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Abstract

Funding of political parties and elections in Nigeria remains contentious, particularly regarding funding sources and their implications for governance. Although previous studies have examined political party financing and its consequences, limited attention has been paid to the constitutional framework governing political party funding and its implications for governance. This study addresses this gap by analysing the constitutional provisions regulating political party funding and assessing their implications for good governance in Nigeria. Data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary data comprised the author's observations and Key Informant Interviews with an academic, journalist, lawyer, human rights activist, businessman, student and community leader selected through convenience sampling. Secondary data were drawn from official government documents, textbooks, academic journals, newspapers, and internet sources. The findings revealed that the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) and the Electoral Act 2022 prescribe legitimate sources of political party funding and sanctions for violations, yet these provisions are frequently breached with little or no enforcement. Consequently, illicit political financing entrenches money politics and elite domination of political parties, undermines democratic accountability, and weakens governance processes. The study concludes that effective enforcement of political finance regulations is indispensable for strengthening electoral integrity, restoring public trust, and improving the quality of democratic governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Electoral Act, Electoral Funding, Governance, Money Politics, Political Parties

Introduction

Political parties could be seen as a group of people coming together, with the utmost goal of contesting elections to hold power in the government. In other words, the principal goal of any political party is to prevail over the others, get to power, and stay in it (Schumpeter, 2003). It is an incontestable fact, that there can be no democratic governance without a political party. Given its role in bringing about a democratic leader to manage the governance and administrative activities of the country, a political party is indispensable in democratic processes and activities.

Political parties are also essential in deciding, regulating, and nominating candidates for various positions to represent them in the election (ACE, 2024). It must be noted, however, that a country could practice either a one-party, two-party, or multiparty system, depending on the constitution of such a country. Having more than one political party could benefit the electorates in some ways. It accords them the opportunity to select their choices from the available political parties in the country. It allows the electorates to decide on the preferred candidates vying for different positions in the elections. Similarly, having more than one political party drives various parties to present their best candidates in the elections. For these reasons, political parties could be seen as an essential institution in a democratic setting. Therefore, the institution must be made and allowed to function effectively.

Funding remains a key to the effective functioning of political parties. Thus, it would be difficult, if not impossible for political parties to carry out their agenda to the public without funding. In essence, the functionality of any political party is largely dependent on adequate funding “which can be legal or illegal” (Ayeni, 2019). The opprobrium surrounding the financing of political parties illegally and its hijacking by the ‘moneybags politicians’ made the Nigerian government under General Ibrahim Babangida partly responsible for the funding of political parties (Oji, 2014). The funding of political parties by the Nigerian government has since stopped.

Since the commencement of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic in 1999, however, most political parties have fallen under the control of a few “rich” cliques who offered substantial sums of money to finance the political parties' affairs and activities. These rich cliques could be seen as “political dealers” who have invested large amounts of money into political parties and expect a commensurate interest in their political investments (Adegbami & Uche, 2016; Adegbami & Adepoju, 2017; Adegbami et al., 2018). The fact that they are major financier of the parties allowed them to wield powers for controlling the party's activities. This enables them to easily hijacked the party’s structures and have continued determining who gets to various political positions and offices at every election (Adegbami & Ganiyu, 2019).

Given the importance of political parties in advancing political activities and other governance activities of the country, it thus calls for concern on the proper way to finance political parties. This is because the funding of political parties in the country has continued to generate arguments and counterarguments, and arouse public condemnation, especially on the issue of illicit sources of financing political parties and their tendency to compromise electoral processes, free and fair elections, and how this can hamper the quality of governance. Given the foregoing, the study analyses the constitutional provision for sourcing funds for political parties’ activities in Nigeria; examines the effects of illicit funding of political parties on the party system; and how this has impacted good governance in Nigeria.

Constitutional Provision for Sourcing Funds for Political Parties in Nigeria

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) provided how political parties should be funded. The Constitution equally grants the powers to monitor the sources of funding of political parties in Nigeria to the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). In addition, the powers to assess and give directives on campaign finances and scrutinize the sources of political parties’ funds are also given to the Independent Electoral Commission. The Constitution also provides sanctions in case of flouting the stipulated laws on political parties and campaign finance. The purpose of regulating political parties' finances is to avert some unethical behaviour that can hamper political activities and to create transparency and accountability on how money is raised and spent, especially in electioneering processes. According to Section 225(1-2), of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended):

Every political party shall, at such times and in such manner as the Independent National Electoral Commission publish a statement of its assets and liabilities. Every political party shall submit to the Independent National Electoral Commission a detailed annual statement and analysis of its sources of funds and other assets together with a similar statement of its expenditure in such form as the Commission may require (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

The constitution in its Section 225(2-6) warns political parties from holding or possessing funds or other assets outside Nigeria; and from retaining any funds or assets remitted or sent from outside the

country. And, in case funds or other assets are from outside the country, such funds or assets must be paid over or transferred to the Commission within twenty-one days of their receipt. The constitution equally empowers the Electoral Commission to give directions to political parties concerning the books or records of financial transactions which they shall keep and to examine all such books and records.

Section 221 of the Constitution states that no association or organisation other than a political party shall donate or contribute to fund a political party or the election expenses of any candidate at any election. Similarly, the Electoral Act 2022, 86(1) states that:

Every political party shall submit to the Commission a detailed annual statement of assets and liabilities and analysis of its sources of funds and other assets, together with a statement of its expenditure including hard and soft copies of its list of members or in such a form as the Commission may require.

In addition to the above, the Electoral Act 2022, in its Section 87(1), states that the Electoral Commission has the power to limit the amount of money and other assets an individual can contribute to a candidate or a political party. The Commission can also demand information on the amount donated and the source of the funds.

The Electoral Act 2022, 88(2)-(7), however, sets the limit of election expenses of a presidential candidate at N5,000,000,000, while the sum of N1,000,000,000 is set as a limit for a governorship candidate. The maximum amounts that can be spent on elections by the candidates vying for Senatorial and House of Representatives seats are N100,000,000 and N70,000,000, respectively. With regards to the State Assembly election, a candidate is expected not to spend more than N30,000,000. And, candidates for the Local Government Chairman and Councillors are allowed to spend a maximum of N30,000,000 and N5,000,000, respectively, on the election. In addition to the above, a sum of N50,000,000 is set as the maximum amount that can be donated by an individual or other entity (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022).

Nigeria's Constitution offers sanctions for disobeying the stipulated political party and campaign finance laws. On the contrary, however, political campaign funds have always exceeded the limit set. Beyond this is the fact that the sources of the funds cannot be verified, and how the funds are spent is not usually disclosed (Osigwe, Onyimadu & Onyeaku, 2019). For instance, during the general elections of 2015 and 2019, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), the two dominant parties in Nigeria, employed their power of incumbency to raise funds indiscriminately without following the Constitution or Electoral Act. In essence, these major political parties sustained the parties' activities and elections by exploiting the governmental levels they controlled. In addition, the parties, through the power of incumbency, coerced various organisations that have business relations with the State to donate generously (Nwozor et al., 2021). Till now, no step has been taken to sanction these political parties for contravening the constitution of Nigeria and the Electoral Act.

Similarly, during the preparation for the 2023 general elections, the Nigerian Labour Party (LP) gathered money from various sources, some of which were against the rules and regulations guiding political party funding. Some months after the general elections, crises broke out within the party, in which the National Working Committee (NWC) was alleged to have misappropriated over N3 billion purportedly raised for the 2023 campaign. The National Treasurer of the party, Mrs. Oluchi Oparah, directly accused the National Chairman of the party, Barrister Julius Abure, of misappropriating over N3 billion of the money raised for the 2023 campaigns. In Mrs. Oluchi Oparah's words,

These funds have completely vanished under Abure's oversight – with zero paper trail. While on a fundraising tour in the United States in August 2023, Mr. Abure and his cronies raised hundreds of thousands of dollars from the party's diaspora community. To date, he has not declared a single dollar to me or the NWC, essentially stealing donations meant for the party's development. Indeed, not a single cent of donations received was ever paid into any of the party's accounts (Isuwa, 2024, para. 4-5).

Despite continuous contravention of the existing laws guiding political parties' funding, it is disheartening to note that the concerned institutions have not taken special attention or action to sanction

those people and political parties involved in the illegal practices of illicit funding. Going by the above, it is obvious that the dominant political parties in Nigeria, as well as their members, generated their election funds from diverse sources, some of which were illegal and without due regard to the limit stipulated by the 2022 Electoral Act and the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended). This suggests, that the so-called 2022 Electoral Act and the 1999 Nigerian Constitution are mere paper tigers. This has caused many of the elections conducted in Nigeria to be compromised, and the quality of governance to be constrained.

Illicit Funding, Political Party and Good Governance in Nigeria

Political party funding or finance refers to resources, especially money gathered to sponsor political party activities. In other words, it is the money put together and used in promoting the interests of the political party and its candidates. The sources or means of gathering money for political activities go a long way in determining the kind of governance a member from that particular political party will offer when getting to power or public office. In Nigeria, different political parties generate funds from various means, many of which are not revealed to the Independent Electoral Commission, and how they expended the money is shrouded in secrecy, contrary to the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) and the Electoral Act 2022 stipulations. In this section, therefore, attempts will be made to discuss the effects of illicit funding on the political party system and how this is affecting good governance in Nigeria. Some of these effects on the political system are:

1. **Promotion of Political Godfatherism and Moneybags Politicians:** funding of political parties illicitly in Nigeria has been one of the reasons political godfatherism and moneybags' politicians continue to flourish. Many promising young politicians without enough money to project and pursue their political ambitions always look for godfathers and moneybags political leaders to fund their ambitions. Godfathers and moneybags' politicians, having realised the potential of these young politicians, do agree to assist them, but with conditions, which may include swearing the oaths of allegiance, agreeing to bring political returns to them, e.g. money and other accompanying benefits from time to time (Adegbami & Ganiyu, 2019). Anytime the agreements are not strictly met, it becomes a problem for this set of politicians, as the godfathers would not want anyone to challenge their authority. This can cause disruptions in governance and thereby impede good governance.
2. **Hijacking of Political Party Structures:** illicit political party funding has created avenues for the money-bags politicians to easily hijack the political structures of the party, and take over the control of its activities. With their financial power, they easily buy over the who is who or those who matter within the party. The slogan "everyone has a price", as commonly used in the country, always applies in this situation. The money-bags politicians armed with this slogan go all out to persuade the important party members by offering them enough money and other compensations. With enough money doled out to him or her, a typical Nigerian politician will easily forsake his or her principles. Apart from hijacking the party structures, money-bag politicians decided who got what and when in political offices.
3. **Politics of the Highest Bidders:** The practice of the highest bidders' politics is encouraged through illicit political party financing. It is a practice whereby a candidate who can pay enough money to the rightful clique within the political party gets nominated for a preferred political post or position. In other words, any candidates vying for one political office or the other, who have huge sums of money, always have an undue advantage over others. In essence, candidates who can spend money easily win the party nomination process and are most likely to win elections. Suffice it to say, differences in the amount of money put into political activities by one party against the other, and one candidate against the other, enhance one party and its candidate alike to get to political positions and offices and constrain the other party and its candidates.
4. **Politics of Exclusion:** The illicit political party funding has continued to encourage and promote politics of exclusion in Nigeria. The practice has created a situation whereby those who do not have enough money to spend are sidelined. In other words, a few candidates with enough money to throw about are always selected and presented to represent the party in elections. The practice has continued to have far-reaching effects on good governance, as people who spend so much

money to finance their elections do find all means to get back the money expended on elections immediately, once they get to public office.

5. **Loyalty to Few Personalities Against the Generality of People:** Some candidates whose election processes are being sponsored by political godfathers and moneybags' politicians are usually loyal and more committed to their financiers/sponsors than those they represent. In essence, those who fund the electoral processes, political parties, and candidates do influence political decisions through those they have sponsored. When this happens, there can be no good governance, the governance system will be filled with self-serving people, who turn the governance business into a private business, and public resources into personal (Osigwe, Onyimadu & Onyeaku, 2019), this hampers good governance.
6. **Inhibition of a Free and Fair Election:** the political parties and their campaigns' finance regulations are necessitated to ensure that the elections are free and fair on the one hand and to avert the political party in power from using the power of incumbency to its advantage and to the disadvantage of other political parties during elections. Due to its access to the public purse, the ruling parties used public funds to facilitate and increase their chances of winning elections. The incumbent party could procure or engage in vote-buying using public funds (Olakanye, 2022). This process usually brings unpopular candidates into power, which is antithetical to good governance and impedes national development.
7. **Promotion of Unmerited Candidates:** Illicit funding of political parties in Nigeria has created a situation whereby preferences are given to unmerited candidates. These unmerited candidates are preferred simply because they can offer enough money to party leaders and sponsor party activities. Therefore, those candidates who can offer a substantial sum of money easily have their ways of becoming the flagbearers of political parties in elections. This is harmful to good governance because most of the candidates in this category will first look for how they could recover the money they have spent in procuring elections, thereby compromising good governance.

While analyzing the cause of illicit funding, Ayeni (2019) argues that the high poverty rate in Nigeria is a major contributor to illicit political parties' funding. Poverty has been a valid reason for the electorate's demand for money from politicians vying for political posts and positions. The people needed jobs to make money, but there were limited jobs available; thus, they could not make money. The people, therefore, see political parties and politics as one of the easiest ways to make money in Nigeria. Therefore, they continue to demand money from the politicians. The monetary demand always puts enormous pressure on politicians. Any politician who cannot meet these demands has no option but to patronize financiers to bail him or her out. When this happens, the politicians will need to compensate their financiers when they get to public office. At the end of the day, the citizens are at the receiving end of this unhealthy association. Put differently, the effects of the unhealthy relationship on the political system are enormous as it inhibits national development.

Similarly, the problem of incumbency and the desire to stay in power perpetually, contribute to illicit funding in Nigeria. It is no news in Nigeria that the political parties in power in Nigeria always use their power of incumbency and dip their hands into State resources to fund their parties and their candidates, putting other political parties at a disadvantage and staying glued to power. The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), the two dominant political parties in Nigeria, used their power of incumbency to divert the state resources into the general elections in 2015 and 2019, respectively (Nwozor, et al., 2021). Thus, the money that belonged to the generality of the people of Nigeria was used to pursue personal goals and ambitions. All these practices have continued to have far-reaching effects on good governance, especially in providing social services delivery.

On good governance, illicit political parties' funding effects are unquantifiable. Illicit political parties' funding has continued to hinder the manifestation of good governance in Nigeria. Illicit political finance has been linked "to the underperformance and loss of credibility of democratic governments". The illicit political parties' finances have continued to undermine fair representation, and it is, consequently, taking its toll on democratic governance. Anywhere political activities are financed

through illicit funds, elections and other institutions of such countries become façades and good governance becomes a mirage (Kupferschmidt, 2009).

The interviews conducted with selected respondents, on how illicit funding of political parties affects good governance in Nigeria corroborate the above analysis. According to one of the interviewees¹

Illicit funding means sponsoring political parties or candidates in a manner that violates the extant laws regulating political parties and election processes. Illicit funding of political parties breeds corruption, lack of accountability, unhealthy rivalries, and undue negotiations for political positions and “political transactions”. This can make a party in power unresponsive to people's yearnings and desires and, in the long run, undermine national development.

Illicit funding of political parties as seen by another interviewee²

negates the basis of democracy as a system of government. It also gives room for favouring the benefactors, anytime, any day, instead of asking the benefactors to follow due process when transacting business with the government. Illicit funding allows benefactors to enjoy undue advantages while transacting business with the government, e.g., in the awarding of contracts, every protocol is broken for them. Merit is equally jettisoned to compensate them. How will this not affect good governance?

Furthermore, a Law student during the interview has this to say concerning the illicit funding of political parties in Nigeria³

Illicit funding in Nigeria has been one of the reasons Nigerian political leaders in public offices become tools in the hands of their godfathers. These godfathers, in turn, use political officeholders and government agencies to launder money. This has continued to cost the country its development and undermined its pathway to good governance.

Another interviewee states that⁴

Illicit funding of political parties can be detrimental to good governance. Illicit funding creates room for prioritisation of special interests over and above the public good. Nigeria has a history of illicit funding in politics, with cases of politicians receiving funds from illegal sources or engaging in corrupt practices to finance their campaigns. This has contributed to a culture of corruption and weakened governmental institutions. The government in power deliberately imposed unsuitable persons to head important institutions to weaken them. This is to cover up their corrupt practices during elections or planned corrupt practices to recoup campaign funds.

A Lagos-based lawyer, while citing a case and the effect of illicit funding of political parties in Nigeria, avers that⁵

Illicit funding of political parties can erode public trust in institutions, distort policymaking, and ultimately weaken the foundations of democracy. In most cases, the government, while trying to protect the interests of its financiers, formulates and implements certain policies. The arms deal scandal that involved Colonel Dasuki, a former Security Adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan, was a good

¹ A businessman in the Ijoku area, Sagamu, Ogun State, Nigeria.

² A postgraduate student at the Department of Public Administration, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria.

³ An undergraduate Law Student at the Osun State University, Ifetedo Campus, Nigeria.

⁴ A journalist based in Lagos, Nigeria.

⁵ A Lawyer based in Lagos, Nigeria.

example of how illicit funding of political parties can affect good governance. Funds meant to prosecute the war against Boko haram were diverted into funding the 2015 election.

Another interviewee stated that⁶

Illicit funding of political parties discourages adherence to ethical behaviour from political parties and compromises the national values system. Beyond this, it easily weakens the anti-corruption war, especially when the government in power can remove and appoint the head of institutions at will. The government in power can easily remove the head of the anti-corruption institution that doesn't want to cover its financial recklessness.

According to another interviewee⁷

The effect of illicit funding may be in many forms. For instance, political parties that rely on illicit funding are more likely to engage in corruption and misuse public resources for personal gain. This tends to result in poor governance and a lack of accountability. I have several examples in Nigeria. For instance, in the 2023 general election, Nyesom Wike, a governor (now former governor) of Rivers State, in the South-South, Nigeria, single-handedly bought election nomination forms for all the political aspirants in his party and funded their elections. All his aspirants in the party won the elections, but there have been reports of a breach of agreement between the 'godfather' and officeholders in the State. Consequently, the Rivers State House of Assembly had been locked for more than six months because of a power tussle. The question is, how can this mess translate to good governance?

Another interviewee⁸, a Lecturer comprehensively analysed the illicit funding of political parties in Nigeria and how it has continued to be a bane to good governance.

The bedrock of democracy is a free, fair, credible, and acceptable election. Political parties that rely on illicit funding may also engage in vote-buying and other forms of electoral manipulation. Since the return of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, several cases of vote-buying have been reported. Many political parties rely on different forms of manipulation, including judicial manipulation, to gain power. In the 2023 general election, for instance, Ahmed Lawan (a Senate President then, now a former) and Godswill Akpabio, two aspirants from the All Progressive Congress political party, did not participate in the primary election for the Senatorial seat organised by their party because they were targeting the Presidential position. After they lost the ticket to the incumbent President, Bola Tinubu, they came back and challenged those aspirants who won the Senatorial tickets of the party in court, and the tickets were handed over to them. Two of them are currently in the National Assembly, one is a member, and the other is the Senate President. The decision of the court to declare them the winner of a primary election in which they did not participate has generated a lot of debate among the general populace. All these acts undermine the integrity of the democratic process and the unfair distribution of power.

In essence, illicit funding of political parties has continued to shrink the political space in Nigeria. It has become a key factor in deciding who participates in electoral politics in many ways. To start with, for a candidate to show interest in contesting for a particular post, such a candidate needs to pay nomination fees for the party. In contemporary times, nomination fees have become so high that only the rich can afford them and participate in party primaries. In their desperation to source nomination fees, many candidates went the extra mile and got the money by hook or crook. Many of them have to link up with moneybags' politicians or political godfathers to realise their political dreams.

⁶ A Human Rights Activist, based in Ibadan, Nigeria.

⁷ A Community Leader in Ile-Ife, Southwest, Nigeria.

⁸ A Lecturer at the Department of Political Science, KolaDaisi University, Ibadan, Nigeria.

The political godfatherism practice has not helped the matter of good governance but has compounded the country's problems. Godfathers, for instance, use donations to political parties, bribe party officials, and sponsor candidates for political posts to actualise their political preferences. The godfathers, after they might have placed their godsons in different political offices, control both political parties and the political officeholders. At the end of the day, those in political offices are just in office and not in power; as such, the godfathers run the government from the background. The godfathers keep State apparatuses in their hands and transact the country as a business venture from which they generate interest. This practice has continued to hinder good governance in Nigeria.

In essence, illicit funding of political parties encourages a culture of money-driven politics, thereby reducing political offices to a means of getting and sharing the "national cake" among political cliques, operated like a cult, rather than rendering to the public essential services. The institutionalisation of illicit funding in political parties and political processes has rendered governmental institutions in Nigeria impotent, as unethical practices continue to blossom in Nigeria's public offices, and bad governance becomes sustained with its attendant effects on national development.

Summary and Conclusion

It is an incontestable fact that there can be no democratic governance without a political party. Given its role in bringing about a democratic leader to manage the governance and administrative activities of the country, a political party is indispensable in democratic processes and activities. For these reasons, political parties could be seen as an essential institution in a democratic setting; therefore, the institution must be made and allowed to function effectively. Funding remains a key to the effective functioning of political parties, as it would be difficult, if not impossible, for political parties to carry out their agenda without funding. However, funding of political party activities in Nigeria has always been marred by financial scandals. And, this has continued to generate arguments and counterarguments, and arouse public opprobrium, especially on the issue of illicit sources of financing political parties and elections, and their effects on the quality of governance. The illicit sources of generating funds for political party formation and processes, and procuring elections have continued to hamper good governance and national development in Nigeria. The study thus concluded that until stringent measures are taken to exterminate the illicit funding of political activities and procuring elections, through illicit funds, citizens' trust in election matters will not be preserved, and elections will not be free and fair. Consequently, the quality of governance will continue to be hindered.

Key Informants Interviewees (KIIs) Checklist

Interview with: a Businessman in the Ijoku area, Sagamu, Ogun State, Nigeria, June 27, 2024.

Interview with: a Postgraduate Student at the Department of Public Administration, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria, June 27, 2024.

Interview with: an undergraduate Law Student at the Osun State University, Ifetedo Campus, Nigeria, June 28, 2024.

Interview with: a Journalist based in Lagos, Nigeria, June 27, 2024

Interview with: a Lawyer based in Lagos, Nigeria, June 27, 2024

Interview with: a Human Rights Activist, based in Ibadan, Nigeria, June 22, 2024.

Interview with: a Community Leader in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, June 22, 2024.

Interview with: a Lecturer at the Department of Political Science, KolaDaisi University, Ibadan, Nigeria, June 27, 2024.

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