

## Political Finance and Party Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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### Abstract

The paper investigated political financing in Nigeria and its impact on the country's democratic process. The study considered issues involved in political financing such as the regulation and monitoring of the flow of finance within the electoral space in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on political parties' finance. The study also interrogated the extent to which effective financial regulation of the electoral system in a society such as Nigeria is feasible, taking into consideration the high incidence of financial malfeasance in the country. The study is a documentary research and data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive method. Utilizing the hydraulic theory of political finance, the paper established that state institutions in Nigeria lack both the capacity to adequately monitor the flow of finance in the country's political system and to sanction offenders of the relevant electoral statutes. Thus, voter education and monitoring of the electoral process by religious organisations, civil society, the mass media and social medial personalities is recommended in order to ensure transparency within the electoral system in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Political Financing, Democratic Process, Elections, Electoral System

### Introduction

Nigeria's electoral history can be summed up in one word – turbulence. Indeed, Larry Diamond's magisterial study of the First Republic detailed how the political elite's persistent disregard of the rules of the game destroyed that republic. However, even in the contemporary period it is still widely appreciated that, 'our political elites are responsible for the country's electoral integrity deficiency' (Guardian, editorial Sept. 18 2022). The elite contempt for law is at the very foundation of Nigeria's electoral crisis. Consequently, electoral reforms after electoral reforms have proved largely unavailing in dealing with the pathogenic elements within the electoral system (Adejumobi 2000).

A critical factor which is at the foundation of the successful capture of the electoral system by the elite is the possession of humongous resources. The vast resources at the disposal of these elites have significantly undermined democratic structures and principles especially within political parties. For example, the recent general election (in

2023) was characterised by overt, brazen and superfluous utilisation of money, including foreign currencies, in the electoral process. To be sure, the impact of political finance on the stability of the political system in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. Consequently, issues surrounding political finance and other subsidiary issues have inspired an unending slew of literature (Omotola 2008; Onu & Momoh, 2005; Anifowose & Babawale, 2003; International Crisis Group, 2007).

This study is an addition to this timeless search for stability in Nigeria's electoral system and will, in this regard, consider issues involved in political financing such as the regulation and monitoring of the flow of finance within the electoral space. The study will also interrogate political finance regulation and monitoring within the electoral space in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study will examine the extent to which an effective financial regulation of the electoral system in a society such as Nigeria is possible at all, taking into consideration the high incidence of financial malfeasance in the country, the extent to which law can be effectively utilized as an instrumentality of social change within a newly democratizing state and the ability of state institutions to act as effective base stations for concretizing and transmitting that change.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the qualitative approach as its research design. Thus data for the study were sourced through secondary materials such as journals, books, online newspapers and websites. The mass of data generated were analyzed using the qualitative descriptive method of data analysis. This method moves farther into the domain of interpretation because effort is made to understand not only the manifest but also the latent content of data with a view to discovering patterns or regularities in them. Furthermore, in Nigeria activities associated with political finance, such as fund mobilization, vote buying, inducement of party delegates etc., are often carried out egregiously in the public domain and so therefore have been adequately and accurately documented in several credible materials.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Hydraulic theory**

The hydraulic theory is a paradigm used mainly to understudy political finance in American politics. The hydraulic theory was selected as the theoretical framework for this study because Nigeria is not only a federation like the USA, but also operates the presidential system of government like the US. To be sure, the presidential system is noted for its high cost of maintenance unlike the parliamentary system which Nigeria operated in the first republic (1960 – 1966). The almost unquenchable thirst for money

needed to run for elective offices in a presidential system invariably gives rise to various financial shenanigans within the presidentialist electoral system.

In sum, the hydraulic theory avers that, irrespective of regulation, money like water, will inevitably continue to seep into the political system. In the short term, reforms can change the direction that the money takes, but money will eventually seep back into the system as political actors identify and exploit loopholes in the law (Boatright, 2011, p, 178). Thus, observers like US politician John McCain have argued that electoral reforms must be carried out periodically, perhaps every decade or two, in order to circumvent the antics of political actors. On the other hand, some scholars such as Bradley Smith (2001, 220-25) have noted that the best means of addressing money in politics is to provide clear channels for it to take, and then to try to maximize transparency and provide voters with the tools to accurately observe the flow of money into the system.

### **Operationalization of the hydraulic theory into Nigerian electoral system**

As noted earlier, the enormous resources required to effectively participate in the presidential system of government necessarily compels political actors to engage in (un)wholesome acts to mobilise campaign funds. In Nigeria same is true. The Nigerian government has adopted the first perspective on the hydraulic theory which suggests that periodic electoral reforms can undercut the antics of political actors. Thus, since the inception of the Fourth Republic the state has regularly reviewed its electoral laws with a view to stymie the influence of money in the electoral process. However, all efforts by the government, through electoral reforms, to control the seepage of finance into the electoral process has ended in abysmal failure.

The second perspective on the hydraulic theory which advocates adherence to transparency and voter vigilance in order to ensure compliance has largely been neglected by the state. It is this theme that this study pursues as a probable solution to undercutting the finance centred crisis in the electoral process in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Party Politics**

For Onilusi (2000, p. 175) party politics constitute the formal structure, institutions or organisations which compete through elections to allocate resources. He argues that ‘the primary objective of party politics is directed towards a single goal of wrestling for governmental or political power’ (ibid 15). Party politics in simple terms can be seen as a ‘housekeeping’ exercise by the political party before it enters the wider realm of the political system to compete against other political parties within that system. This is the main difference between party politics and inter-party politics. In this paper therefore

party politics is conceptualised as the internal arrangements within the political party to prepare itself for electoral competition or contest.

### **Political Financing: a discourse**

Finance it has been argued, sustains a competitive democratic environment (Pottie, 2003, p.8, Frimpong, 2019, p.1; Muñoz, n.d, p.475). In recent years the relevance of finance in a democratic system has burgeoned quite dramatically especially with the inevitable bureaucratisation of political parties (Muñoz, n.d, p.475). The expansion in the logistical scope and structural framework of the political party has consequently driven up party expenses everywhere. Therefore, in order to compensate for the inevitable differences in the ability to mobilise finance among political parties there has been an equally global effort to level the floor and lower the ceiling (Pottie, 2003, p.5). Though this effort has no doubt come with its own challenges, countries have nonetheless persisted in the search for an effective formula upon which the flow of liquidity within the political system can be effectively gauged. For obvious reasons the need to monitor political finance is urgent for countries recently unshackled from the chains of political repression (Pottie, 2003, p.10).

According to Edmund Terrence Gomez (2012, p.137) political financing refers primarily to the funding of parties and electoral campaigns. For him this definition covers many issues not explicitly captured such as ‘the cost of maintaining permanent offices, carry out policy research, conducting polls and political education, mounting public campaigns and mobilizing voters’. The concept of political financing runs the gamut of financial flow within the electoral process particularly with respect to the political parties. It must be noted that political finance is quite distinct from campaign finance because while political finance refers to an on-going and complex relationship between political parties and the state campaign finance is finance centred mainly on campaign expenditure (Muñoz, n.d, p.447).

In Africa, three phases of political finance have been isolated; early post-war nationalist period mass-based political parties were funded by party memberships and external agencies or governments interested in influencing the outcome of decolonisation’. Second, the one-party state ‘enabled parties to use state resources’. Finally, the conflation of party and state resources persisted despite the democratic wave era even as the opposition parties relied on ‘grassroots financing, local NGO support and international donors’ (Pottie, 2003, p.12). However, in recent times the economic evisceration of citizens in Africa has incapacitated the political parties’ ability to extract tangible resources from local supporters (Pottie, 2003, p.12).

Subsequently, the harsh economic climate has precipitated a realignment of social values in African society. In sum, this realignment of values which has been adequately

explained by the value change theory (see Ronald Inglehart, 1995), has led to the preponderance of materialist impulses in Africa. In an empirical study on police recruitment in Nigeria, Olly Owen (2013, p. 161) has argued that, ‘hereditary occupational policing’ in the sense that children follow their parents into the police occupation, while a normal phenomenon in the West, ‘acquires a different slant in a situation of scarcity and radical insecurity and against the context of the ever-present dangers of relegation to the permanently insecure masses’. Thus, it was based upon the dominant materialist impulses prevalent in the African landscape that Frimpong (2019, p.6) postulated a typology of political finance which captures these nuances. For him the sources of political finance in Africa are encapsulated in these arenas: grassroots funding, state funding, plutocratic funding, foreign funding and illegitimate funding. In particular, illegitimate funding comprising abuse of state resources and financial kickbacks are very common means of extracting resources for partisan use in Africa (Frimpong, 2019, p.11). For example, Goodluck Jonathan, a former Nigerian president, was accused of using state funds to pursue his ultimately unsuccessful re-election bid in 2015 (Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2016, p. 621). Generally, in Africa state funds are presumptuously regarded as legitimate sources of political party finance. Based on this notion, Frimpong (2019, p.12) avers those alternations of power is a desirable outcome in Ghana so that all the parties could have equal access to adequate ‘Illegitimate funding’ (i.e., specifically abuse of state resources and financial kickbacks). In Nigeria, in addition to illegitimate funding, plutocratic funding is another major source of finance for political parties. It must be noted however, that there are myriad undocumented streams of political finance in the country. Thus, Nwangwu and Ononogbu (2015, p.628) were right when they described the source of political finance in Nigeria as ‘ad infinitum’. To be sure, the lay of the electoral landscape in Nigeria has long been apparent to policymakers. Consequently, in order to defend the structural integrity of the electoral process, a variety of political finance regulations mainly aped from western countries (Pottie, 2003, p.12), have been instituted since 1999. Mention must now be made of the existing political finance regulatory frameworks.

Broadly there are two dominant models of political finance regulation; the libertarian model (USA) and the egalitarian model (Europe). The European idea of the equalisation of the political process was mainly founded on the idea of state funding of political parties. The public funding policy is accompanied by other restrictions such as limits on expenditures, regulation of private contributions, public accountability in party financing etc. Furthermore, the regulation of political finance is continent wide in Europe. The need for political finance regulation in Europe arose from incessant corruption in party politics and the demands for equality of the political space in order to protect the popular will (Muñoz, n.d, p.448).

Similarly, for Wiltse et al (2019) financial regulatory laws may be exercised in either one of two broad ways; direct state intervention in party financing and laws that require transparency of party finances. The one refers to the attempt by states to ‘level the playing field’ for all participants by ensuring that the political system is not unduly monopolised by an oligarchy. There are different ways of achieving this purpose; provision of subsidies to the political parties, or the limitation of the ability of political parties to spend funds. This approach to political finance regulation has its advantages. As pointed out the impetus behind state funding is to level the political field and also protect the popular will. Thus, political finance regulation, it has been argued aids political pluralism and proper functioning of democratic institutions (Muñoz, nd, p.463). However, under the proportional system, public funding of political parties as practiced in Europe ‘tends to favour incumbent parties at the expense of opposition parties’ (Sarakinsky, 2007, p.112). Furthermore, state funding may cause parties to lose touch with the electorate or their constituents because of low dependence on grassroots funding (Frimpong, 2019, p.9, Muñoz, n.d, p.478). It could also lead to the growth of cartel parties which exploit state funds to ensure their survival (Muñoz, nd, p.478). This was the major reason behind the abrogation of state funding of political parties in Nigeria (Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2016, p.627). For example, in terms of corruption and repression, Russia and Italy are culpable of utilising state funding of political parties to give undue advantages to the ruling party in the one while in the other it has facilitated the growth and development of corruption (Muñoz, nd, pp.477,481).

The other approach to political finance regulation refers to the attempt to maintain some semblance of transparency within the party system by mandating public disclosure of political party finance. There are three reasons for fund disclosure; private funding leads to the corruption of political parties, corrodes democratic accountability and also corrodes and negates representativeness of public institutions (Sarakinsky, 2007, p.113). However, according to Sarakinsky, empirical evidence suggests that lack of political finance disclosure does not necessarily connote corruption. Furthermore, full disclosure often forces donors, anxious for government contracts, to concentrate their donations on electorally viable parties to the detriment of smaller and fringe parties (Sarakinsky, 2007, p.116, 120).

In Africa comprehensive political finance disclosure laws are confronted by the complete absence of implementation (Frimpong, 2019, p.2). In Ghana for example no political party ‘has filed an up-to-date annual audited statements of accounts with the electoral commission as stipulated by law’ in ten years (Frimpong, 2019, p.7). Same applies to Nigeria, where a frustrated independent investigator lamented that all his efforts to cite any audit report of INEC on ‘the political parties proved abortive’ and thus concluded despairingly that there was probably none (Shehu, 2023, p.74). Due to high



levels of corruption in Nigeria and crass elite contempt for law, it is certainly reasonable to assume that disregard for political finance rules by the political elite is even more blatant. For example, Nwangwu and Ononogbu (2016, p.616) observes that the average politician in Nigeria is perpetually in search of novel methods of evading political finance regulations. In the main, however, the prevalence of factors such as rentier politics, electoral machines, and political entrepreneurs obviates the benefits or advantages of any fund disclosure law (Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2016, p.619). Consequently, some of the most egregious infringement of the political finance regulation is carried out in the full glare of the Nigerian EMB. This 'enforcement gap' and the 'scant regard for legal restraints on finance' have been attributed to the 'low level autonomy of the Nigerian state' (Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2016, p.619). However, regulatory agencies do not face a less herculean task in the consolidated democracies. In Europe the challenge of regulation is equally confronted by the dearth of resources and political interference in enforcement bodies (Muñoz, nd, pp.473-74). Italian political parties, as a poignant case in point, are notorious for violating political finance regulations (Muñoz, nd, p.481) while in America it has been shown that 'no obstacle set up for control purposes will stop trickles from flowing and siphons from being applied' (Sarakinsky, 2007, p.119).

The enormous logistical and moral requirement for effective political finance monitoring and regulation has led to varied suggestions of alternative procedures for curbing financial malfeasance in the electoral process. Sarakinsky (2007, p.125) has postulated internal party reforms, fair access to public media and peer review of finances by parties. Muñoz on his part notes that reforms do not often deliver what they promise and may end up being 'counter-productive'. For him official oversight, in and of itself, can never be enough to dissuade corruption thus it needs to be 'combined with oversight by the media and civil society' (nd, pp.474-75). In South Africa, it was also shown that investigative journalism and civil society were efficient tools of exposing corruption (Sarakinsky, 2007, p.118).

### **Political Finance in Nigeria's First Republic (1960 – 1966)**

In Africa, especially in the immediate post-colonial period, the profusion of the one-party state enabled the conflation of party and the state. The outcome of the state/party conflation was the 'abuse of state resources and financial kickbacks on government contracts' (Frimpong, 2019, p.7). The kickback syndrome was also an integral aspect of political party finance under Convention Peoples Party rule in Ghana (Frimpong, 2019, p.7). In Nigeria all the major political parties in the first Republic engaged to a lesser or greater degree in the manipulation of the financial system for the direct benefit of the party. However, the internecine conflict which engulfed the western region in 1962 enabled the Action Group's political rivals at the centre to declare a state of emergency, shove the AG aside (which was the then dominant party in the western region), take over

the affairs of the region and institute an enquiry (the Coker Commission) to examine the financial affairs of that party. Unsurprisingly, the outcome from the Coker Commission into the dealings of the AG revealed the extent to which ‘vast sums of public money were diverted for its (AG) use’ (Macintosh 1966, p.453). Thus, the outcome from the extensive finance of the AG in the western region confirms one of the worst fears of the advocates of party finance regulation i.e. the ability of the one party with access to unlimited public funds to easily dominate the political system in its entirety (Pottie, 2003, p.16) while simultaneously emasculating the opposition parties in the process (Frimpong, 2019, p.4).

### **Political Finance in Nigeria's aborted Second Republic (1979 – 1983)**

In the aftermath of the internecine civil war (1967-1970) the official reaction against ‘ethnic parties’ (to the neglect of all else) became a fetish with the military. In fact, the military became obsessed with the idea of extirpating ethnicity in the body politic through its asphyxiation in the political parties, its primary host. This reaction led *inter alia* to the strict guidelines set out for party registration in the period leading up to the Second Republic (Oyovbaire, 1983, p.22; 1987, p.6; Ojo, 1987, p.165; Ujo, 2000, p.46). In 1977, for example, the avowed intention of the military to control the political process in Nigeria was made realisable through Decree No. 73 which gave the then electoral agency, FEDECO; power to register political parties; determine eligibility of candidates and audit party accounts (Ujo, 2000, p.46; Philips, 1980, p.13; Yahaya, 1979, p.272). While these regulations in the main, dealt with the ethnic ingredient in the political parties, ‘the Second Republic marked a high point for prebendal politics in the country’ (Suberu, 2013, p. 87; see also Richard Joseph, 1987) as issues of financial regulation within the political parties were largely ignored. Indeed, the fact that financial considerations played a key role in the Second Republic can be attested from Umaro Dikko’s sharp retort to the late businessman, Moshood Abiola that the presidential ticket of the National party of Nigeria (NPN) was not for sale (Siollun, 2013, p.16). Even so,

there was so much display of affluence by the wealthy contractors and the mercantile class that those who emerged victorious in the conventions and the primaries of some of the political parties ... belonged to the business-managerial group (Nwangwu and Ononogbu, 2016, p.621).

### **Political Finance in Nigeria's aborted Third Republic (1986 – 1993)**

In the aftermath of the failure of the second republic, the obsession of the military with political party regimentation practically went into overdrive. In this regard, the Babangida regimes’ principal tool for political system reform – the political Bureau – suggested a two-party system which should be deliberately created under an atmosphere of ‘some degree of regimentation’ (Oyediran & Agbaje, 1991, p.221). For the Political



Bureau the two-party system was a convenient vehicle for launching an frontal attack on the twin evils of ethnicity and financial malfeasance which was believed to be embedded within the structure of Nigerian political parties. The main tasks that the Babangida regime set for itself in its fevered search for a 'stable democratic' political system involved *inter alia* the following:

enactment of laws to preclude 'bad' Nigerians from hijacking the politics of the Third Republic; state funding of political parties and of electioneering campaigns so as to de-emphasize the role of private money in politics; establishment of state agencies such as the Centre for Democratic Studies and Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) to teach, inculcate and induce democratic behaviour; direct supervision of elections and other aspects of the transition program by the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC); the establishment of two "grassroots" political parties to permit mass participation in politics (Agbese, 1990, p.32).

Consequently, in its zeal to eradicate underhand dealings and enthrone the so-called 'new breed politician' with lofty values and principles in the government sanctioned parties, the Babangida regime proceeded to institute a severe brand of state co-opted management style of the party system, for which he has since been accused of 'repressive violence' (Salami, 1994, pp.21-24).

However, in the final analysis, despite this severe regimentation the germ of financial malfeasance was not even seriously challenged talk less extirpated. Ultimately, Babangida had observed, as one of his reasons for annulling the 1993 elections, that the party conventions of the government sanctioned parties which had produced the two presidential contenders had been heavily monetized and that the delegates had been wantonly induced financially (Obadare, 1999, p.210).

### **Party Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: godfatherism, political finance and Nigeria's leadership crisis**

Since that ignoble annulment in 1993, the extent of the monetisation of Nigeria's electoral process especially within the ambience of party politics has escalated. Presently, political positions appear to be accessible only to the highest bidder. The humongous amount of money involved in party politics equally means that only those with equally humongous wealth are realistically able to respond to the bidding process, thus enter Nigeria's retinue of godfathers or political entrepreneurs or political fixers. This group of individuals have become a serious bane of party politics in the Fourth Republic and the inability of the parties to evolve and institutionalize internal party democracy.

Thus Basdau (2003, p.106) is right when he suggests that the persistent ability of what he terms ‘dominating Big Men’ militates against the institutionalisation of norms in party politics in Africa. Similarly, Jibrin Ibrahim noted that some of the activities of ‘dominating big men’ in Nigeria are anti-democratic because they seek the imposition of candidates after ‘manoeuvres and compromises’ which inevitably leads to the weakening of the ‘organizational structure of political parties in the long term’. Consequently, Ibrahim attributes the problem of lack internal democracy within the party framework in Nigeria to mainly clientelist politics which is an ‘entrenched culture in all the political parties in Nigeria and indeed much of Africa’ (Ibrahim, 2014, p.196; Randall, 2007, p.86).

To be sure, both the colonial and the post-colonial state in Nigeria have had to contend with the germ of political godfatherism. In Southern Nigeria, the growth of the godfather phenomenon began in the First and Second Republics with individuals such as Busari Adelakun and Adelabu Adegoke in Ibadan respectively (Hodgkin, 1961, p.91, Aderonke & Awosike, 2013, p.199).

While the early godfathers were organisational geniuses and magnets for political mobilisation at the grassroots level the current godfather class almost nearly lacks any form of social distinction i.e. erudition, intellectualism, ideology etc. except their wealth. They are driven by no higher purpose like the reformative aristocracies of England. Their only visible goal is to control the apparatus of power in order to effectively extract state resources. Consequently, the godfather class in Nigeria is a veritable smorgasbord of individuals ranging from the barely literate to former political thugs to retired military officers. To be sure, the retired military officers have been the most pernicious and their activities within the political realm are well documented (Toyo, 1998, p.9; Obi, 2011, p.90, p.376; Ukiwo, 2003, p.133; Mustapha, 1999, p.38). During the late nineties and well into the twenty-first century, these retired army officers dominated party primaries through their humongous wealth ‘which they doled out in large measure’ (Toyo, 1998, p.9).

Even up to the present period the currency of monetary resources is still very evident in Nigeria’s electoral process. Thus, even before the 2023 general elections had taken place an avid observer of Nigerian politics had prophesied that the elections would ‘be won by the highest bidder’ (Shehu, 2023, p.143). In the event, the description of the winner by the Times of London and the Financial Times in the aftermath of the polls is indicative of the sordid financial colouration of that election; the one described the winner of the presidential election as a ‘wealthy kleptocratic godfather of politics’ while the other described him as a ‘wealthy political fixer’ (Shehu, 2023, p.206). Bola Tinubu had won the election despite all attempts by his political enemies to undermine his presidential ambitions. One of such schemes was the sudden redesign of the national

currency which led to widespread cash shortages in the economy. The major aim of the scheme was to torpedo his well known predilection over the years for co-opting his opponents through financial inducements. Indeed, the role of Bola Ahmed Tinubu as a principal godfather in the Fourth Republic is well documented (Ibrahim, 2016, p.207; Mudashiru, 2015, p.17). His victory in the elections which appeared to be a tacit nod in the direction of political godfatherism in Nigerian politics has prompted strident demands for further electoral reforms on the legally permissible range of finance in Nigerian elections.

However, it should be borne in mind that ‘reforms do not always deliver what they promise and sometimes they are even counterproductive’ (Muñoz, nd, p.474). For Suberu (2013, p. 98),

reform measures have failed to resolve the most intractable institutional feature of neo-patrimonial rule in Nigeria, namely the absence or fragility of ‘agencies of restraint’ that are truly independent in their direction, staffing, functioning and funding from the political class they are designed to constrain.

Thus, extant laws on regulating political party finance are regularly flagrantly and brazenly breached in the full glare of the public – and the electoral body INEC itself (Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2016, p.624). However, it is also important to point out that no matter the magnitude of reforms, there maybe local or cultural conditions which make transplanted institutions difficult to germinate in their adopted territories. ‘Even when such institutions are adopted, there is usually no concerted effort to operate those institutions’ correctly (Aiyede, 2013, p. 108), thus enabling their hijack by dark subterranean political forces. Indeed in the developing world, it is not entirely atypical for ‘formal institutions to ‘be a mask for those who wield power behind the scenes’ (Levan, 2015, p.33); it is in fact archetypal (Levan, 2015, p.35; Macintosh 1966, p.614; Macintosh 1966, p.617).

Similarly, the emasculation of state institutions in Africa nay Nigeria is further enhanced by the nature of the society which shapes the politics characteristic of such polities (Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2016, p.619). As the foremost Nigerian political scientist, Claude Ake (in Joseph, 1999, p.177), observed, politics is an ‘all consuming business’ in Nigeria because it is a sure path to instant wealth. For Ake the obsession with politics leads to the ‘nonautonomousness’ of ‘the state and the huge difficulty it has operating in relative autonomy’ (Amuwo, 2013, p. 133). Thus institutions such as the judiciary, the electoral body and the security agencies come ‘under considerable pressure to relinquish its independent stance and adopt a partisan one’. To be sure, in the period leading to the ill-fated 1983 elections, specifically between July and September 1983,

public institutions and political parties were practically indistinguishable from each other (Joseph, 1999, p.181). In noting the corrosive impact of these openly partisan leaning of the electoral body on Nigeria's future political development, Joseph prophetically concluded that:

Until Nigerians find a way to create institutions which like the electoral bureaucracy of India and other multi-cultural, multi-party democracies, can remain part of the state or polity itself and not become instruments susceptible to being captured by factions of civil society which win (temporary) control of the state, any hope for a constitutional democracy is certain to be regularly frustrated (Joseph, 1999, p.169)

Consequently, institutional dysfunctionality leads to 'a gulf between stated rules and principles and actual practice' (Macintosh 1966, p.370). Thus Nassmacher was right when he argued that, 'rule-making covering the role of money in politics needs to be a multifaceted search for the optimum, not the transfer of a perfect set of rules already applied elsewhere' (Sarakinsky, 2007, p.124).

Although Nigeria's current democratic experiment has spanned slightly more than two decades, state institutions including the electoral body INEC, persist in their partisanship (Suberu 2007). To be sure, during the public hearings of the Electoral Reforms Committee in 2008 it was revealed that a substantial number of petitioners questioned the impartiality of INEC and other institutions concerned with electoral matters in Nigeria. In the period leading up to the 2023 general elections, an editorial by the Nigerian Guardian newspaper lamented the 'nation's weak institutional system' (The electoral offences commission debate, Thursday. September 8, 2022). Similarly, it has been noted that, 'weak punitive sanctions against perpetrators of vote-trading ... have been responsible for frustrations to the fight against vote-buying and selling in Nigeria' (Olorok, 2022). It was also noted in the same report on the need for effective electoral sanctions as the 'existing channel' i.e. INEC 'has so far proved ineffective'. Thus, it can be seen quite clearly why there are no attempts by the electoral body to enforce laws for which it lacks the will and why there are equally no attempts by the political parties to obey laws unenforceable by an agency whose 'real power' might very well lie within the political parties themselves. The crowning argument is that it does not appear feasible that a renowned political godfather, now the current president, will perform political hara-kiri by instituting a reformist agenda that will liquidate his major arsenal of controlling the political space.

Two facts are apparent from the foregoing. One, the political parties in Nigeria cannot heal itself of pathogenic practices and two the regulation of political finance in Nigerian party politics has completely failed and so therefore the continued presence of such laws makes a mockery of the country's penal system. Consequently, it would be more

appropriate if all laws regulating political finance in Nigeria are expunged forthwith from the statute books. While these laws were meant to prevent corruption in the electoral process in the first instance, it can be argued that in actuality their presence has fuelled corruption as officers charged with its enforcement would no doubt be periodically induced by the enormous funds accessible to the parties through illegitimate and plutocratic funding. The point has already been made that in and of itself 'political finance regulations alone are not sufficient' thus necessitating the need for 'broader measures' (Muñoz, nd, p.482). Sarakinsky (2007, p.118) has opined that in South Africa, which does not regulate the private funding of political parties, 'investigative journalism and civil society were efficient tools of exposing corruption'.

The glaring failure of Nigerian political parties, the political elite and the EMB to reform from within ultimately suggests that reform should proceed from without. Consequent upon this, voter education, religious organisations, civil society, the mass media and social medial personalities could serve as veritable lynchpins of social mobilisation against the pernicious effects of finance on democratic consolidation. Latterly, even Nigeria's electoral body had recognised the importance of the involvement of the ordinary people in the recalibration of the country's electoral process:

We are going to intensify voter education and sensitise the people more ... People have also talked about poverty. Yes, we all know its poverty. But I think also that as soon as people begin to have faith in the electoral process, they will begin to see the power that they have over the people who are running for offices. And I believe that very soon, the story will change and the power will return to the people (The chairman of INEC, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, Guardian, Editorial Sept. 18 2022).

The religious institution, due to its extensive linkages with the population, possesses the capacity of enlightening the citizens on their role in the political process. To be sure the religious institution, churches in particular, have been at the vanguard of similar social reforms globally. For instance, the 'Liberation Theology' ideology which originated 'as a movement within the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America is now a worldwide movement found within most Christian denominations'. Essentially the 'Liberation Theology is based on the message that Jesus was and is a liberator, thus Liberation Theology speaks about bringing the good news of liberation' from unjust social structures (Sargent, 2009, p.261). In Latin America, the intervention from the church was very critical in rescuing the people from their oppressive social circumstances. However, a critical aspect of liberation theology is the idea of 'action of people to transform their own lives'. Thus, the liberation ideology pays heavy emphasis on 'consciousness-raising' among the people who are often completely oblivious or impervious to the dangers of the 'unjust social structures' in which they live.

Consequently, the churches in Nigeria could serve as a veritable springboard through which the plutocratic stranglehold on party structures can be challenged.

The mass-media offers another platform through which issues of irregular utilisation of finance or abuse of internal party procedures may be broached and discussed. A sterling example could be the Brekete Family programme a reality radio and television talk show on Human Rights FM radio in Abuja. The program which has a vast listenership base in Nigeria is concerned mainly with ‘mediation, justice seeking and dispute resolution’ initiatives. According to a beneficiary, “ordinary Ahmad Isah has built Brekete to become the greatest platform of our time for people to fight for their rights and obtain justice where the traditional institutions have failed in their duties to the citizens’ (Daily Trust, 2018). Brekete Family and other similar platforms could be utilized by INEC, NGOs and other stakeholders to campaign against and expose the evils associated with political finance, godfather syndrome and other associated pathogens within Nigerian political parties.

Similarly, the social media space has lately become a very powerful tool for engendering social transformation across the world witness for example the Arab Spring uprisings. This change has been brought about largely because the social media has replaced the tavern as the centre of political discourse. Thus, social media influencers and personalities, some of which command millions of followers, can play a key role in the ‘pacification’ of Nigeria’s electoral process by unearthing and publicising unethical financial practices.

## Conclusion

In this brief study we have examined the concept of political financing and its variants viz. market-based, public utility, state co-opted and the unregulated regime. The study noted that of the four, the unregulated variant is more appropriate for Nigeria due to severe institutional lapses. This pervasive institutional failure has thus far made it almost impossible to monitor the financial flows occurring within the political systems thus occasioning the abuses perpetuated by political entrepreneurs popularly known as godfathers. The study in the light of these challenges suggested that the mass enlightenment of the masses and adroit monitoring of the electoral process by churches and civil society organisations could prove a portent panacea to financial abuses within the electoral system.

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