

Campaign Finance, Party System and Women Representation in Leadership in Nigeria Political System



Onuoha Anthony Uchenna^o
&
Njoku Ignatius Achilike, PhD*

Abstract

This study examines the impact of campaign financing on women's political representation in Nigeria. It identifies the persistent underrepresentation of women in politics despite their right to vote and stand for elections for over sixty years. The research highlights the complex relationship between campaign financing and women's participation, revealing that financial, cultural, and political barriers significantly hinder gender equality in political representation. The study finds that the influence of money in Nigerian politics, including vote buying and the domination of wealthy individuals and elite interests, creates an uneven playing field. This situation is exacerbated by weak enforcement mechanisms and a lack of transparency in campaign financing. The research also notes that cultural norms and patriarchal structures historically marginalize women, limiting their political engagement. To address these challenges, the study suggests a comprehensive approach involving legislative reforms, political party restructuring, civil society advocacy, and capacity building, aimed at creating a more equitable and representative political landscape in Nigeria.

Keywords: Campaign finance, Leadership, Political party, Representation, Women

Introduction

Democratic values, such as inclusion, participation, equality, equity, civil liberty, and respect for human rights, define democracy globally. This system promotes fair political representation by opposing gender segregation and enhancing socioeconomic and political development through gender inclusivity. However, the misuse of money in politics, leading to vote trading, hampers gender inclusivity and acts as a means of political discrimination.

The commodification of votes in Nigerian elections, especially post-independence, is a long-standing issue. Money politics, as emphasized by Apkotor (2015), is not unique to Nigeria; politics globally requires significant funding. The increasing frequency of elections worldwide necessitates more campaign financing, highlighting the prominent role of money in politics. Eme and Okeke (2011) note that money's availability crucially

^o Onuoha Anthony Uchenna, Department of Political Science. University of Benin. Benin City. 08063306355

* Njoku Ignatius Achilike PhD, Department of Mass Communication. Benson Idahosa University, Benin City

influences the conduct of elections in all democracies, whether established or emerging. In the modern era of globalization and capitalism, money and politics are inextricably linked. Money is essential not just for transitioning to democracy but also for ensuring fair competition within existing democratic systems, as indicated by Transparency International (2004). Political finance is a key component of democracy and nation-building. The concern arises, according to Ologbenla and Adisa (2012), when money is used illegally or improperly to sway political outcomes and policies, marking an unethical intersection of money and politics.

Globally, women often face discrimination and underrepresentation in politics, particularly in less developed countries. Nigeria, like many others, struggles with gender inequality in its political representation. A key factor in this disparity is the influence of money in political campaigns, reflecting complex cultural, economic, and political dynamics. Aligning women's aspirations with national objectives is crucial for sound economics and governance. Historically, women in Nigeria faced marginalization in a patriarchal political system; they didn't even have voting rights in Northern Nigeria until 1976 (Ake, Rasak, Olowojolu, Oye & Ake, 2019). The Fourth Republic continues to see such marginalization, evident in women's minimal roles as elected officials, party leaders, and political appointees, underscoring their limited participation in the country's political arena (Olugbemi, 2004).

In Nigeria, efforts towards gender equality have been made, but women continue to be underrepresented in political leadership, largely due to historical patriarchy and traditional norms. The National Gender Policy and its Implementation Plan aim to improve women's inclusion, yet campaign financing emerges as a major barrier. The escalating costs of political campaigns present a significant hurdle. With the need for substantial funds for advertising, travel, rallies, and other promotional activities, the financial demands can be prohibitive, especially for women candidates. Traditional funding structures, often dominated by men, further put women at a disadvantage. Additionally, the Nigerian political scene is characterized by a culture of godfatherism. Aspiring politicians, including women, frequently seek the backing of influential party figures or financial patrons. This often creates a dependency that compromises the autonomy of candidates and perpetuates existing power imbalances, making it even more challenging for women to secure leadership roles in politics.

Problem statement

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, faces significant challenges in its political system, notably in the realms of campaign finance and the underrepresentation of women in political leadership. These issues create a political landscape marked by financial opacity, gender disparities, and barriers to equitable political participation and representation. The influence of money in elections and the electioneering process in Nigeria poses substantial challenges, undermining the integrity of both the party system and the electoral process.

While the specifics of state subventions to political parties in Nigeria are unclear, it is widely understood that they are funded to an extent by taxpayers. This lack of transparency underlines the importance of accountability in party financing. No precise records exist of the amounts spent by candidates and political parties in elections, including the last five general elections, but there's a significant reliance on private funding. This reliance stems from the parties' inability to generate income legitimately,

and as former President Olusegun Obasanjo indicated, election spending can be exorbitant. Consequently, only the wealthy or those with affluent backers can feasibly run for office, further complicating the quest for a representative political system.

Money politics, a critical factor influencing participation in electoral politics as highlighted by Ogbette, Idam, Kareem and Eke (2019), is significantly reshaping Nigeria's political landscape. The lack of transparency in the country's campaign finance system, with parties and candidates often not revealing their funding sources and amounts, creates a fertile ground for corruption. This situation undermines the public's trust in the democratic process. The heavy influence of money in politics deepens socio-economic divides, favoring candidates with substantial financial support and creating a competitive edge. Such reliance on wealthy backers perpetuates a scenario where political power is concentrated among the economic elite, limiting opportunities for less financially endowed candidates.

Compounding these challenges are ingrained cultural and social norms that hinder women's active participation in politics. Discriminatory practices, including the relegation of women to domestic roles, restrict their access to vital resources, support networks, and political engagement opportunities. Consequently, women in Nigeria face significant underrepresentation in leadership roles, ranging from local councils to the national assembly. This gender disparity is a manifestation of broader societal issues, where traditional gender roles and stereotypes impede women's access to opportunities and roles in decision-making processes. This study delves into the complex dynamics of campaign finance and women's underrepresentation in political leadership, exploring the effects and challenges associated with party campaign financing on women representation in Nigeria's political system.

Objectives of the study

- To examine the nature and character of campaign financing in the Nigeria's political party system
- To examine the effects of campaign financing on women's representation in Nigeria's political system
- To identify the challenges associated with party campaign financing on women's representation in Nigeria's political system

The concept of campaign finance

Campaign finance, central to democratic processes, entails the financial backing necessary for political campaigns, significantly shaping the electoral landscape. It affects candidates' abilities to communicate their messages, engage with voters, and remain competitive. Extending beyond mere campaign and party funding, it also includes financial contributions from a variety of non-party actors aiming to influence public policy, legislation, or electoral outcomes, as described by Walecki (2008). Acknowledged by scholars like Ujo (2000), Walecki (2008), Ilo (2004), and others, Campaign finance encompasses the sourcing and utilization of funds for political activities, crucial for advertising, event organizing, staff salaries, and more. This concept also covers the fundraising efforts of candidates and parties, which can include events, online campaigns, and other strategies to garner financial support. INEC (2015) defines it as the collection and expenditure of funds concerning election campaigns, emphasizing its broad impact on various aspects of political processes.

The dynamics of campaign finance significantly influence the fairness and transparency of elections, bringing with them challenges such as the risk of corruption and the sway of wealthy individuals or special interest groups. The difficulty lies in balancing the necessity for candidates to effectively communicate with the electorate against the risk of excessive influence or unfair advantages. Effective enforcement of regulations and maintaining a level playing field for all participants are persistent concerns in managing campaign finance, as outlined by Eme and Okeke (2011) and Pinto-Duschinsky (2004). These aspects underscore the complex interplay between finance, politics, and democratic integrity.

The nature of political parties and party system in Nigeria

In modern representative democracies, political parties are crucial for facilitating citizen participation and representation in public policy decision-making, serving as a foundation for sharing democratic values (Agbaje, 2005). Animashaun (2010) emphasizes their central role in electoral systems, acting as conduits for political recruitment and the articulation of interests. In systems like Nigeria's, where legal provisions mandate that only political parties can canvass votes, they become essential for conveying voter preferences in governance. Nnoli (2003) points out that political parties and party systems are often tools for ruling classes to consolidate and extend their power, with their structures and functions reflecting the character of the ruling class and its domination system.

Democracies inherently possess mechanisms for peacefully resolving societal schisms, averting violent crises, and establishing governments that reflect the popular will. Political parties are instrumental in this process, serving as platforms for reconciling differences and conflicts. Eme and Anyadike (2011) define a political party as a group united by a common understanding of state power organization and utilization. Olarinmoye (2008) describes them as relatively permanent institutions in democracies, aggregating interests, fielding election candidates, controlling governments, and representing interests in governance. Therefore, a political party is essentially an organized group with similar political beliefs, goals, and interests, aiming to gain and exercise political power through government formation.

In Nigeria, contemporary political parties are often regarded as the weakest link in achieving sustainable developmental democracy. Momoh (2010) highlights a key issue with these parties: the prevalence of "candidate-members," individuals who join parties solely to contest elections, driven by opportunism and exaggerated ambition. This has led to what Joseph (1987) describes as prebendal politics, where financially capable but ideologically weak candidates gain control of party decision-making processes. The central role of political parties in Nigeria's electoral system, as vehicles for political recruitment and articulation of interests, is thus compromised. Mair, Muller, and Plasser (2004) suggest that political parties aim for 'survival and success,' but many Nigerian parties struggle even for survival, let alone success in elections. This situation is exacerbated by internal crises and a lack of commitment to ideological principles.

The debate on the most suitable party system for Nigeria remains unresolved. While a one-party system is broadly deemed unsuitable, there's contention over the number of parties that should be allowed in the electoral arena. This debate involves considering the pluralistic nature of Nigerian society and the ideological commitments of political associations. Animashaun (2010) notes that the parties of the fourth republic are

ideologically weaker compared to their predecessors and lack deep cultural roots or effective connections with the people they claim to represent. This ideological void is apparent in their inability to address national challenges effectively. Additionally, the genuine membership base of these parties is limited, consisting mainly of the founders and funders who support them for potential rewards, rather than a broad base of committed members.

Women and leadership in the pre-colonial Nigerian nation-states

In Nigeria, deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and values significantly hinder women's participation in public life, with African traditions often prescribing disempowering roles for females in contrast to the empowering roles of males (Adatuu, 2017). Despite this, Nigerian women historically played crucial roles in the socio-political landscape during the pre-colonial era. For example, in Bornu and Zaria, women were integral to state administration, with notable figures like Queen Bakwa Turuku, who founded Zaria, and her daughter, the warrior Queen Amina, who expanded and fortified the city. Similarly, in the Yoruba system, female traditional chiefs assisted the Oba, while women like Moremi of Ife, Emotan and Idia of Benin Kingdom, and Omu Okwei of Ossomari significantly influenced politics and commerce (Oloyede, 2016; Kolawale, Adeigbe, Adebayo & Abubakar, 2013). This historical context underscores the contrast between the past active involvement of women in leadership and their current underrepresentation due to prevailing gender norms.

Women and the colonial experience in political leadership

During the colonial era, women in Nigeria and much of Africa were markedly marginalized in political leadership, facing discrimination in both participating in elections and attaining political positions. No women held political office at this time, reflecting a period of significant gender inequality. Key constitutional developments, such as the Clifford Constitution of 1922 and the Richard Constitution of 1946, restricted voting to adult males with certain income levels or property qualifications. It wasn't until 1979, 57 years after men began voting, that Nigerian women were granted the right to vote, as indicated by Rasak and Garuba (2017). This era laid the groundwork for persistent gender inequalities post-Nigeria's 1960 independence. Nevertheless, some women, including Margaret Ekpo, participants in the 1929 Aba Women's Riots, Madam Tinubu of Lagos, Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Abeokuta, and Hajia Swaba Gambo of NEPU, made significant socio-political impacts during this period (Erunke, 2009).

Women political representation: Post-colonial experience

The advent of political independence in 1960 in Nigeria brought about only a slight increase in women's involvement in politics and governance compared to the colonial era. During the First Republic (1960-1966), female representation was minimal, with only four female legislators: Mrs. Wuraola Esan and Mrs. Bernice Kerry in the Federal Parliament, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Janet Muokelu in the Eastern House of Assembly. Notably, there were no women in ministerial positions at this time, as noted by Omotola (2007). In Northern Nigeria, women, including prominent politicians like Hajia Gambo Sawaba, were denied the vote until 1979, following the reinstatement of civilian rule (Oloyede, 2016). The end of colonialism, which was male-dominated, did not

substantially alter the status of women; it was more of a change in leadership than a transformation in governance dynamics.

The Second Republic (1979-1983) saw a marginal increase in women's political participation. A few women, such as Mrs. Justina Eze (NPP, Anambra), Mrs. Veronica Nnaji (NPP, Imo), and Mrs. Abiola Babatope (UPN, Lagos), were elected to the House of Representatives, and a small number won seats in State Houses of Assembly (Olugbemi, 2004). Two women were appointed as Federal Ministers: Mrs. Adenike Egun Oyagbola; Chief (Mrs) Janet Akinrinade, and Mrs. Yetunde Emmanuel became the only female Permanent Secretary at the time. In 1983, Ms. Franca Afegbua made history as the only woman elected to the Senate during this period, with few women winning local council elections. Despite this progress, the gender disparity remained significant: in the Second Republic, there was just one female senator out of 571 and 11 female members of the House of Representatives out of 445 (Agina-Ude, 2003). This illustrates the continuing large gap between men and women in Nigeria's political landscape. During General Babangida's Third Republic (1985-1993), one of Nigeria's longest and most expensive transitions, women were significantly underrepresented in that political era. The 1990 local government elections saw a mere 0.5% female representation, with no women legislators in 14 states. In the House of Representatives and Senate, women constituted only 2.4% and 1.1%, respectively. Political parties mirrored this trend, with men dominating executive positions in both the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republic Convention (NRC). Under General Sani Abacha, the representation remained low in legislative bodies. This scarcity of women in governance roles is attributed to the socio-political culture of the society. The shift to democratic governance in 1999 brought some improvement in gender politicization, yet significant barriers for women persisted. Despite an increase in women's participation in elective and appointive positions, their representation in the Fourth Republic's democratic space remained notably low, underscoring a deep-rooted issue of gender imbalance in Nigerian politics (Ake, Rasak, Olowojolu, Oye & Ake, 2019). Despite efforts by civil society organizations and some political party initiatives, such as waivers for women's nomination fees, women's political participation in Nigeria remains disappointingly low in the Fourth Republic. In the Senate, from 1999 to 2019, women's representation fluctuated from 2.8% to 7.3%, never surpassing 7.3%, and culminating in only 35 female senators against 619 males over two decades, with no female Senate president. This scenario aligns with observations by former Senator Grace Folashade Bent and Ayeni and Ajibogun (2013), highlighting the stark underrepresentation of women in active politics and decision-making roles. This gender gap is seen as detrimental to the consolidation of democracy and national strength, with a belief that increased female leadership could significantly mitigate societal issues like gangsterism and terrorism. The political process itself is described as inherently masculine and biased against women, impacting Nigeria's developmental progress.

In the Nigerian House of Representatives from 1999 to 2019, female representation was significantly low, fluctuating from 3.3% to 7.2% but never exceeding 26 out of 360 members. The percentage of women dropped from 5.8% in 2003 to 3.3% in 2019, totaling 113 female representatives over 20 years, a mere 5.2% of all members. In the same period, only one of the eight speakers was a woman. This stark gender disparity, highlighted by Eniola (2018), underscores the challenges women face in influencing legislative processes, particularly in advocating for rights-protection measures.

From 1999 to 2019 in Nigeria, female representation in elective and appointive positions showed fluctuating but overall low trends. In 1999, only 30 women (1.9%) held positions out of 1588, which increased to 73 (4.6%) in 2003. By 2007, this number rose to 99 (6.3%), despite women comprising about 11% of all candidates in that year's elections, with their representation varying across different positions: 0% for presidency and governorship, around 7% in the Senate and House of Assembly, 16.6% for deputy governorship, and 5.45% for State Houses of Assembly. Ultimately, women occupied just 6.13% of key elected leadership roles. Despite the Yar'Adua/Jonathan administration's promise of 30% political appointments for women, actual appointments were only around 11%, far below the 35% target in the national gender policy. By 2011, female representation increased to 109 (6.9%), marking the peak period for women in Nigerian politics. However, there was a decline to 54 women (3.4%) in 2015 and a slight increase to 65 (4.2%) in 2019, out of a total of 1534 positions. This period, spanning two decades reflects the ongoing challenges and slow progress in achieving gender parity in Nigeria's political landscape.

Finally, Nigeria has a population of over 200 million people (Worldometer, 2024) with approximately 51 percent males and 49 percent females. Yet, since 1999 when Nigeria transitioned from military rule to democratic governance up till now, women have never occupied up to 15 percent of elective positions in a country where the voting population of both men and women are almost equal. More worrying is the fact that a woman has never been elected president, vice president, governor nor elected senate president in Nigeria's two decades of democracy.

Challenges in campaign financing on women's representation in Nigeria

- a. **Opacity and lack of transparency:** One of the foremost challenges in Nigeria's campaign financing is the lack of transparency. Political parties and candidates often operate in an environment where the sources and amounts of campaign funds remain undisclosed. This opacity undermines the democratic process by fostering an environment conducive to corruption and undue influence. Nigeria grapples with a pervasive opacity and lack of transparency in campaign financing, posing a severe threat to the democratic process (The Agora Policy Report, 2023). The intricate web of financial transactions often occurs in the shadows, shielded from public scrutiny. Political actors exploit this opacity to maneuver undisclosed funds, creating an environment conducive to corruption and skewed power dynamics. The absence of stringent regulatory frameworks further exacerbates the problem, hindering efforts to trace the origins and purposes of campaign funds. This opacity not only compromises the integrity of elections but also undermines public trust in the democratic system, hindering the pursuit of a truly representative government.
- b. **Influence of wealthy individuals and elite interests:** In Nigeria, the influence of wealthy individuals and elite interests permeates the political landscape, wielding significant impact on governance and policy decisions. Wealthy individuals often finance political campaigns and parties, creating a system where financial power translates into political influence (Momoh, 2010). This dynamic results in policies that often prioritize elite interests over the broader welfare of the populace. The nexus between wealth and political power perpetuates a cycle of inequality, hindering equitable development and exacerbating social disparities. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive reforms to campaign financing, increased

transparency, and measures to ensure that political decisions reflect the diverse needs of the entire population. The dominance of money in Nigerian politics has led to the significant influence of wealthy individuals and elite interests. Candidates with substantial financial backing often enjoy a competitive advantage, sidelining those without access to such resources. This dynamic reinforces existing power structures and may compromise the representation of diverse voices in the political arena.

- c. **Weak enforcement mechanisms:** The weak enforcement mechanisms of campaign finance in Nigeria undermine the integrity of political processes. Despite existing regulations, lax enforcement allows candidates and parties to flout rules, leading to opacity and corruption. Limited oversight contributes to the unchecked flow of undisclosed funds, reinforcing a system where financial improprieties go unpunished (Sule & Tal, 2018). This weak enforcement fosters an environment where the interests of powerful individuals and corporations often supersede the principles of fair and transparent electoral financing. Despite existing regulations, enforcement mechanisms related to campaign financing are often weak. Violations of finance laws frequently go unpunished, creating a culture of non-compliance and eroding the efficacy of the regulatory framework.
- d. **Vote buying and monetization of politics:** Nigeria grapples with the rampant issues of vote buying and the monetization of politics, particularly evident in campaign financing. Political campaigns often devolve into a transactional process where candidates and parties seek electoral support through financial inducements (Adetula, 2008). This practice undermines the democratic principles of free and fair elections, distorting the integrity of the electoral process. The monetization of politics exacerbates corruption, erodes public trust, and sidelines substantive policy discussions. Addressing these challenges necessitates comprehensive reforms in campaign financing, stringent enforcement of electoral laws, and public awareness initiatives to foster a political culture based on merit and genuine representation rather than financial incentives. Nigeria has witnessed instances of vote buying, where monetary inducements are used to influence voters. This practice not only compromises the free and fair nature of elections but also perpetuates a system where the electoral outcome is influenced by financial incentives rather than the merits of candidates and their policies.

Conclusion and recommendations

The dynamic nature and character of campaign financing in Nigeria's political system concerning women's representation is skewed against women. Thus, the study concluded that the role of money is pervasive and endemic in Nigeria's political party leadership and governance which breeds nepotism and favoritism during the electioneering process. Sule and Tal (2018) assert that money has been publicly utilised by politicians to win elections in developing democracies like Nigeria. The issue is that money politics, or the overuse of money in elections, breeds self-centered leaders who utilise the wealth of office to further their own interests and alter public property. In Nigeria's elections, the politics of money dictates who wins political office and who has access to power. Anointed candidates known as godsons were funded by a group of sponsors known as godfathers in an attempt to gain indirect access to the halls of power and influence the government through enticing appointments, kickbacks, lucrative

contracts, and nepotism. Money's influence on Nigerian politics is so great that it completely undermines the political process, tipping the scales in favour of the highest bidder. Indeed, one cannot run for any elected office unless they are sufficiently affluent or have the financial support of powerful wealthy godfathers who will fund their campaign and political activities. The situation according to Adetula (2008) has reduced Nigerian politics and democracy to a faltering system driven and shaped by money. The effect of the deployment of money during the electioneering process to determine electoral outcome has deterred women political desires in and women representation in Nigeria's political system. Ballington (2003) posited that money is the most difficulty women face in primary elections and in receiving party nomination. Money is crucial because it enables the candidate to establish name recognition, gain exposure, and organize a campaign team—hire staff, arrange for headquarters, and set up a telephone service, among other things.

Again, the sources of political parties and candidates' finances during electioneering in Nigeria have been inundated with illegal sources. According to Adeyi (2008), money politics is evident in Nigeria today through vote buying as godfatherism is applied regularly to portray the dubious electoral behaviour of politicians, political parties, voters, and electoral officials. Money politics has been identified as preserving power for certain classes of politicians through electoral corruption, political patronage, and judicial corruption (Yagboyaju, 2011)

Conclusively, in Nigeria, the challenge of gender equality, particularly in political representation, is impeded by factors like campaign financing, cultural biases, and economic barriers. Despite women's suffrage for over sixty years, their underrepresentation in politics is significant. The intricate relationship between campaign financing and women's participation involves not only economic hurdles but also cultural and political constraints. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach including legislative reforms, political party restructuring, civil society advocacy, and capacity building. The undue influence of money in politics, often leading to legislative favoritism, elective office purchases, and public disengagement, further undermines democratic principles of representation and participation. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms is vital to ensure fairness, accountability, and equal opportunity in Nigeria's political system, aiming for a more equitable and representative democracy.

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