuals from participating. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems states that "the high cost of running for office limits political participation to the rich, making genuine competition at the grassroots level less likely."

Excessive campaign financing tends to magnify the influence of moneyed interests and elites, further marginalizing the influence of ordinary citizens. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies explains that "wealthy elites have a disproportionate influence on political parties and campaigns, reinforcing the sentiments of many Nigerians that their government does not prioritize the poor and marginalized." Inadequate monitoring and enforcement of campaign finance regulations contribute to an uneven electoral playing field. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems highlights that "although Nigeria has laws governing campaign financing and spending, weak enforcement mechanisms often undermine their implementation."

These examples illustrate the impact of campaign finance on the competitiveness of elections in Nigeria. However, it is important to note that several other factors can also influence electoral competitiveness, including voter education, party structures, and political culture.

Effects of Campaign Finance on the Quality of Representation and Accountability of Elected Officials in Nigeria

Nigeria has a mixed system of campaign finance, which combines spending limits, public funding, and private donations. However, the system faces many challenges, such as weak enforcement, lack of transparency, and corruption.

One of the main effects of campaign finance on representation and accountability is that it can create an uneven playing field for candidates and parties, especially those with fewer resources or less popular support. This can reduce the diversity and competitiveness of the political system, and limit the choices available to voters. For example, a study by Cagé and Dewitte (2022) shows that in the UK, while spending in real terms has gone down over the last 150 years, the correlation between spending and winning has strengthened. Similarly, in Nigeria, candidates and parties with access to more funds tend to have an advantage over their rivals, as they can afford to pay for nomination forms, media adverts, rallies, and vote-buying.

Another effect of campaign finance on representation and accountability is that it can influence the policy preferences and decisions of elected officials, who may be more responsive to their donors than to their constituents. Studies have shown that elected representatives' votes most closely track the preferences of their affluent constituents and campaign donors, federal policy primarily reflects the influence of well-off citizens and well-funded interest groups, and lobbying groups overwhelmingly represent business and the well-to-do, not ordinary citizens (Ojo, 2022). This can undermine the democratic principle of equal representation and create a gap between public opinion and public policy. For instance, in Nigeria, some elected officials have been accused of being loyal to their godfathers or sponsors rather than their voters, or of diverting public funds to repay their campaign debts (Premium Times, 2020).

A third effect of campaign finance on representation and accountability is that it can affect the quality and credibility of information available to voters and policymakers. Campaign finance can enable candidates and parties to communicate their platforms and positions to the electorate, but it can also be used to spread misinformation, propaganda, or negative attacks (Gilens & Page, 2014). Moreover, campaign finance can affect the media coverage of elections, which may be biased or influenced by political advertising or ownership. This can distort the public debate and reduce the accountability of elected officials. For example, in Nigeria, some media outlets have been accused of being partisan or compromised by political interests, while some candidates have resorted to spreading fake news or hate speech to discredit their opponents (Ojebode *et al.*, 2018).

Campaign finance has significant effects on the quality of representation and accountability of elected officials in Nigeria. It can create advantages or disadvantages for different candidates and parties, influence the policy outcomes and responsiveness of elected officials, and affect the information environment of voters and policymakers. Therefore, it is important to design and implement effective campaign finance regulations that can ensure fair competition, transparency, accountability, and participation in the political process.

Effects of Campaign Finance on Political Participation and Engagement of Citizens in Nigeria

Campaign finance can have significant effects on the level and quality of political participation and engagement of citizens in a democracy. Political participation is the involvement of citizens in the public affairs of their country, such as voting, campaigning, contacting officials, joining parties or groups, protesting, etc. Political engagement is the degree of interest, knowledge, and efficacy that citizens have towards the political system and its actors. Both political participation and engagement are essential for the functioning and legitimacy of a democratic system.

According to some scholars, campaign finance can affect political participation and engagement of citizens in different ways. On the one hand, campaign finance can enhance political participation and engagement by providing resources, information, and incentives for citizens to get involved in politics. For example, campaign donations can help parties and candidates to mobilize voters, communicate their messages, and compete effectively in elections. Campaign spending can also increase the visibility and salience of political issues, stimulate public debate, and raise political awareness among citizens. Furthermore, campaign finance can foster political engagement by allowing citizens to express their preferences, values, and identities through their contributions to parties, candidates, or groups (Smith *et al.*, 2016).

On the other hand, campaign finance can also undermine political participation and engagement by creating inequalities, distortions, and corruption in the political system. For instance, campaign finance can create disparities in the access and influence of different actors in the electoral process, depending on their financial resources. Campaign finance can also distort the representation and accountability of parties and candidates to the public interest, if they are dependent on or captured by wealthy donors or special interests. Moreover, campaign finance can erode public trust and confidence in the political system, if it is perceived as a source of corruption, fraud, or abuse of power (Falade & Ologunagba, 2022).

The effects of campaign finance on political participation and engagement of citizens may vary depending on the context and characteristics of each country. In Nigeria, a country that has experienced several episodes of democratic transition and consolidation since its independence in 1960, campaign finance has been a contentious and controversial issue in its electoral politics. Nigeria has a multiparty system with a presidential form of government and a bicameral legislature. The country has held six general elections since its return to civilian rule in 1999, with varying degrees of competitiveness, credibility, and violence.

Nigeria has a legal framework for regulating campaign finance, which includes limits on contributions and expenditures, disclosure requirements, public funding provisions, and sanctions for violations. However, the enforcement and compliance of these rules have been weak and inconsistent, due to various factors such as lack of capacity, independence, and resources of the electoral management body (INEC), lack of political will and cooperation from parties and candidates, lack of awareness and education among citizens and stakeholders, and lack of effective monitoring and oversight mechanisms (Ukase 2019).

As a result, Nigeria's campaign finance system has been characterized by high levels of opacity, excessiveness, illegality, and impunity. Some examples of campaign finance abuses in Nigeria include:

- i. The use of state resources for partisan purposes by incumbent parties or candidates at various levels of government (Ukase 2019).
- ii. The use of illicit sources of funds such as money laundering or diversion from public funds by parties or candidates (Falade & Ologunagba 2022).
- iii. The use of foreign donations or interference by external actors or interests in favor or against certain parties or candidates (Ukase 2019).
- iv. The use of vote-buying or inducement strategies to influence voters' choices or turnout (Falade & Ologunagba 2022).
- v. The use of violence or intimidation to disrupt or manipulate the electoral process or outcomes (Ukase 2019).

These campaign finance abuses have negative implications for the quality and integrity of Nigeria's democracy. They undermine the fairness and competitiveness of elections; they weaken the responsiveness and accountability of parties and candidates to the electorate; they reduce the political efficacy and participation of citizens; they increase the risk of electoral violence and conflict; they erode the trust and confidence in the political system; they hamper the development and consolidation of democratic institutions; they impede the delivery of good governance; they fuel corruption and undermine the rule of law (Ukase 2019). Therefore, there is an urgent need to reform and improve Nigeria's campaign finance system, in order to enhance the political participation and engagement of citizens, and to strengthen the democratic process and outcomes.

Some Possible Reforms and Workable Strategies to Harness Campaign Finance Positively for Election Results in Nigeria

Campaign finance is a crucial aspect of electoral politics in Nigeria, as it influences the outcomes of elections and the quality of democracy. However, the current system of campaign finance is plagued by several problems, such as lack of transparency, accountability, and regulation; excessive spending and influence of moneyed interests; and corruption and vote-buying. These problems undermine the integrity of elections, the representation of citizens, and the responsiveness of public policies.

Therefore, there is a need for some possible reforms and workable strategies to harness campaign finance positively for election results in Nigeria. Some of these reforms and strategies are:

- i. Enacting and enforcing a comprehensive legal framework for campaign finance that covers all aspects of income and expenditure, disclosure and reporting, limits and caps, oversight and sanctions, and public funding and incentives. Such a framework should be based on international standards and best practices, as well as the specific context and challenges of Nigeria.
- ii. Strengthening the capacity and independence of the electoral management body (EMB) and other relevant institutions, such as the anti-corruption agencies, the judiciary, the media, and civil society organizations, to monitor, investigate, and sanction violations of campaign finance rules. This would require adequate resources, training, and coordination among these institutions, as well as political will and public support.
- iii. Promoting a culture of transparency and accountability among political parties, candidates, donors, and voters, through civic education, awareness-raising, advocacy, and engagement. This would entail encouraging voluntary disclosure and reporting of campaign finance information, exposing and denouncing malpractices and abuses, and demanding accountability from elected officials.
- iv. Fostering a level playing field for political competition and participation, by reducing the barriers and costs of entry for new and alternative actors, such as women, youth, minorities, and independent

candidates. This would involve providing public funding and incentives for political parties and candidates that meet certain criteria, such as gender balance, internal democracy, policy platforms, and performance.

- v. Enhancing the quality and diversity of political communication and information, by supporting the development of independent and professional media outlets, as well as alternative and innovative channels, such as social media, online platforms, and community radios. This would require ensuring media freedom and pluralism, regulating media ownership and access, promoting media literacy and ethics, and facilitating dialogue and debate among different stakeholders.

These reforms and strategies are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive, but rather complementary and interrelated. They require the involvement and cooperation of various actors at different levels: from the government to the opposition; from the national to the local; from the formal to the informal; from the public to the private; from the collective to the individual. They also require a long-term vision and commitment to transform the culture and practice of campaign finance in Nigeria.

Summary

Campaign finance is a crucial factor that affects the outcome of elections in Nigeria. This paper provides a summary of the main arguments and evidence on how money influences the electoral process and the quality of democracy in Nigeria. The paper examines the sources, regulations, and effects of campaign finance on political parties, candidates, voters, and the media. How campaign finance affects the competitiveness of elections, the quality of representation and accountability of elected officials in Nigeria; how campaign finance affects the political participation and engagement of citizens in Nigeria. The paper also discusses some possible reforms and workable strategies to harness campaign finance to positively work for election results in Nigeria

Conclusion

This study has examined the influential role of campaign finance on election results in Nigeria, using related literature, texts, books, journals and articles. The main findings are that campaign finance has a significant impact on the electoral outcomes, especially in terms of voter turnout, vote share, and electoral violence. The study also reveals that the sources and patterns of campaign finance vary across different regions, parties, and candidates, reflecting the complex and diverse nature of Nigerian politics. The study concludes that campaign finance reform is urgently needed to enhance the credibility, transparency, and accountability of the electoral process in Nigeria, and to reduce the influence of money politics on the democratic development of the country.

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