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To cite this article: Agaptus Nwozor, Segun Oshewolo, Solomon I. Ifejika, John Shola Olanrewaju & Modupe Ake | (2021) Has anything changed with illegitimate electoral financing and political power contestation in Nigeria?, Cogent Social Sciences, 7:1, 1961396, DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2021.1961396

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2021.1961396>



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Published online: 29 Aug 2021.



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Received: 14 August 2020
Accepted: 25 July 2021

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Reviewing editor:
John Kwame Boateng, University of Ghana, Accra, UNITED STATES

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POLITICS & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Has anything changed with illegitimate electoral financing and political power contestation in Nigeria?

Agaptus Nwozor^{1,2*}, Segun Oshewolo^{1,2}, Solomon I. Ifejika^{1,2}, John Shola Olanrewaju^{1,2} and Modupe Ake^{1,2}

Abstract: This paper examines the monetization of politics through the manipulation of the loopholes in the electoral funding architecture of Nigeria. It evaluates whether the ceiling placed on individual and group donations to candidates and political parties by Nigeria's Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) was adhered to in mobilizing election funds in recent presidential elections. In other words, this paper investigates whether election funding in Nigeria's recent elections followed the prescribed protocols as indicated in the Electoral Act and the extent to which adherence or otherwise contributed to the monetization of the electoral contests and its implication for electoral integrity. Using data generated from key informant interviews and qualitatively analyzed in the tradition of logical inductive method,

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The issue of money in politics has been a consistent problem since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic governance. The Nigerian political system had always been flooded with money in each election cycle since 1999. The pervading influence of money has tended to create two scenarios namely, robbing the electorate the moral rectitude to make the right political choices because of being compromised, and distorting the political playing ground by making it impossible for candidates and parties without enormous resources to compete in elections. Since 2002, adjunct laws in the form of Electoral Acts have been made to correct various anomalies, especially political financing. The question is whether anything has changed with Nigeria's political financing despite the Electoral Acts. The major finding of this paper is that little has changed, and this is linked to lack of political will on the part of relevant governmental institutions to drive it.

the paper finds a contravention of the legal provisions for electoral funding. The various political parties leveraged their political structures to raise funds without due recourse to the prescriptions of the Electoral Act, thus compromising the level-playing ground necessary for electoral integrity. The paper contends that the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria must entail the plugging of the capillaries and streams of illegitimate electoral funding and the establishment of critical institutional framework that would drive adherence to constitutionally prescribed provisions on electoral funding.

Subjects: Democracy; Elections; Political Parties

Keywords: Electoral Act; illegitimate electoral funding; monetization of politics; electoral funding; political financing; Nigeria

1. Introduction

The fifth and sixth quadrennial general elections in Nigeria since 1999, namely the 2015 and 2019 general elections had certain characteristics that stood them out from other elections so far conducted in the country. Starting from the 2015 general elections, the electoral contests were evenly matched, with no discernible winner before the polls. This political scenario was made possible by the successful merger of disparate opposition political parties to form a mega party, the All Progressive Congress (APC) in 2013. Prior to the 2015 general elections, opposition politics was practically weak in Nigeria (Nwozor & Oshewolo, 2017). However, the merger of several fringe opposition parties to form the APC represented a watershed that ushered in a new era of opposition politics and offered a credible alternative to the electorates (Nwozor et al., 2019).

The consolidation of the APC as a result of the defection of many prominent stalwarts of the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), especially moneybags with wide economic latitude, expanded the horizon for money politics. The major political parties, that is, the APC and PDP, deployed diverse strategies to mobilize money for their politicking and elections. The checklist of strategies deployed by political parties as captured from our key informants, anecdotal evidence and political analysts, which underpinned the monetization of the electoral processes, is quite wide-ranging. These included the mobilization of pseudo-political groups, and the creation of massive war chests with accompanying national spread in their spending patterns. Other strategies were the erection of complex networks of third-party donors; intimidation of voters, disruption of the process of collating election results using law enforcement agents, and the inundation of the polity with money through vote-buying (Ayeni, 2019; Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2016; Nwozor et al., 2019; Nwozor & Oshewolo, 2017; Okeke & Nwali, 2020).

Both the PDP and APC maximally deployed their power of incumbency at various points in time, which facilitated the raising of funds from diverse quarters at the state and federal levels. The key informants contended that the prevalence of money politics was sustained by the major political parties through the exploitation of the governmental levels they commanded. In other words, the dominant parties used their power of incumbency to mobilize election funds. According to the responses from our key informants, anecdotal evidence and reports from election observers, the magnitude of funds deployed by the dominant political parties in the 2015 and 2019 general elections for various purposes ranging from political campaigns to the inducement of voters and law enforcement agents was enormous.

The issue of political financing is a major source of concern in both well-established democracies of the West and less well-established democracies of transition economies and most of the third world countries. Igwe (2002, p. 110) has averred that although democracy constitutes one of the finest examples of a working framework to promote human life and society, its greatest threat in

the 21st century “remains its universal monopolization by moneyed men” and women and the resultant alienation of the masses from its processes. However, a point to note is that political financing is important in democracies as the various political activities that need to be carried out, including the dissemination of the manifestoes and programs of the parties, campaigning in elections and winning elections, require enormous funding to accomplish. The problem of political financing in democracies is essentially connected to its abuse leading to political corruption (Amundsen, 2006, 2019; Walecki, 2003a). In most cases, the link between political financing and corruption is the manner in which political funds are mobilized.

Generally, states have enacted electoral laws stipulating the various means, considered legal, through which political entities especially political parties are to mobilize their funds. The deviation from these laid-down procedures and sources is what constitutes political corruption. Although the concept of political corruption is too wide as scholars have stretched it to incorporate all forms of corruption in the political realm, including administrative or bureaucratic corruption (Amundsen, 2019; Igiebor, 2019), it is distinct from other forms of corruption. Political corruption takes place in the political sphere of governance and in the course of exercising public authority. It involves the abuse of entrusted power by political leaders and elected officials through engaging in corrupt practices for private gain (Igiebor, 2019). Amundsen (2019) has made a distinction of political corruption into “extractive” and “power-preserving” corruption. Amundsen (2019) denotes extractive political corruption as encompassing corrupt enrichment by political leaders to satisfy personal and group interests and power-preserving political corruption as referring to corrupt enrichment for the purpose of maintaining or strengthening hold on power through diverse means.

The monetization of politics, bordering on corruption is not peculiar to Nigeria. Both well-established and less well-established democratic states are afflicted with this political malaise in varying degrees. In most of the well-established democracies, there have been major scandals associated with campaign or party financing (Heywood, 1997; Pinto-Duschinsky, 2002). However, there appears to be a prevalence of election-related frauds and impunity of politicians and members of the government due to incumbency factor in less well-established democratic states across Africa, Latin America, East Europe and Central Asia (TI (Transparency International), 2014; Canare et al., 2018; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2020; Jensen & Justesen, 2014; Kramon, 2018; Vicente, 2014; Vicente & Wantchekon, 2009).

This paper evaluates the architecture of electoral funding in Nigeria’s 2015 and 2019 general elections against the backdrop of the ceilings prescribed by the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) for individual and group donations to candidates and their political parties. The major question, which constitutes the fulcrum for the paper is whether the ceilings placed on individual and group donations by Nigeria’s Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) were adhered to in mobilizing funds for the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Adjunct to the foregoing focus of this paper is the consideration of the extent to which deviation or otherwise from the prescribed donation ceilings fuelled the monetization of the polity, influenced the electoral processes and impacted electoral integrity.

The paper finds brazen non-adherence to the prescriptions of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) as the APC and PDP, being the dominant political parties, competed in monetizing the polity. The paper also finds that the monetization of the polity had negative implication on electoral integrity as it distorted the political playing ground and disadvantaged small and fringe political parties. The paper contends that the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) requires further amendment to plug the loopholes being exploited by political parties to monetize the electoral processes. Additionally, the current lacunae in the implementation framework of the various aspects of the Electoral Act need to be addressed in order to eliminate the noncommittal aloofness of governmental institutions, especially the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) and other anticorruption agencies, in prosecuting its contravention.

2. Brief literature review

Nigeria is the most populous black country, with an estimated population size of 208.28 million (Nwozor, Olanrewaju, Ake et al., 2020). Nigeria's major economic mainstay is crude oil. Nigeria is a major player in the global oil economy as its hydrocarbon endowments place it among the top ten countries with proven crude oil and natural gas reserves (Nwozor, Olanrewaju, Ake et al., 2020). It is estimated that the total financial accruals to Nigeria from its oil and gas sector between 1999 and 2016 totaled over US\$614.61 billion (NEITI (Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative), 2020). Yet despite these enormous financial inflows, majority of Nigerians are entrapped in poverty. Recent estimates put the number of Nigerians living below the country's poverty line of N137,430 (US\$381.75 at N360/US\$1) a year at 82.9 million or 40.09 percent (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Nigeria gained political independence in 1960 after over a century of formal British occupation and colonial rule. Between 1960 and 1999, Nigeria's political system was unstable, with governmental power alternating between democratically elected governments and military authoritarian regimes. However, since 1999, Nigeria's political system has been stable, with six quadrennial elections held in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. The unaccountable nature of military regimes enthroned several destabilizing features that transited into democratic governance with negative consequences on the quality of democracy in the country. Some of such negative authoritarian carryovers include utter disregard of the rule of law, poor management of public trust, abuse of state power, corruption, and desperation to win elections by all means (Ejimabo, 2013; Nwozor et al., 2019).

As a result of Nigeria's checkered political history, it is in its fourth republic. The term "republic" is used to designate the various eras of democratic governance since 1960. Thus, the first three republics were 1960–1966, 1979–1983 and 1991–1993. Interestingly, the third republic never produced an elected president because the military regime of Ibrahim Babangida annulled the presidential election before the results were fully announced (Jega, 2019; Nwozor, 2014). Nigeria's current political dispensation, referred to as the fourth republic, started in 1999. Nigeria's fourth republic has recorded certain landmarks in comparison to the previous republics. It is the longest republic yet, having recorded 21 years of unbroken democratic governance. In the course of these 21 years, the country has also recorded administration-to-administration and party-to-party power transitions as well as power rotation from the Southern to Northern Nigeria (Jega, 2019; Nwozor, 2014; Nwozor et al., 2019). Although other republics witnessed money politics in varying dimensions, there is an increased prevalence of money politics and monetization of political activities in the present fourth republic (Ayeni, 2019; Sakariyau et al., 2015).

Money plays an important role in the various processes that characterize the struggle for power in both democratic and non-democratic settings. The money required by political parties for electoral activities is not the problem but where it comes from and its compliance with extant laws. For instance, the total spending projected for the US federal elections by November 2020 was US\$11 billion (Briffault, 2020). This was a huge financial outlay. Undoubtedly, access to funding plays a huge role in determining the extent to which political parties can disseminate their manifestoes or sell their candidates and political parties to the electorates (Bryan & Baer, 2005; Terracino & Hamada, 2014). This enables the electorate to make informed decisions, which invariably impacts electoral outcomes positively. Thus, the possible electoral advantages which the possession or access to unrestricted finances could confer on political actors underpin the imposition of ceilings on donations and expenses by various democratic states (Walecki, 2009).

Despite the disputations among scholars about the distortionary effects of electoral financing on electoral outcomes in democratic systems (Guardado & Wantchekon, 2017; Smith, 1995; Walecki, 2003b), there is an evolving global commitment to regulate political financing with the major aim being to achieve greater transparency and disclosure in political processes. The global predisposition to, and emphasis on the regulation of political financing is due to the undue influence of

money in the electoral processes, which borders on corruption. Political financing per se does not connote corruption but the circumvention of laid down rules about how to mobilize funds for the diverse activities of political parties. As Walecki (2003a) has pointed out political finance-related corruption involves improper or unlawful financial operations conducted by a candidate, a party or their associates for their gain or that of other entities associated with them.

Political corruption has been recognized as a major drawback to the consolidation of democratic governance across the world (TI (Transparency International), 2014; Heywood, 1997). There is an impreciseness in the conceptualization of political corruption (Amundsen, 2019; Heywood, 1997). There is tendency in the literature to use political corruption in the context that portrays it as interchangeable with administrative or bureaucratic corruption (Igiebor, 2019). A point that Amundsen (2019) has made in connection with this interchangeable usage is the mutually reinforcing relationship between political and bureaucratic corruption. Although the conceptualization of political corruption shares the general attribute of corruption, which is the abuse of office or the entrusted public power for private gain or benefit (Amundsen, 2006; Rose, 2017), it has its own somewhat definitional realm. With political corruption, the emphasis is on political leaders and political decision makers. Thus, political corruption denotes “the abuse of power, and leads not only to the misallocation of resources, but also affects the manner in which decisions are made” (TI (Transparency International), 2014). The abuse of power connected to political corruption takes place in the political realm and spans such activities as improper and unlawful conduct of financial operations, sale of appointments, vote rigging, election fraud, vote-buying, falsification of election results and abuse of immunities and other related prerogatives among others (TI (Transparency International), 2014; Amundsen, 2019).

Amundsen (2019) has made a very instructive distinction of political corruption into “extractive” and “power-preserving” corruption; both of which focus on its different manifestations. While extractive political corruption refers to the abuse of an entrusted office by political leaders to satisfy personal and group interests, power-preserving political corruption is concerned with wider corrupt enrichment that focuses on maintaining or strengthening hold on power through diverse means. It is power-preserving political corruption that threatens the integrity of the electoral democracy. As Transparency International pointed out, “vote-buying and election fraud seem to be more prevalent in countries in Africa and Latin America, and abuse of office in East Europe and Central Asia and African countries” (TI (Transparency International), 2014, p. 2). There have been instances of pervasive and widespread political corruption, especially vote buying and electoral frauds across countries of Africa, including Kenya, Uganda, Benin, Madagascar, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, Tanzania and South Africa (Jensen & Justesen, 2014; Vicente, 2014). Several works have also provided clear evidence of the pervasive influence of vote buying in elections in Latin America and Asia (Burhanuddin Muhtadi, 2019; Canare et al., 2018; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2020; Jensen & Justesen, 2014).

Several steps have been taken across the world to ensure that political corruption is controlled for the survival of democracy. For instance, at the regional level, the African Union (AU) devoted Article 10 to funding of political parties in its Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, which was adopted by the Heads of State at the African Union Summit held in Maputo on 11 July 2003. In the same vein, the Council of Europe in the 835th meeting of the Committee of Ministers held on April 8, 2003 adopted Recommendation Rec (2003) 4 on Common rules against corruption in the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns. At the global level, Article 7(3) of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) placed a demand on all countries to strive towards evolving appropriate legislative and administrative measures to enhance transparency in the funding of candidates and political parties (Santucci & Öhman, 2009). The whole essence of evolving benchmarks to drive political financing is to strengthen democratic practices by limiting monetary and non-monetary contributions to political parties; reducing the possibilities of corruption in the political processes and improving transparency in the

political system generally (Brunelle-Quraishi, 2010; Nwozor, Olanrewaju, Oshewolo et al., 2020; Ohman, 2014).

Notwithstanding the diversities in democratic systems around the globe, financing political activities to secure political power is the major unifying preoccupation of political parties (Nwozor et al., 2019). Thus, irrespective of whether states are well-established or less well-established democracies, they rely on the instrumentality of political parties to struggle for elective positions. It is for this reason that Katz (1986) describes modern democracy as party democracy since political parties constitute the central institutions of democratic governments. However, the difference between well-established democracies and their less well-established counterparts with regard to party system is the extent of the influence of such factors as ethnic and religious affiliations on party formation, membership subscription, support base and entrenchment. Although clientelistic networks exist in party systems across all democratic states, they appear more pronounced in less well-established democracies (Kura, 2011). The distinction of democratic states into established and less established is to show their different levels and degrees of inculcating and demonstrating the ideals of democracy. In terms of periodization, countries that started the democratization process since the 1970s up to the 2000s fall into the category of new democracies or less well-established democracies (López-Pintor, 2010). The less well-established democracies are so characterized because of their low standards of electoral competition as well as deviation from the tenets of liberal democracy. They are generally characterized by poor quality elections, weak democratic institutions, curtailment of civil liberties, poor adherence to the rule of law and the efflorescence of political corruption (Burhanuddin Muhtadi, 2019).

It is pertinent to emphasize that political funding and campaign financing or electoral funding are related and are often used synonymously (Nassmacher, 2003). However, a thin line tends to ascribe different attributes to them. Political funding represents the totality of the means by which political parties fund their various activities that span routine organizational spending and election spending (February, 2016). Pinto-Duschinsky (2002, p. 70) identifies the components of organizational spending to include expenses related to “the costs of maintaining permanent offices, carrying out policy research, and engaging in political education, voter registration, and other regular functions of parties”. On the other hand, campaign financing or electoral funding is an aspect of political funding and essentially refers to the various resources, including direct and indirect resources, which political contestants, political parties and other political actors mobilize for the purposes of electoral campaigns and elections (Okeke & Nwali, 2020). It encapsulates all the monetary and non-monetary funding and assistance received by individual contestants and political parties for the purpose of meeting electoral expenses in an election cycle and includes expenses incurred and offset by individual contestants and their supporters as well as political parties (WEDO (Women’s Environment and Development Organization), 2007). But the distinction between these concepts is not too divergent as to render interchangeable use redundant.

The potential danger posed by unregulated access to monetary and non-monetary resources in the electioneering process underpins the imposition of limits on the total amount that candidates and their political parties can mobilize from individuals and groups as well spend on political activities, including campaigns and elections. The major idea is to eliminate unevenness in electoral contests as well as create access for all political actors (Hatchard, 2014; Power, 2020). Beyond the logic of smoothing electoral unevenness likely to be caused by access to excess funds, the limitation placed on electoral funding is designed to achieve a combination of goals. These goals would include managing the cost of party politics, bridging inequalities between contestants and political parties, reducing the prospects of vote-buying, insulating the electoral processes, and by extension the political system, from plutocratic ambush and limiting the scope of improper influence and corruption on the political system (Walecki, 2009; Brunelle-Quraishi, 2010; Power, 2020; Nwozor Olanrewaju, Oshewolo et al., 2020).

The Nigerian political arena is not enamored of the influence of money in the electoral process. Money is seen as a political investment that facilitates the capture of political power and by extension, economic power (Kura, 2011; Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2016). In the Nigerian polity, both the elite and the masses equate political power with economic power, although in different ways. In the context of political systems, the term “elite” generally refers to a small group of people that wields enormous power and influence due essentially to their political, socioeconomic standing, wealth, or talent (Vergara, 2013). The elite exist in every state as a privileged minority, thus conferring a quality of universality to it and refuting the notion of absolute equality of citizens in all forms of political systems (Igwe, 2002). The elite exercise overwhelming influence in political systems as they play significant, if not the dominant, roles in determining a state’s policy agenda and political priorities as well as in orchestrating and controlling its political and economic structures (Igiebor, 2019; Wedel, 2017). To the elites, political power means economic power and what needs to be spent in order to acquire it must be spent. To the masses, their ballot power is their asset in the political marketplace and must be converted to economic power. This is the whole logic of political entrepreneurship. Political entrepreneurship has reduced elections to buying and selling, thereby giving primacy to vote buying (Nwozor et al., 2019; Okeke & Nwali, 2020; Onah & Nwali, 2018). Thus, support for candidates and membership of political parties are motivated by expectations of patronage. The implication of the foregoing is that party formation and sustenance is top-bottom with no perceptible inputs from the rank-and-file membership. Accordingly, the party system in Nigeria is controlled by powerful economic and political elites called godfathers who expect concurrent rewards on their political investments (Ayeni, 2019; Deme, 2013; Harneit-Sievers, 2004). The concept of godfather is rooted in certain traditions in many parts of Europe and America, especially in the Catholic Church, where it is originally associated with a man who provides inspiration, advice or support to a younger one for his overall betterment (Albert, 2005). However, political godfatherism is a corruption of this original ideal as it depicts a personal transactional relationship of varying dominance, which political actors enter into, based on their mutual self-interest to manipulate and exploit the resources of the state (Albert, 2005; Hoffmann, 2010). The phenomenon of godfatherism describes a system of influence whereby “certain individuals or groups of individuals possess the political, economic or social capacity to decide political party nominations, and to also ensure that these nominees gain political office for the chief purpose of servicing private interests” (Hoffmann, 2010, p. 291).

To amplify the top-bottom thesis of the administrative structure of Nigerian political party system, Kura (2011) contends that no political party in Nigeria generates any reasonable part of its income from membership dues and levies. This contention is justified by the seeming absence of authentic membership registers in the various party secretariats. In certain situations, such as, when parties organized direct primaries, aspirants and other stakeholders often created ad hoc membership registers by paying lump sums to offset the liabilities of their constituents with regard to membership dues. These scenarios provided fertile ground for the ascendancy of political godfathers who mobilize funds by all means necessary to ensure victory for their candidates and their parties for prebendal purposes.

3. Election funding in Nigeria: A theoretical statement

Political funding in Nigeria accords with the logic of prebendalism despite the incremental legal reviews evolved to dislodge it and enthrone a democratized party funding framework. The observation of the Babalakin Commission of Inquiry into the 1983 elections that “... political parties are dominated by men of influence who see funding of political parties as an investment that must yield rich dividends,” (as cited in Liebowitz & Ibrahim, 2013, np) still describes the prebendalistic nature of funding political parties in contemporary Nigeria. In their assessment of political parties after the 2011 general elections, Liebowitz and Ibrahim (2013, np) assert, “parties are run by godfathers and barons rather than members, and they have clientelist networks that are used by the party barons to ‘deliver’ crowds for rallies and party congresses.” The tools that the godfathers use to actualize their political preferences include donation to parties, bribing of party officials and the sponsorship of candidates. In both the 2015 and 2019 general elections, it was widely reported that the dominant

political parties distributed money, in different currencies and in staggering amounts, to clerics, traditional rulers, ethno-national groups and youth groups as an inducement to vote for them (CSJ (Centre for Social Justice), 2015; The Commonwealth, 2019; Angerbrandt, 2020).

The paper intermixes prebendalism and political clientelism in offering an explanatory framework for electoral funding in Nigeria. The resultant explanatory model can be described as neo-prebendalism. Prebendalism is used to denote “patterns of political behavior which rest on the justifying principle that [state] offices should be competed for and then utilized for the personal benefit of office holders as well as of their reference or support group’ (R. A. Joseph, 1987, p. 8). In other words, prebendalism with its focus on the appropriation of state offices to satisfy personal and group interests (Amuwo, 2013; R. A. Joseph, 1987) does not offer deep insights and explanation into the forces that shape and motorize electoral funding. In the same vein, clientelism and its explanatory framework that centers on the asymmetrical dyadic relations of reciprocal exchange between a patron and his client in which state resources are prime targets (Bardhan & Dilip, 2012; Kura, 2014) is also analytically limited in illuminating the interplay of the variegated and multi-modal dimensions of political funding in Nigeria.

While prebendalism and clientelism explain the asymmetrical, hierarchical and reciprocal relations between a patron and his clients under the assumption that role allocation is fixed and obligatory (R. A. Joseph, 1987; Kura, 2014), neo-prebendalism represents not only the overlapping and layering of these perspectives but also their mutation. There are now predatory attributes to both clientelist and prebendal politics. Neo-prebendalism emphasizes that in addition to clearly identified patrons who serve as the arrowhead of the support base of the client-godson, pockets of groups that are powerful in their mobilizing capabilities form part of the equation in the matrix of support base. Neo-prebendalism also captures the seeming vagaries in the relations between the patron and the client resulting in the withdrawal of support by the patron with the attendant consequences of violence, insecurity and impeachment or dethronement of the “recalcitrant” godson.

The 2015 and 2019 general elections followed the political path already paved and sustained by the elite since Nigeria’s independence and therefore paradoxically reflected their failure to modernize the country’s political system. The lack of political modernization, in terms of dismantling prebendal mechanisms in the polity, underpinned the continued predatory and prebendal practices in Nigeria. R. Joseph (2013, np) contends that successive post-military democratic governments “had the opportunity to move Nigeria towards a modern political system in which state offices would gradually cease to be prebends exploited to generate material resources for office-holders, their sectional clients, and their cronies,” but they lacked the political will to effectuate reforms necessary to achieve such “de-prebendalization”. And the ubiquitous queue of political aspirants who believe that the surest path to personal wealth is the seizure of the apparatuses of state power sustains prebendal mechanisms that keep the system going. The effect is the deepening and institutionalization of neo-prebendal practices.

4. Methodology

The issue of electoral funding and spending has been a recurring political sore point in Nigeria’s political system due to the link between funding and electoral outcomes (Yagboyaju & Simbine, 2020). In Nigeria, electoral funding is not unconnected with elite perception of state power as conferring access to the “national cake” and facilitating distributive politics (Ikpeze et al., 2004). It is this perception that motorizes the penchant of political elites to inundate the political system with money for electoral purposes. The implication of unregulated injection of funds into the political system by power brokers is the likelihood of its distortionary effects on electoral outcomes as well as the erosion of the electoral prospects of candidates and political parties with limited access to funding.

This paper generated its primary data through semi-structured set of questions from key informant interviews. The data were further enriched with secondary data obtained from archival

materials. A total of twelve key informants were chosen through purposive sampling technique to cover the various sections of the political terrain. The breakdown of the key informants (KIs) is as follows: 3 PDP members/stalwarts who have been designated as KI-1-3; 3 APC members/supporters denoted as KI-4-6; 4 people drawn from other political parties coded as KI-7-10 and 2 analysts/researchers with knowledge in Nigerian psephology labelled as KI-11-12. The key informants voluntarily participated in the interviews while preferring anonymity. For this reason, this paper has adopted coding to differentiate and identify the key informants (See Appendix A). The key informants were equally apprised of their freedom to discontinue at any point without offering any reason for the decision. All the data were qualitatively analyzed through the instrumentality of logical inductive method.

5. Finding/discussions

The tool used to generate data from the key informants was semi-structured question format (see Appendix A). From the consideration and analysis of the responses of our key informants, three major themes were discernible. These included the monetization of the polity and its implications on electoral integrity; surreptitious streams and capillaries of electoral funding that contravene and undermine electoral funding ceilings; and the creation of the psyche of “might is right” with implications on level-playing ground for electoral contests.

5.1. Electoral integrity on the dock: recurring loopholes in the Electoral Acts

The 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) provides the broad framework for electoral governance. While Sections 221 to 229 deal with issues relating to political parties, Sections 14 and 15 of Part I in the Third Schedule contain provisions that set out the composition, powers, functions and operational modalities of INEC (see Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as Amended), 1999). As a body recognized by law to handle all issues relating to election and its management, INEC is conferred with the power to make rules, regulations and guidelines that will facilitate the conduct of credible elections in Nigeria. The need to strengthen the constitution gave birth to the Electoral Acts, which are customized legal frameworks that serve as compasses for credible electoral navigation (Okoye, 2013). In other words, the various Electoral Acts derived their legitimacy from Section 228(c) of the Nigerian Constitution (see Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as Amended), 1999).

Nigeria has been enacting and amending Electoral Acts to address the loopholes in the electoral system since the 1999 general elections. One of such loopholes has been electoral funding. The 2002 Electoral Act attempted to deal with this problem but in a perfunctory manner. For instance, instead of fixing ceilings on the amounts that individuals and groups could contribute to political parties, it shifted the responsibility to INEC when it provided, “the Commission shall have power to place limitation on the amount of money or other assets, which an individual or corporate body can contribute to a Political Party” (see S.83(1), Electoral Act, 2002).

Another flaw in the 2002 Act with respect to electoral funding was the narrow conceptualization of election expenses. The Act saw election expenses from the perspective of “expenses incurred by a Political Party” (S.84(1), Electoral Act, 2002). The implication was that all the expenses made by the candidates and their supporters were excluded, thus giving a field day to political godfathers. These flaws probably emboldened the godfathers to brazenly deploy their enormous wealth to “win” elections for their godsons in the 2003 elections (Albert, 2005; Edigin, 2010; Hoffmann, 2010).

The Act attempted to limit election expenditure by discouraging direct and indirect inducement of the electorates (S.87(1)) and restricting expenditure to an aggregate sum determined by multiplying N20 per voter to the total number of registered voters in a constituency (S. 84(2)) (Electoral Act, 2002). Notwithstanding the seemingly laudable intentions of this provision, it was more or less utopian as it posed serious implementation challenges. Apart from the practical difficulties of how to keep a tab on the expenses of candidates and parties to determine whether they were within

the approved threshold, there was another issue of its practicability, especially in the face of material demands by the electorates due to deep-seated poverty (Egwu, 2009). The key informants contended that the enormous amount of money spent in the run up to the 2003 general elections underscored the incapacity of the Act to rein-in the monster of money politics. Table 1 shows the various maximum thresholds for election expenses by the Electoral Acts.

The succeeding 2006 Electoral Act, which provided the legal basis for the 2007 general elections, attempted to address the grey areas in the previous Act with regard to electoral funding. The Act stipulated maximum election expenses for candidates contesting for various positions (S.94(1), Electoral Act 2006). Our KI-12 noted that the weak point of the 2006 Electoral Act with regard to electoral funding was the seeming neutralization of the ceiling on electoral expenses as it failed to explicitly determine a realistic threshold for calculating maximum allowable election expenses. Despite the aforementioned weakness, KI-11 observed that the 2006 Electoral Act had some high-points in connection with political and campaign financing. These included the novel introduction of a limitation on the amount of money or other assets, which individuals and groups could donate to parties, the prohibition of receipt of anonymous donations by political parties, maximum allowable expenses that candidates and political parties could incur and penalties for contravention.

Despite the improvements contained in the 2006 Electoral Act, the 2007 general elections were a disappointment, necessitating further fine-tuning of the Electoral Act that eventually resulted in the Electoral Act 2010 (Nwozor & Oshewolo, 2017). As Jinadu (2012) has observed, the cumulated reports of electoral malpractices by international and national election observer groups formed the basis for the 2010 Electoral Act. One of the major changes introduced by the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) was the abolition of public funding for political parties. Globally, the issue of the relevance of public funding in the matrix of credible electoral system is still a subject of disputation (Pinto-Duschinsky, 2002; Power, 2020). The divergence of views centers on the morality of using public funds for electioneering purposes, especially in view of the likelihood of abuses.

The abuse of government grants to political parties informed its discontinuation (Anokuru, 2019). Our key informants were unanimous in the view that the subvention to political parties encouraged political elites to proliferate political parties in order to corner the grants. A further justification of this view was the perennial wrangling associated with the disbursement of the grants within recipient political parties. Indeed, allegations of misappropriation of party funds, including government grants formed part of the litanies of misconduct levelled against the leadership of most of the fringe political parties (Anokuru, 2019; Ayeni, 2019).

The 2010 Electoral Act also introduced upward changes in the maximum allowable election expenses for candidates in line with inflationary trend. The Act doubled the maximum election expenses for candidates in presidential election to N1 billion; gubernatorial election to N200 million, and Senatorial and House of Representatives election to N40 million and N20 million respectively. The rest included State Assembly and Local Government Chairmanship elections to N10 million each and councillorship election to N1 million (S.91(2)-(7), Electoral Act 2010 as amended). Interestingly, there was no discernible basis for the spending ceilings imposed on the various positions. Assuming we adopt the principle of proportionality and use the amount approved for senatorial election as a baseline to calculate the realistic election expenses for presidential election, the amount would come to N4.3 billion (this amount is arrived at by multiplying N40 million by 109 senatorial seats in the country). If, on the other hand, we adopt the amount for gubernatorial election as our baseline amount, what ought to be included in the Act as maximum for presidential election expenses should be N7.2 billion.

The Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) which governed the 2015 and 2019 general elections did not tackle most of the contradictions associated with electoral funding in the polity. For instance, third-party spending was not addressed. Similarly, it did not require candidates to keep books of expenses; or prohibit them from receiving funding from abroad or declare same. Candidates had

Table 1. Maximum election expenses for various elective positions		Spending Limits (in Naira)		
S/N	Position	Electoral Act, 2002 (Section 84(2))	Electoral Act, 2006 (Section 93)	Electoral Act, 2010 (Section 91)
1	Presidential	The prescribed maximum expenses are based on the aggregate sum determined by multiplying 20 Naira by the number of names on the final voters' list for each Constituency	500 million	1 billion
2	Governorship		100 million	200 million
3	Senatorial		20 million	40 million
4	House of Representatives		10 million	20 million
5	House of Assembly		5 million	10 million

Sources: Electoral Acts 2002, 2006 & 2010

no responsibility to disclose anonymous donations nor keep a book of records; and, no duty to file post-election report of contributions made by individuals and other entities. Based on the Act, the political parties, and not the candidates, are answerable for election funding and expenditure.

Another loophole in the Act that conduced to massive donations without the donors breaking any law is the absence of restrictions on individual donors. The donation ceilings apply only to individual donations to a candidate. Thus, a donor could donate N1 million apiece to cover the 109 senatorial seats, 360 House of Representatives seats and 991 state constituency seats and still be on the side of the law. The key informants agreed that the focus on political parties as the locus of electoral funding is fundamentally flawed. While political parties are under obligation not to accept anonymous monetary or other contributions, the candidate is neither under such an obligation nor restrained from collecting such donations. In other words, the Act did not impose any form of duty on the candidate except to incur expenses within the limits recognized by the Act (S. 91(2)-(7), Electoral Act 2010 as amended). Even at that, candidates have to “knowingly” contravene these limits to be culpable.

5.2. Undermining the funding ceilings by other means: surreptitious streams and capillaries of electoral funding

Vote buying and other forms of electoral frauds have been shown to have influence on electoral outcomes. It is on the basis of the link between access to inexhaustible funds and electoral victory that underpinned the quest by elites to secure funds, even if they had to undermine the legal prescriptions for party and electoral funding. Often such mobilized funds end up in being used to subvert the electoral processes, especially in the form of vote buying. According to Jensen and Justesen (2014, p. 220), vote buying is „a particular form of political clientelism, i.e. the direct exchange at the individual level of rewards and material goods by political patrons in return for electoral support by voters”. In Nigeria, political spending in the form of vote buying and outright compromise of security agencies have been shown to have distortionary effect on electoral outcomes. Vote buying takes place at various stages of the electoral cycle ranging from the periods of voter registration, party nomination, campaign, and the election day (Matenga, 2016). Since 2011, vote buying efforts in Nigeria have concentrated on election day where politicians paid voters directly for their votes (Matenga, 2016; Olaniyan, 2020). Across less well-established democracies, vote buying tends to be deep-rooted and driven by several factors, especially the desperation of political elites to remain in power and poverty among voters. In a study of vote buying in sub-Saharan Africa by Jensen and Justesen (2014), they found that poor voters are significantly more likely to be targets of vote buying than wealthier voters. There is also an interesting aspect of vote buying: it induces increased participation of electorates in elections, due mainly to expected pay-off (Vicente, 2014).

The 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) provided the legal basis for the conduct of the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The 2010 Electoral Act was amended in 2015 and the proposed amendment to it, which was encased in the 2018 Electoral Act Amendment Bill, was denied assent by the president (Punch, 2018). Since 2001, Nigeria has been tinkering with the right legal regime to drive its electoral system. Thus, the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) could be seen as a product of cumulated reports from observers of previous elections and national desire to consolidate democracy by adopting international best practices (Jinadu, 2012). Although the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) introduced some far-reaching changes in Nigeria’s electoral governance, not much changed in relation to electoral funding. KI-8 posited that the absence of changes with regard to electoral funding emboldened all manner of political players to mobilize and spend money on behalf of their preferred candidates without seeming to violate any law.

The successful merger of disparate political parties to form the mega political party, the All Progressive Congress (APC) changed the political permutation in Nigeria (Nwozor et al., 2019). The APC was a product of an alliance comprising Nigeria’s four biggest opposition parties then, namely, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria

Peoples Party (ANPP), and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). The APC was formed in February 2013. However, it was not until July 31, 2013 that it received approval from INEC to begin operations as a political party (Fabiya, 2013; Nwozor et al., 2019; Okocha et al., 2013).

Although several events took place to strengthen the APC as a formidable opposition party, the most important of these events was the boost in its membership of APC with the entrance of key political personages. For instance, five incumbent PDP governors, namely, Rotimi Amaechi (Rivers State); Aliyu Wamakko (Sokoto State), Rabi'u Kwakwanso (Kano State); Murtala Nyako (Adamawa State); and Abdulfatah Ahmed (Kwara State) joined the APC. Likewise, 37 PDP members in the House of Representatives and 11 PDP senators defected to APC (Nwozor et al., 2019). KI-6 observed that although the registration of APC offered Nigerians credible opportunity for electoral choices, it expanded and intensified the subterfuges employed in mobilizing funds and monetizing the political system.

The key informants generally agreed that the credible opposition, which the APC and PDP represented in the 2015 and 2019 general elections respectively, had impacts on electoral expenses. Both the ruling party and the major opposition party at these elections were desperate to prove a political point and thus willing to spare no expense in achieving electoral victory. Mutual desperation appeared to have driven electioneering campaigns in both the 2015 and 2019 general elections and deepened the monetization of the polity. Our key informants agreed that mutual desperation manifested at the candidate and party levels in both general elections.

The mutual desperation among candidates and political parties was catalyzed by different sets of aspirations and motivations. For instance, in the 2015 general elections, the two prominent presidential candidates, Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP and Muhammadu Buhari of the APC had divergent motivations for electoral victory. Similarly, in the 2019 general elections, both Atiku Abubakar and Muhammadu Buhari were motivated by different goals. Like Jonathan in 2015, Buhari in 2019 wanted a second term. In the same vein, like Buhari in 2015, Abubakar in 2019 was desperate for a shot at the presidency after previous failed attempts. At the party level, the PDP and APC wanted to wrest or retain power by all means in these elections. These scenarios underpinned the circumvention of the electoral funding protocols by these candidates and their parties and accounted for the monetization of the polity.

Generally, the 2015 and 2019 general elections were highly monetized, but the role that money played was more pronounced at the level of presidential election. The view of many politicians, especially those who had the wherewithal, was that the electoral expense ceilings were unrealistic. The media quoted Goodluck Jonathan as asserting, "you cannot pigeonhole a candidate to spend within a budget. So I think people must come up with what is realistic and practicable because the law itself must not be a booby trap for anybody" (Ekott, 2014, np). The 2015 and 2019 general elections were classified as very expensive not just in terms of the cost of organizing the elections by INEC but on the basis of the enormous amount of money spent by candidates and their political parties. Due to poor data records in Nigeria, there are conflicting estimates about the amount of money that political parties and their candidates spent in both the 2015 and 2019 general elections. For instance, some sources estimated that in the 2015 presidential election, Jonathan and Buhari spent N8.8 billion and N2.9 billion, respectively, on media adverts alone (Yagboyaju & Simbine, 2020). The sources as cited in Okeke and Nwali (2020) estimated that political parties and their candidates spent about US\$1.5 billion on political campaigns in the 2015 general elections. In the 2019 general elections, it was estimated that the traceable amounts spent by Buhari and Abubakar were N4.6 billion and N2.9 billion, respectively (Yagboyaju & Simbine, 2020). The key informants contended that the media expenses constituted an insignificant portion of the intriguing architecture of electoral expenses. KI-3 noted that larger chunks of the electoral expenses were never documented as these amounts serviced specialized interests, including the inducement of voters. The major issue of contention is the source(s) through which these staggering sums were amassed.

Figure 1. Major capillaries of illegitimate sources of electoral funding.



The major capillaries of illegitimate funding in the 2015 and 2019 general elections consisted of untracked donations by power brokers and godfathers, looting and diversion of state resources, and the use of pseudo-political associations (see [Figure 1](#)). The donations made by power brokers and godfathers are often untraceable and yet quite substantial. KI-4 opined that the diffuse nature of godfather syndrome makes it impossible to track or estimate in any reliable manner the quantum of resources they pumped into the economy in election years. KI-5 noted that what non-politicians might not know was that the crowds in the various political rallies across the states were generally rented. She elaborated that power brokers and godfathers often took the responsibility in their spheres of influence to foot the bills for transportation and honoraria to the hirelings for such political rallies. This diffuseness in spending patterns makes it difficult to reconstruct estimates for electoral funding and expenses. What might provide a guiding snapshot into the likely volume of cash injection and its impact on the economy could be gleaned from the cyclic worries of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) each election year. The CBN's monetary policy raised concerns each election year about the liquidity impact of election-related spending. The same concern on the likelihood of a spike in inflation due to the envisaged flooding of the political system with money by politicians was raised by the CBN in the run-up to the 2019 general elections (CBN, 2019).

The looting and diversion of state resources for political campaigns is another source of illegitimate electoral funding. This source is often shrouded in secrecy and always outside the public domain. It is only after the defeat of the incumbent government that the evidence of such sleazes are made public. The defeat of Jonathan in 2015 exposed the deep-seated corruption that feathered the nest of electioneering in the 2015 general elections. It was after Jonathan was defeated that a fraud of US\$ 2 billion was uncovered in his administration. Jonathan's National Security Adviser, Sambo Dasuki, was indicted by an investigative panel of diverting US\$ 2 billion meant for the procurement of arms (BBC, 2015). Further investigation revealed that Dasuki distributed the fund to politicians for the prosecution of the 2015 re-election bid of Jonathan (Onuoha et al., 2020). In the run-up to the 2019 general elections, there were various allegations that Buhari was funding his campaign from slush funds. The alleged sources of such slush funds included special funds held by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) for oil subsidy, the Excess Crude Account following presidential approval for the withdrawal of US\$1 billion from the account and military fund meant for the procurement of arms (Oyewole & Mudashir, 2018; Premium Times, 2017; Yakubu, 2019). These allegations may never be confirmed as the administration is still power.

Another stream of illegitimate electoral funding in the 2015 and 2019 general elections was the deployment of mutant pseudo-political associations. A most obvious shortcoming of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) was its failure to properly interpret the spirit, intention and nuances of Section 221 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended). The section under reference clearly states, "no association, other than a political party, shall canvass for votes for any candidate at any

election or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election expenses of any candidate at an election.” There is no ambiguity in this provision as attested by the interpretation of the word “association” as “a body of persons (corporate or otherwise) who agree to act together for any common purpose and includes an association formed for any ethnic, social, cultural, occupational or religious purpose” (see S.156 of the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended)).

There were uncountable number of pseudo-political platforms that actively campaigned and canvassed for votes for APC and PDP in both 2015 and 2019 general elections. These associations appeared to have had their own budgets outside the mainstream campaign organizations and political parties of their principals (Agbajileke, 2019; CSJ (Centre for Social Justice), 2015; Olaoye, 2014). Although most of these groups did not have well-defined administrative structures, they served as nodal points for the APC and PDP campaigns across the country. In fact, these pseudo-political groups provided a veritable platform for third party spending outside the officialdom of the party and campaign organizations. They spent so much money in the production of souvenirs and other branded campaign products as they competed among themselves for ascendancy. KI-2 acknowledged that campaign materials were generally funded by individuals who often did so as some form of investment in anticipation for post-election rewards.

5.3. The creation of the psyche of “might is right” and implications on level-playing ground for electoral contests

Prior to 2015, it was a rarity for an incumbent to lose a re-election bid owing to the entrenchment of “might is right” psyche that is motorized by the power of incumbency. This led Ross (2015) to make a sweeping assertion that “in Nigerian elections, the incumbent always wins.” The incumbents often deployed the entire arsenal of state power to skew the political arena to their advantage. A point that often appeared muted when discussing political financing generally is the influence of non-monetary factors as exemplified by the power of incumbency. Even the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) did not capture this aspect in any discernible details.

The power of incumbency offers a wide operational latitude to those in power to deploy state resources in the pursuit of their political ambitions. In the 2015 and 2019 general elections, the power of incumbency played significant role in the mobilization of voters. Our key informants noted that the two frontline parties used the resources of their various spheres of influence to advance the political aspirations of their candidates. For instance, in the 2015 and 2019 general elections the PDP and the APC respectively used the combined strength of the federal government and the states under their control to mobilize support for their presidential candidates.

Apart from the use of state resources that have no strict monetary value attached to them such as holding partisan meetings in government houses, using state aircrafts and official motorcades, and deploying government staff on party and electioneering campaign assignments, the power of incumbency manifests in generous donations by organizations that have business relationship with the state. In the run-up to both the 2015 and 2019 general elections, there were manifestations of the abuse and misuse of the power of incumbency. For instance, in a fundraising dinner organized at the Old Banquet Hall of the Presidential Villa, Abuja for Goodluck Jonathan’s second term election, about N21 billion was raised for the project (Yagboyaju & Simbine, 2020). In the said fundraiser, donations came from known and anonymous donors. In the 2019 general elections, the APC included Nigeria’s top billionaires, especially Aliko Dangote, Africa’s richest man, and Femi Otedola, into its presidential campaign team (Owolabi, 2018). The deployment of the power of incumbency contravenes such aspects of the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) as S.93(1) that deplores anonymity and demands full disclosure, and S.100(2) that outlaws the exclusive use of state apparatuses to advance political advantage. There is no evidence of indictment on both the APC and PDP for leveraging state power to advance their political interests. The only known official response attributed to INEC was that it possessed prosecutorial and not investigative powers and therefore would not probe contributions to electoral funds of parties (Olorok & Adepegba, 2014).

6. Conclusion

Money has always played a key role in politics globally. The 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria had its share in terms of election-related liquidity. The dominant parties in the election, the PDP and APC, generated their election funds from diverse sources and without due regards to the ceilings imposed by the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended). Our key informants contended that the reliance of the dominant parties on multiple streams of electoral funding including state resources, for their electoral activities skewed the political field and made it difficult for the fringe parties to break into the electoral arena in any meaningful way.

Although the dominant political parties took advantage of the loopholes in the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended), there were several valid provisions they contravened. A cardinal loophole that they exploited was the non-incorporation of S.221 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) in the provisions of the Act. This paved the way for the multiplicity of groups that invaded the electoral arena to canvass for votes for their preferred candidates. In order to create a level playing ground and progress towards democratic consolidation, the current 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) would require further refinement. This paper suggests the areas of such refinement to include the criminalization of setting up pseudo-groups for campaigns in the spirit of S.221 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended); and setting ceiling on contributions that individuals can make to candidates in an electoral cycle. Other areas that will require further legislative attention are the creation of institutions other than INEC that will have both investigative and prosecutorial functions and powers on electoral funding; linking the ceiling on election expenses with ceiling on fund mobilization; and imposing duty on the candidates to submit reports on donations and expenditure.

Acknowledgements

The authors appreciate Landmark University, Omu-Aran, Kwara State, Nigeria, for providing the financial support for the publication of this work.

Funding

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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Citation information

Cite this article as: Has anything changed with illegitimate electoral financing and political power contestation in Nigeria?, Agaptus Nwozor, Segun Oshewolo, Solomon I. Ifejika, John Shola Olanrewaju & Modupe Ake, *Cogent Social Sciences* (2021), 7: 1961396.

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Appendix A

S/N	Semi-structured lead questions
1	What would you think as the underpinning justification for the limitation of donations generally?
2	Do you think that Nigeria's Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) holistically captured all aspects of election funding to be considered effective?
3	Was there a level-playing ground in Nigeria's political arena in the 2015 and 2019 general elections considering the disproportionate access to funding by political parties?
4	What specific ways do you think the political parties used to raise funds for the electioneering activities?
5	Do you think the electoral processes were actually monetized? Would you think that the monetization promoted or undermined electoral outcomes?
6	Do you think there were safeguards in the political system to checkmate the monetization of the 2015 and 2019 general elections?
7	Does the monetization of elections have the tendency to undermine people's confidence in democracy?
8	Do you think that the electorates bother about electoral integrity since they make money during elections and thus partake in the national cake and take care of stomach infrastructure?
9	How would you describe the law enforcement agencies and other governmental institutions in managing the breach of donation ceilings as prescribed in the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) Nigeria?
10	Do you think there is a real deterrence to the manipulation of electoral funding by political parties?



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