International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Innovative Research

ISSN(print): 3050-6883, ISSN(online): 3050-6891

Volume 03 Issue 03 March 2026

DOI: 10.58806/ijmir.2026.v3i3n04

Page No: 180-188

Money Politics and The Nigerian Delegate System: Implications for Democratic Governance

ThankGod Festus Lilly-Inia,PhD[1],Chimezie Chukwuemeka Eze[2],Tommy Enodienetuk Enodien, PhD[3]

[1]Department of Political Science

[2]Faculty of Social Sciences

[3]University of Port Harcourt

ABSTRACT

The study investigated money politics and the Nigerian delegate system; implications for democratic governance. In Nigeria, the delegate system, intended to ensure credible candidate selection, has been undermined by pervasive money politics. Financial inducements to delegates distort internal party democracy, favouring wealth over competence. This practice threatens the quality of leadership and weakens democratic governance. The objectives of the study were to examine the influence of money politics on the Nigerian delegate system, with particular focus on the conduct of the 2023 Presidential party primaries, and evaluate the implications of monetised delegate politics on the quality of leadership and democratic governance. The study adopted the Elite Theory propounded by Vilfredo Pareto in 1935; Gaetano Mosca in 1939; and Robert Michel in 1965 and 1966. The study employed a descriptive research design and applied secondary sources of data; data were sourced from academic journals, books, conference papers, newspaper articles and official documents, among others. The study concluded that the use of the delegate system in the conduct of party primaries in Nigeria has largely failed to live up to expectations. Party primaries, especially high-profile ones like the 2023 Presidential primaries, were marked by irregularities, widespread vote-buying, and corruption. Instead of choosing candidates based on merit, the process was transactional, with political offices often going to the highest bidder. The study recommended that political parties and electoral authorities should ensure the strict enforcement of laws and internal regulations to eliminate money politics during delegate-based primaries, with active monitoring and penalties for vote buying, to uphold the integrity of candidate selection and strengthen the delegate system.

KEYWORDS: Money politics, delegate system, democratic governance, presidential primary, competence, accounta0bility

ARTICLE DETAILS

Published On:
09 March

Available on:
https://ijmir.com

INTRODUCTION

Money politics is a pattern of political behaviour in which financial inducements and material gifts are deployed to secure electoral support. In practical terms, it describes a situation where candidates, party agents, or political intermediaries distribute cash or consumable items to voters in exchange for electoral backing. In Nigeria, this practice has become a recurring feature of election campaigns. The transactional nature of such exchanges reduces political participation to a market relationship in which votes are traded for immediate material gain. Essien (2009) argues that this trend reflects a troubling reality in which electorates exchange their civic rights for short-term benefits, thereby undermining the integrity of electoral choice.

The phenomenon of money politics in Nigeria is historically entrenched. From the post-independence period to the present democratic dispensation, electoral contests have frequently been characterised by vote buying, patronage networks, and the monetisation of political loyalty. Rather than emerging as a recent distortion, the use of financial incentives has evolved alongside Nigeria's electoral system, gradually normalising corruption within political competition. The Fourth Republic, inaugurated in 1999, has witnessed intensified manifestations of this practice, particularly during party primaries and general elections.

Governance, in its institutional and normative sense, concerns the extent to which public institutions operate transparently, remain accountable to citizens, and facilitate meaningful participation in decision-making. The Human Development Report (2002)

conceptualises effective governance as a framework of principles and values that empower citizens, especially marginalised groups, to influence decisions affecting their lives while safeguarding them from arbitrary and unaccountable exercises of power. Governance, therefore, implies the structuring and distribution of political authority in ways that promote inclusiveness, responsibility, and public oversight.

Money politics directly contradict these principles. When political office becomes an investment financed through inducements and patronage, elected officials are incentivised to prioritise the recovery of campaign expenditures rather than the delivery of public goods. Public office, under such conditions, shifts from a platform for service to a mechanism for personal enrichment and political consolidation. The resulting governance deficit manifests in weakened institutional accountability, compromised policy decisions, and diminished public trust in democratic processes.

Central to this discussion is the Nigerian delegate system. Political parties constitute the primary vehicles for contesting elections and shaping public policy. Membership is formalised through registration and fee payment, and internal party processes determine the selection of candidates for public office. Delegates are party members elected or appointed to represent their constituencies within party conventions. A delegate is a person chosen to vote or make decisions on behalf of a group, especially at conferences or meetings. Within Nigerian political parties, delegates emerge from ward, local government, state, and national structures after fulfilling stipulated requirements, including party membership and eligibility documentation. They are empowered to vote at party conventions and primaries to determine the party's flag bearers (Tsaro, 2020).

The delegate system itself is not unique to Nigeria. Established democracies such as the United States of America, Italy, and Germany employ variations of delegate-based or representative mechanisms in selecting party nominees. In principle, this model strengthens internal party democracy by ensuring that candidates are vetted and chosen by informed party representatives rather than by direct mass participation susceptible to populist manipulation. The system is designed to promote institutional coherence and to produce candidates with credible track records, ideological commitment, and administrative competence (Okore & Onuoha, 2025).

In Nigeria, however, the operation of the delegate system has often been undermined by financial inducement and manipulation. Delegates, who are expected to act as custodians of party values and as gatekeepers of leadership credibility, frequently become targets of monetary influence during primaries. The monetisation of delegate votes transforms internal party contests into competitive bidding processes. Consequently, aspirants with substantial financial resources gain a disproportionate advantage over those with competence, integrity, or grassroots legitimacy but limited financial capacity.

This distortion has profound implications for democratic governance. Leadership selection within political parties influences the quality of governance at national and sub-national levels. When delegates prioritise financial reward over merit, the probability of credible leadership diminishes. The cumulative effect of money politics within the delegate system is a weakening of democratic norms. Electoral competition becomes less about policy alternatives and more about resource mobilisation. Accountability mechanisms erode because leaders who secure nominations and electoral victories through financial inducement are less responsive to citizens and more beholden to patronage networks. Governance outcomes then reflect elite bargaining rather than public interest considerations (Tsaro, 2020).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The growth and stability of democracy in Nigeria depend on free and fair elections as well as honest internal party processes. However, money politics continues to weaken both general elections and party primaries carried out through the delegate system. The use of cash payments, gifts, and other benefits to gain political support has turned politics into a business transaction instead of a civic duty based on personal beliefs and policy choices. In the delegate system, a small group of party members is given the responsibility of choosing candidates for public office. In theory, these delegates should assess aspirants based on their ability, experience, values, and leadership qualities. In reality, many aspirants use large sums of money to influence delegates during party primaries.

When money determines who wins party nominations, internal party democracy becomes weak, and the quality of candidates presented to voters declines. Leaders who emerge through such processes usually focus more on recovering the money they spent and rewarding their supporters than on serving the public. This affects governance negatively as citizens expect democracy to bring real improvements, such as better roads, quality education and healthcare, job opportunities, and economic growth, among others. The continued presence of money politics since the return to civilian rule in 1999 shows that there are deep-rooted problems within Nigeria's political system.

Several studies have examined money politics in Nigeria. For instance, Adetula (2008) investigated the influence of money on Nigeria's electoral process and argued that the rising cost of political campaigns has entrenched corruption within the democratic system. Similarly, Ajayi (2007) explored electoral administration and money politics in Nigeria, emphasising how financial inducements distort political competition and encourage patron-client relationships.

This present study differs from earlier works as it focuses specifically on money politics within the Nigerian delegate system and its impacts on democratic governance.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. Examine the influence of money politics on the Nigerian delegate system, with particular focus on the conduct of the 2023 Presidential party primaries.
2. Evaluate the implications of monetised delegate politics on the quality of leadership and democratic governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Money Politics

The concept of money politics has been conceptualised by scholars of politics in various perspectives. Money politics deals with how politics is financed. It is about how political parties fund their electoral activities. Ezirim (2010) sees money politics as the reflection of the interplay between the dubious tendencies of public servants in government-owned Ministries and agencies, manifest in their demands for bribes from politicians and the latter's oblige. Sakariyau et al. (2015) conceived money politics as the practice of anything that involved money to influence or change the minds of voters to favour givers. Edgar (2013) sees money politics as an act of changing people's minds through the use of money, anything that involves inducements, promises and even threats in the polls is considered an election offence and money politics. Also, Aspinall (2019) believes that money politics is a general term which connotes other aspects of inducements, including the offering of material gifts and vote buying. Beyond the views of Aspinall (2019) and Edgar (2013), Ovwasa (2014) comprehensively defines it as the phenomenon in the Nigeria electoral process whereby contenders for elective positions used money or money is used on their behalf as an inducement to sway their support which is based on persuading their electorates not to vote according to their wish and conviction but on the force of money that has changed hands. Alfa and Marangos (2016) argued that money matters for democracy because many of the democratic activities simply could not take place without money. Best (2006) describes the role of money in politics, especially for those seeking political offices, as the norm. Ojo (2006) conceives money as an instrument used by political parties or candidates in an election campaign to secure votes. However, money politics, in terms of conceptualisation, raises conflicting and varying explanations from scholars, policy analysts and politicians. According to Gillon (2000), money-politics encompasses the activities of 'big-money interests' to buy political outcomes. What this entails is that money-politics involves a situation in which 'wealthy candidates' and 'special interest individuals' employ the instrument of money to buy elections. Evertsson (2008) views money-politics as bribery and a form of political corruption. Beetseh and Akpoo (2015) conceptualised money-politics as the phenomenon in the electoral process whereby contenders for elective positions use money or money is used on their behalf as an inducement to sway their support, which is not based on persuading the electorate to vote according to their wish and conviction but on the influence of money that has changed hands. In other words, money-politics involves the use of money to induce voters to vote against their wishes and convictions. Aiyede (2006) lends support to the foregoing when he explained that money encourages the flourishing of corruption in the Nigerian democratic process.

Democracy

The word, democracy is derived from two Greek words. These words are "Demos" and "kratein". Demos denotes 'the people' while kratein implies 'rule of or by'. The term literally means 'rule of the people.' By extension of the meaning apart from demos, Heywood (1997) views it from 'kratos,' which means power or rule. Democracy, therefore, means rule by the 'demos' (the demos referring to the people, although the Greeks originally used this to mean 'the poor or the many'. Heater (1964), cited in Awopeju and Martins (2023), argues that it involves equal rights and opportunity of all citizens and guarantees the respect of the human body and mind. He identified five basic elements without which no community can call itself truly democratic. These elements are equality and sovereignty of the people. Respect for human life, the rule of law, and liberty of the individual. Heather's definition has been criticised because it undermines the cardinal contents of liberal democracy. It may, however, be faulted for its lack of emphasis on the role of political parties in the democratic process (Enemuo, 2000). This deficiency has been rectified by the definition given by Diamond (1988), who avers that democracy entails meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organised groups (especially political parties) either directly or indirectly, for the major positions of governmental power. Similarly, but comprehensively, Egwu (2013) posits that democracy is a liberal project which emphasises the formal, institutional and procedural elements such as a multi-party system, periodic elections, and constitutional guarantee of civil and political liberties.

Delegate System

The delegate system constitutes a fundamental component of internal party organisation, particularly in the process of nominating candidates for elective offices. Within this framework, political parties designate certain members as delegates who are vested with the authority to participate in congresses and conventions where party officials and candidates for public office are selected. The system is widely regarded as an institutional mechanism for promoting internal party democracy because it subjects party leadership and candidacy positions to a voting process rather than unilateral selection by party executives. In theory, this arrangement enhances participation, representation, and organisational coherence within political parties.

Existing scholarship suggests that the delegate model is intended to reinforce party stability by channelling candidate selection through a representative structure (Wilson, 2001). By limiting the nomination process to elected or designated delegates, political parties seek to create an orderly and manageable system that reflects the interests of party members while avoiding the logistical and financial challenges associated with direct primaries. This representative approach is also viewed as a safeguard against populist manipulation that may arise in large-scale direct participation systems.

Despite these theoretical advantages, empirical evidence indicates that the implementation of the delegate system has generated uneven outcomes, particularly in Nigeria. Although it provides a formal structure for participation, its practical operation has often been shaped by elite influence and internal power dynamics. As reported by Thompson (2022), influential political actors frequently exert control over the selection and composition of delegates. Such interference undermines the democratic intent of the system and concentrates decision-making authority in the hands of party power brokers.

Democratic Governance

Democratic governance, according to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2025), is a system of decision-making linking state and society actors where institutions and processes are anchored in a set of principles intended to promote equality, freedom, fairness, representation and inclusion. Democratic governance is more than just elections. It is a process where people have a voice and a stake in the decisions that affect their lives, where rulers are elected, decisions are made, and (formal) power is transferred based on a competition for votes at regular intervals. Each country has its own unique history, beliefs and experience of governance, voice and representation (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2025). There are five distinct but interlinked principles to define and assess the quality of democratic governance. These are:

1. Openness: basic individual rights, civic liberties and freedoms that enable people to participate in political, economic and social life in an open and non-discriminatory way;
2. Inclusion: in terms of both process (how decisions are made and who has a say) and outcome (who benefits and how wealth and prosperity are distributed);
3. Rule of Law: impersonal and impartial rules that apply to all equally;
4. Accountability: includes political accountability (checks and balances between different branches of government); popular accountability (e.g. elections); and social accountability (bottom-up processes of accountability like participatory budgeting);
5. Effectiveness: the capacity and authority of a state to make and implement decisions, get things done, and enforce rules across its territory.

The combination of these five principles and related major features, working together, is explicitly intended to diffuse power, with a broad set of actors having a say in political decision-making processes, and ensure that electoral and policy outcomes are not pre-determined and can be contested, but within agreed democratic rules of the game. The legitimacy of democratic governance hinges on how things work in practice, not just on paper (e.g. the constitution and other formal rules). It is the way in which formal and informal institutions, known as 'the rules of the game', interact that determines the nature and quality of democratic governance and its legitimacy among the population (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2025). The rules of the game are shaped and reshaped through ongoing negotiation, bargaining and contestation among a wide variety of actors – ranging from presidents, parliaments and political parties to private sector groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, media figures, faith-based groups, non-state armed actors (including serious organized crime (SOC) networks) and others seeking to gain greater power, influence, voice, and access in the political system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted the Elite Theory propounded by Vilfredo Pareto in (1935); Gaetano Mosca (1939); and Robert Michel (1965 and 1966). Pareto argued that every society exists in classes and so, it is heterogeneous, and the heterogeneity is accounted for on the basis of mental, moral, physical and cultural reasons that help to maintain social balance in the society. He uses elites as the parameter to classify society. The elites represent the higher stratum of society, whilst the non-elites are the lower stratum. Amongst the higher stratum elites, Pareto further categorises them into governing elites and non-governing elites. The governing elites are the individuals who directly or indirectly have a considerable role to play in the government or administration of the society. The non-governing elites comprise the rest of the individual elites not connected with administration but occupy such a place in society that they somehow influence the administration (Pareto, 1935).

Mosca (1939) propounded the Ruling Class Theory of Elites. He states that in any type of society, and at any point in history, there are two classes of people: a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The class that rules contains a small number of people and possesses all the political power and privileges, whereas the class that is ruled consist of a huge number of people and is subjected to the class that rules but provides essential instruments for political organisation. Just as Pareto's elite stratum consists of two strata, the higher stratum and the lower stratum, Mosca's ruling class consist of the highest stratum and the second stratum. The highest stratum is the core of the ruling class, but it cannot sufficiently lead and direct the society unless the second stratum helps. The

second stratum is larger than the highest stratum in number and has all the capacities of leadership in the country. So, the second stratum is needed not only in the political realm but also in any type of social organisation for smooth administration (Mosca, 1939). The Iron Law of Oligarchy, propounded by Michels (1965 and 1966), explicitly points out the indispensability of oligarchy within organisations by stating that it is the organisation which gives birth to the domination of the elected over electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators, who says organisation, says oligarchy" (Michels, 1966). To Michels, regardless of any ideological concerns, all types of organisations have oligarchic tendencies. His major question in political parties was how oligarchic tendencies are explained in socialist and democratic parties, which they declared war against. (Michels, 1966). He examines this question and observes the organisation itself, particularly bureaucracy, the nature of human being and the phenomenon of leadership as being the major factors for oligarchical tendencies in organisations. However, to him, leadership itself is not compatible with most of the postulates of democracy, but leadership is a necessary phenomenon in every form of society. He argues that an ideal democracy is impossible due to socio-economic conditions because democracy has an inherent preference for an authoritarian solution to important questions. Therefore, he admits to his iron law of oligarchy, that there are elites in society, but not elite circulation in terms of replacing one another. He does not redefine the concept of elite; rather, he took Pareto's theory of circulation of elites and modified it. Michels states that there is a battle between the old and new elites, leaders, and the end of the war is not absolute replacement of the old elites by the new elites, but a reunion of elites, a perennial amalgamation and complete replacement of elites is rare in history (Michels, 1966; Michels, 1965).

The Elite Theory is relevant for the study because it deals with political parties, the issues of delegates and the delegators, as well as the emergence of leadership in a democratic society. It aligns with the position that there are oligarchic tendencies even in political parties, and most of those who are elected as delegates to elect political parties' standard-bearers are influenced, if not determined, by the group with the socio-economic means that acts as oligarchs or aristocrats, according to Pareto. The study also concurs with the postulation that elites are not replaced in the sense of circulation as defined by Pareto, but they are absorbed by the old elites into their union.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Okore and Onuoha (2025) conducted a study titled Delegate System and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria; the 2022 PDP and APC Presidential Primary Elections investigated the delegate system and democratic consolidation in Nigeria with emphasis on the 2022 People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) Presidential primary elections. The use of the delegate system in the conduct of primary elections in Nigeria has been a clog in the wheel of democratic consolidation, as it allowed the emergence of unpopular, incompetent and corrupt candidates who are imposed on the electorate during general elections. This has implications for good governance, performance and accountability. The study adopted the elite theory propounded by Robert Michel, Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto. It attributed the electoral infraction that characterised the delegate system in Nigeria to the excessive ambition of the political elite. The delegate system is elitist in nature, as the masses are often alienated from the process, which portends grave danger to competence and good governance. The secondary source of data was utilised for the study; data were sourced from textbooks, journal articles and seminar papers, among others. The study found that the use of the delegate system in the conduct of primary elections was not unique to Nigeria; other countries such as the US, Germany and Italy also use the same system. What is unique about the delegate system in the Nigerian context is that it is often subjected to manipulation by the political elite. These were demonstrated in the 2022 presidential primary elections of the PDP and APC. The study recommended, among other things, that in order to deepen democracy through the electioneering process, the delegate system should be abolished from the Electoral Act and replaced with the direct system of election to enable eligible party faithful to participate in the selection of candidates that will fly the flag of their parties. This will help eradicate excessive financial inducements that characterise the delegate system, so as deepen our democracy.

Awopeju and Martins (2023) carried out a study titled *Election, Money Politics and the Implications for Sustainability of Democracy in Nigeria* argued that although money politics contributes significantly to democracy, it also harms sustaining democracy in developing democracies such as Nigeria and other African countries. Due to this, the study examines the antecedents of money politics with a view to establishing the reasons responsible for money politics, the strengths and shortcomings of money politics and the implications it has on sustaining democracy in Nigeria. Making use of secondary sources of data, the study found that an increase in population cum high value of money, an increase in the number of political parties, high intensity of electoral contests and desperation to control government by the political class are the factors responsible for money bag politics. Even though money politics has its strengths, it has implications of encouraging looters, eroding the competence of the candidate, weakening political participation and undermining democratic governance in Nigeria. The study concluded that unregulated money politics in elections by political parties and politicians has a debilitating impact on sustaining democracy and that it is only the hostile stance of the government that can completely root out the pervasive money bag politics in Nigeria. The study recommended that the government should redesign the framework of money bag politics to ensure strict compliance by the political parties and other stakeholders in the conduct of elections in Nigeria.

Olabode (2021) carried out a study titled *Impact of Money Politics on Good Governance in South West Nigeria (2011-2019)* explored the impact of money politics on good governance in South West Nigeria (2011-2019). Five research questions were framed, while one hypothesis was formulated and tested for the study. From a population of 38,257,260, a sample of 400 respondents was drawn using the stratified sampling technique. The descriptive survey research design was used for the study. One instrument was utilised for the study. The questionnaire was a 27-item Money, Politics, and Good Governance Questionnaire (MPGGQ). The reliability of the MPGGQ was obtained using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient alpha value of 0.74. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis, while Chi-square statistics were used to test the research hypothesis. The study found that money politics impacts highly on good governance in Southwest Nigeria between 2011 and 2019, and money politics impacts highly on the emergence of people's choice of political leadership in Southwest Nigeria. Also, money politics have a high impact on the electoral system in the Southwest between 2011 and 2019 and have negative consequences on good governance. The extent to which money politics affected performance in office in the Southwest between 2011 and 2019 was great. Money/godfatherism, poverty, corruption and impunity, weak electoral body, deceit by politicians, desperation to win at all cost and weak electoral framework are the major causes of money politics in Southwest Nigeria. The study concluded that Money politics has obliterated the political process in the Southwest states of Nigeria and has impacted negatively on good governance. Money politics also impacted negatively on good governance and abuse of political office because of the political office holders. The study, among others, recommended that until the regulatory agencies responsible for monitoring of elections and sanctioning of offenders improve their efforts in minimising excessive use of money in politics of Southwest Nigeria, it will continue to produce incompetent leaders, and this will lead to bad governance and abuse of power as well as misuse of state resources for private gain.

Babatunde et al. (2019) conducted a study titled *Money Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Implications for Electoral Process and Democratic Consolidation* argued that money politics has gained concern in the international community as it threatens democratic sustainability across the globe. The menace seems to be the root of the political crisis in Africa, particularly in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, beginning from the return to civil rule in 1999. The integrity of the country's electoral process is apparently in doubt. Primarily, the study examined the implications of money politics in Nigeria's fourth republic for the electoral process and democratic consolidation. It was rooted in the classical elite and rational choice institutionalism theoretical frame. The study generated data from secondary sources, and the content analytical method was adopted. It found that in spite of the importance of money as an indispensable socioeconomic tool in party politics and election campaigns, the strong influence of money in politics has seriously discredited the electoral process in Nigeria since 1999. This discredit is attributed to mass poverty leading to over-reliance on the political system; influences of political godfathers, institutional decadence, poor democratic consciousness, desperation of contestants, and corrupt leadership that subvert the process.

Idowu and Etinosa (2013) conducted a study titled *Money, Politics, and Good Governance in Nigeria*. The study argued that since the quest for material accumulation and consolidation has remained the bane for seeking political power, various shades of persons with questionable moral bankruptcy will continue to flood our politic landscape unhindered to manipulate the instrumentality of state power to further their ill-conceived motives of looting the nation's wealth rather than address the urgent societal problems of poverty, hunger, infrastructural decay, rising unemployment, insecurity, to mention but a few. The study concluded by stating emphatically that there is an urgent necessity to put in place a workable constitutional framework that is people-oriented and empowers them with the ultimate sovereignty of choosing those to govern them; the 'demon' called money and its manipulative tendencies will continue to undermine the process of democratic governance in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research design, which was deemed suitable because it allowed for the examination of existing patterns, practices, and institutional processes without any manipulation of variables. The design provided a thorough understanding of how financial inducements affected delegate-based party primaries and the subsequent implications for governance outcomes. The research utilised secondary sources of data, drawing information from academic journals, books, conference papers, newspaper articles, official documents, electoral reports, policy papers, and other credible online resources. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis, where the collected materials were systematically reviewed, organised, and interpreted to identify recurring themes, trends, and relationships between money politics and the delegate system. This method enabled the researcher to critically assess the meanings, arguments, and perspectives presented in both the literature and documentary sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Influence of Money Politics on the Nigerian Delegate System, with Particular Focus on the Conduct of the 2023 Presidential Party Primaries

The 2023 Presidential party primaries in Nigeria exposed the significant impact of money politics on the delegate system and highlighted its consequences for democratic governance. Delegates, who are supposed to represent party members and make informed decisions on candidates for elective offices, continue to be the most common mechanism for conducting party primaries. Ideally, this system is meant to promote internal party democracy by ensuring fair representation and the selection of competent

candidates. In reality, however, the 2023 primaries showed that delegates became highly vulnerable to financial incentives, effectively turning them into assets to be purchased by aspirants willing to pay the highest amounts (Adedayo, 2022, cited in Okore & Onuoha, 2025). Reports from Eagle Square, Abuja, indicated that delegates received offers ranging from $5,000 to $15,000 to secure their votes.

The extensive use of cash payments to delegates not only distorted internal democratic processes within the parties but also had economic consequences. The surge in demand for dollars to fund delegate inducements contributed to the depreciation of the Nigerian naira, which dropped from N550–N570 in the black market to an all-time high of N595 just one week before the APC and PDP conventions (Mudashir et al., 2022). This scenario reflects a form of clientelism, where delegates negotiate their support through intermediaries in exchange for immediate or promised rewards rather than evaluating candidates based on competence or leadership ability (Nwagwu et al., 2022). Such practices compromise the credibility of the delegate system and raise serious questions about the quality of leadership and governance outcomes.

The 2023 primaries further illustrated how financial inducements have become entrenched in Nigerian political culture. Delegates reportedly demanded larger sums for higher offices, with Presidential aspirants allegedly paying up to $20,000 per delegate to secure votes (Musa, 2022). Despite warnings from the then Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, about the risk of moving toward plutocracy, delegates continued to auction their votes for personal gain. This situation demonstrates the tension between the intended democratic purpose of the delegate system and the corrupt practices that dominate internal party contests.

Candidate selection remains a core function of political parties, encompassing both internal party leadership positions and nominations for general elections. Scholars have emphasised that primaries are critical for party institutionalisation and the development of credible leadership (Okore & Onuoha, 2025; Schlesinger, 1991; Sartori, 1976). When delegate votes are monetised, however, the process no longer reflects merit and competence but rather favours aspirants with financial resources and strong networks. This undermines the integrity of party institutions and weakens the broader democratic system.

During the APC Presidential primaries, over twenty-five aspirants purchased nomination forms despite the high costs involved. Some, such as Chris Ngige and Timipre Sylva, withdrew following directives under the amended Electoral Act, leaving over twenty-three candidates to compete (Kunle, 2022, cited in Okore & Onuoha, 2025). The presence of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission did little to deter vote buying, with reports indicating that several delegates left the convention as millionaires due to the payments received (Kunle, 2022). Similarly, the PDP primaries witnessed widespread financial inducements, though strategic arrangements, such as Aminu Tambuwal stepping down, also influenced the outcome in favour of Atiku Abubakar (Kunle, 2022, cited in Okore & Onuoha, 2025).

Another notable feature of the 2023 Presidential primaries was the provision of accommodation and other amenities by aspirants to delegates, which allowed for close monitoring and control of delegate behaviour. The combination of monetary payments and logistical provisions demonstrates the deeply entrenched nature of money politics in delegate-based primaries, further eroding the principles of internal party democracy and threatening the emergence of competent leadership.

In all, the 2023 Presidential primaries of the APC and PDP illustrate that money politics had a profound influence on the Nigerian delegate system. Delegates were frequently swayed by financial incentives rather than acting as impartial representatives, creating a situation where political offices were effectively auctioned. This undermines the democratic function of the delegate system, weakens party institutionalisation, and has noteworthy implications for governance and accountability in Nigeria.

IMPLICATIONS OF MONETISED DELEGATE POLITICS ON THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Political parties are widely regarded as the foundation of democracy, providing the essential structure and framework for democratic governance to function effectively (Adele, 2001). In contemporary democracies, parties serve a dual role: they facilitate citizen participation and ensure representation, both of which are critical for a functioning democracy. Participation reflects the degree to which citizens are actively engaged in selecting their leaders, while representation involves elected officials acting in the interests of the public (Olarinmoye in Agbaje, 2005). In Nigeria, however, ordinary citizens are often excluded from meaningful involvement in candidate selection, particularly through the monetised delegate system. As a result, elected leaders tend to prioritise the interests of political elites over the general population, enacting policies that favour the ruling class rather than addressing societal needs.

Iboje (2009) supports this perspective, observing that political elites frequently assume they possess exclusive knowledge about what benefits society, thereby marginalising the views of ordinary citizens. This dominance by elites in both candidate selection and governance has contributed to Nigeria's limited socio-economic progress over twenty-two years of uninterrupted democracy since 1999. Given that political parties are inherently elitist and delegates themselves are part of this elite, policy decisions often reflect the interests of a narrow ruling class rather than the wider populace (Ajie, 2005). Consequently, democracy in Nigeria has been reduced to a system "of the few by the few and for the few," characterised by corruption, inefficiency, and intolerance for opposition.

Candidate selection is a crucial function of political parties, shaping not only who competes in elections but also the party's ideological and sociological identity (Katz, 2001). Research indicates that the methods employed in candidate selection directly affect the behaviour and performance of elected officials in office (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Mainwaring & Shugart, 1997). Katz and Mair (1995) argue that nomination procedures reflect both the internal workings of a party and the distribution of political power within a country. In Nigeria, the monetisation of delegate votes, particularly during the 2022 and 2023 presidential primaries of the PDP and APC, undermines these processes by privileging financial capacity over competence, ideology, or leadership capability.

The financial inducement of delegates carries significant consequences for accountability and governance. Ilo (2004) notes that when political office is treated as an investment that must be recovered, officeholders are more likely to divert public resources for personal gain. In Nigeria, high levels of delegate inducement mean elected officials often feel obliged to repay sponsors, diverting funds meant for public projects into private hands. This compromises the delivery of democratic dividends and threatens the consolidation of democratic governance.

Aluaigba (2009) underscores that inducement of delegates contradicts democratic ethics, weakening the foundations of democracy and reducing the effectiveness of political institutions. Huntington (1999) similarly emphasises that for democracy to thrive, principal government officials must be selected through competitive elections with broad citizen participation. In Nigeria, the monetisation of delegate votes restricts public involvement in candidate selection, undermining the legitimacy of party processes and democratic governance.

Monetised delegate politics also generates conflicts among political elites, which can disrupt party cohesion and hinder governance. After the 2022 PDP presidential primaries, divisions emerged, including the faction of G5 governors led by former Rivers State Governor Nyesome Wike, who opposed Atiku Abubakar's candidacy due to regional power considerations. In the APC, aspirants such as former Vice President Yemi Osinbajo and Rotimi Amaechi were sidelined following disputes over the primary processes. These elite divisions have direct implications for governance, affecting the performance of public officeholders, delaying policy implementation, and weakening democratic consolidation.

CONCLUSION

The delegate system plays an important role in selecting capable and trustworthy leaders in some advanced liberal democratic societies. Ideally, it ensures that party candidates represent the interests of the general public while promoting fairness, transparency, and accountability within parties. In Nigeria, however, the system has largely failed to meet these goals. Party primaries, especially high-profile ones like the 2023 Presidential primaries, were marked by irregularities, widespread vote-buying, and corruption. Instead of choosing candidates based on merit, the process became transactional, with political offices often going to the highest bidder.

This practice undermines democracy, weakens political parties, and reduces the quality of leadership. Leaders chosen through financial influence are more likely to serve the interests of party elites and financiers rather than the public, which harms governance, public services, and socio-economic development. In addition, the dominance of money politics creates conflicts among party elites, encourages clientelism, and limits citizen participation, further weakening the credibility of political parties and democratic institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended the following:

1. Political parties and electoral authorities should ensure the strict enforcement of laws and internal regulations to eliminate money politics during delegate-based primaries, with active monitoring and penalties for vote buying, to uphold the integrity of candidate selection and strengthen the delegate system.
2. Political parties should promote transparency, accountability, and merit-based candidate selection in primaries by establishing clear guidelines for delegate conduct and emphasising competence, experience, and leadership ability over financial inducements, to enhance the quality of leadership and strengthen democratic governance.

REFERENCES

1) Adele, J. (2001). Political parties and democracy in Nigeria. University Press.
2) Adeyi, E. M. (2006). Funding of political parties and candidates in Nigeria: Analysis of the past and present. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
3) Agbaje, A. (2005). Democracy and representation in Nigeria. Spectrum Books.
4) Ajie, H. (2005). Elitism and political development in Nigeria. Pan African Publishers.
5) Alfa, M. and Marangos, J. (2016). An empirical appraisal of the role of money in Nigerian politics. International Journal of Economic Policy in Emerging Economies, 9 (1)65–88
6) Aluaigba, R. (2009). Money, politics, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Centre for Democratic Studies.

7) Aspinall (2019) cited in Nwosu. K. (2010). Money, politics, and crisis of leadership in Nigeria: A critical evaluation of experiences in Nigeria's fourth republic. International Journal of Innovative Legal & Political Studies, 7 (4)Pp. 10-21
8) Awopeju, A. & Martins, L.O. (2023). Election, money politics and the implications for the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. Wukari International Studies Journal, 6 (1)
9) Babatunde, H. O., Shaibu, M. T. & Ariyo, O. O. (2019). Money politics in Nigeria's fourth republic: Implications for electoral process and democratic consolidation. Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science, 7 (4)34-42
10) Beetseh, K and Akpoo, T. (2015). Money, politics, and vote buying in Nigeria: A threat to democratic governance in Markudi local government area of Benue state. International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research (IJPAMR), 2 (5)
11) Diamond, L. (1988). Class, ethnicity and democracy in Nigeria: The failure of the first republic. Macmillan Press
12) Egwu, S. (2013). Farewell to electoral authoritarianism? Pathways to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. ACPRED Monograph, No. 3.
13) Enemuo, F. C. (1999). Approaches and methods to the study of politics. In Anifowose, R. &Enemuo, F. (eds.). Elements of Politics. Sam Iroaunsi Publication
14) Eversson, N. (2008). Political corruption and campaign finance. Department of Criminology Report Series, Printed by US-AB Stockholm University, Stockholm
15) Ezrim, G.E. (2010). Conceptualising Nigeria in a global state failure debate. www.unn.academia.edu. Retrieved on 17/10/2020
16) Gallagher, M., & Marsh, M. (1988). Candidate selection in comparative perspective. Sage Publications.
17) Gillon, S. M. (2000). "That's not what we meant to do", the politics of campaign finance reform. New York press
18) Heater, D. B. (1964). Ideas in the modern world. George G. Harrap & Co.Ltd.
19) Heywood, A. (1997). Politics. Macmillan Press
20) Huntington, S. (1999). The third wave: Democratisation in the late twentieth century. University of Oklahoma Press
21) Iboje, S. (2009). Elite domination and public policy in Nigeria. Nigerian Political Review
22) Idowu, C.A & Etinosa, E.M. (2013). Money, politics, and good governance in Nigeria. International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Reviews, 4 (2)
23) Ilo, O. (2004). Election investment and public office accountability in Nigeria. National Institute of Policy Studies
24) Katz, R. (2001). Party organisation and candidate selection. Sage Publications
25) Katz, R., & Mair, P. (1995). Changing models of party organisation and party democracy. Party Politics, 1(1), 5–28
26) Mainwaring, S., & Shugart, M. (1997). Presidentialism and democracy in Latin America. Cambridge University Press
27) Michels, R. (1965). First lectures in political sociology. Harper Torchbooks
28) Michels, R. (1966). Political parties. Free Press
29) Mosca, G. (1939). The ruling class. McGraw-Hill.
30) Ojo, E. O. (2006). Vote buying in Nigeria. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
31) Okore, M. O. & Onuoha, P.C. (2025). Delegate system and democratic consolidation in Nigeria: The 2022 PDP and APC presidential primary elections. Journal of Political Science and Leadership Research, 11 (10)
32) Olabode, O. (2021). Impact of money politics on good governance in South-west Nigeria (2011-2019). International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science. 5 (1)
33) Ovwasa, O. L. (2013). Money, politics, and vote buying in Nigeria: The bane of good governance. Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences. 4 (3). pp. 1-19
34) Pareto, V. (1935). The mind and society. A treatise on general sociology. Dower
35) Tsaro, C. (2020). The role of delegates and the emergence of credible leaders from party primaries in Nigeria. NILDS Journal of Democratic Studies, 3 (1)
36) Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2025). Political Systems and Democratic Governance Diagnostic. Developing an approach