

Political Behaviour and The Funding of Political Parties in Nigeria

Olubunmi Sandra Agbor

National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Jos - Nigeria

sandraagbor294@gmail.com

doi:<https://doi.org/10.37745/gjpsa.2013/vol13n24251>

Published: June 17, 2025

Citation: Agbor O.S. (2025) Political Behaviour and The Funding of Political Parties in Nigeria, *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration* 13 (2) 42-51

Abstract: *The problem addressed is the lack of clarity regarding the impact of political behaviour on the funding mechanisms of political parties and the broader implications for governance in Nigeria. This study examines the dynamics of political behaviour and the funding of political parties in Nigeria, with a focus on how political actions and party financing interact to influence democratic processes. Anchored in the Rational Choice Theory of political behaviour, as introduced by Anthony Downs in An Economic Theory of Democracy (1957), the study explores how individuals and political parties make strategic decisions based on perceived benefits and costs. The content analysis method was employed to critically examine relevant literature, political campaigns, and party financing strategies within the Nigerian political context. Findings reveal that political behaviour significantly impacts the source and allocation of funds, with party funding often influenced by the pursuit of power and political patronage. Furthermore, political financing is characterised by a lack of transparency and accountability, leading to potential corruption. Based on these findings, recommendations are proposed: first, a need for stricter regulations and transparency in party financing to ensure fair competition and reduce the influence of money in politics; second, the promotion of political behaviour that prioritises democratic values over individual gains, thereby fosters more inclusive and accountable political processes.*

Keywords: political behaviour, party funding, rational choice theory, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In any democratic society, political behaviour and the funding of political parties play a crucial role in determining the direction, quality, and transparency of governance. Political behaviour—defined as the activities, attitudes, and choices of individuals and groups in relation to politics—shapes electoral outcomes and influences public policy. In Nigeria, political behaviour is deeply intertwined with socio-economic conditions, ethno-religious affiliations, and patron-client relationships, making it a complex and often controversial aspect of the political landscape

(Ibeanu, 2021). The nature and sources of funding for political parties also serve as a key determinant of the integrity of the democratic process, impacting the level of inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability in political competition.

Political parties in Nigeria are central to the mobilisation of the electorate, articulation of interests, and the presentation of candidates for elective positions. However, their financial operations have been largely opaque, raising concerns about illicit funding, vote-buying, and the dominance of money over ideology and policy. The monetisation of politics in Nigeria has become deeply entrenched, with political actors relying heavily on wealthy sponsors, corporate interests, and, in some cases, proceeds from corruption and criminal networks to finance campaigns and party activities (Ogundiya & Akinola, 2020). This trend has not only exacerbated political exclusion but has also fuelled a culture of impunity and weakened institutional checks and balances.

Moreover, political behaviour in Nigeria is often shaped by immediate material gains rather than long-term ideological commitments or policy preferences. Electoral choices are frequently influenced by ethno-regional sentiments, vote trading, and patronage, rather than critical evaluation of candidates' competence or manifestoes (Omodia, 2022). This behaviour is partly reinforced by the way political parties are funded, as aspirants are required to make significant financial contributions in order to secure party tickets or internal support, thereby sidelining capable but financially disadvantaged individuals.

Despite efforts by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and civil society to promote financial transparency and reform campaign financing, the enforcement of regulations on political party funding remains weak. The Electoral Act 2022, though it stipulates limits on campaign expenditures and mandates political parties to disclose sources of funding, has not been fully operationalised or complied with (INEC, 2023). Political parties often flout these provisions with little or no consequences, undermining democratic values and public trust in the political process.

Statement of the Problem

The relationship between political behaviour and the funding of political parties in Nigeria poses a significant threat to the consolidation of democracy. One of the most critical problems is the undue influence of money in politics, which distorts political behaviour and reduces electoral competition to a transactional exercise. Political parties often prioritise candidates with access to wealth, thereby marginalising citizens who lack financial resources but possess the competence and vision to lead. This has contributed to the proliferation of godfatherism, vote-buying, and the erosion of internal party democracy (Ademola & Ibrahim, 2021).

Another major issue is the lack of transparency and accountability in the financial practices of political parties. Despite statutory requirements, most parties do not submit audited financial reports to INEC, nor do they disclose the identities of major donors. This opacity creates fertile ground for illicit financial flows, money laundering, and the capture of the political system by

vested interests, thereby compromising national development and democratic governance (Transparency International, 2022).

Furthermore, the monetisation of politics has led to a situation where public office is viewed primarily as an investment opportunity rather than a platform for service. Politicians often resort to corrupt practices to recoup campaign expenses, thereby institutionalising rent-seeking behaviour and weakening public institutions. The electorate, on the other hand, is socialised into a culture of immediate gratification, expecting cash and material inducements in exchange for political support (Uadiale, 2022). This type of political behaviour undermines issue-based politics and sustains a cycle of underdevelopment and misgovernance.

Additionally, the regulatory framework and enforcement mechanisms for political finance in Nigeria are grossly inadequate. INEC lacks the institutional capacity and political will to enforce compliance with campaign finance laws. The absence of effective monitoring, coupled with limited civic awareness and judicial inaction, enables political parties and candidates to operate with impunity (INEC, 2023). As a result, the political space remains heavily skewed in favour of the wealthy elite, restricting democratic participation and deepening political inequality.

In sum, the nexus between political behaviour and the funding of political parties in Nigeria presents a critical challenge to democratic deepening. Unless urgent reforms are implemented to ensure transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in party financing, Nigeria's democracy risks remaining a façade—controlled not by the will of the people, but by the power of money.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study examined Political Behaviour and the Funding of Political Parties in Nigeria. In specific, the study seeks to:

- i. Examine the influence of political funding sources on the voting patterns and political behaviour of citizens in Nigeria.
- ii. Analyses the role of campaign financing in shaping the strategies and operations of political parties in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

Political Behaviour

Political behaviour refers to the actions and attitudes of individuals or groups in relation to political processes, including participation in elections, engagement with political parties, public opinion, and political decision-making. Scholars have widely studied political behaviour as a means of understanding how citizens interact with political systems and how their choices influence democratic governance.

According to Dalton and Klingemann (2021), political behaviour encompasses both conventional forms of participation—such as voting, campaigning, and attending political meetings—and

unconventional activities, including protests and civil disobedience. These behaviours are shaped by several factors, including political socialisation, media influence, party affiliation, economic conditions, and institutional structures.

Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (2020) argue that political behaviour is not merely an individual activity but also a function of social networks and group identities. They suggest that individuals are more likely to participate politically when they are mobilised by peers, communities, or institutions. This underscores the significance of socio-political contexts in understanding how political engagement occurs.

In the Nigerian context, political behaviour is deeply influenced by ethnicity, religion, patronage networks, and historical political experiences. As Omodia (2022) notes, the nature of political behaviour in Nigeria reflects a complex interplay between formal democratic institutions and informal socio-cultural dynamics. For example, voter behaviour in Nigeria is often aligned with ethnic and regional affiliations rather than ideological commitments, revealing a pattern of identity-based political alignment.

Furthermore, the funding of political parties significantly influences political behaviour in Nigeria. Illegitimate sources of political finance and the absence of transparency often distort political participation and reduce citizens' trust in democratic institutions (Uji & Bamidele, 2023). Consequently, understanding political behaviour within such a context requires an analysis of both systemic factors—such as the legal framework regulating political finance—and behavioural factors like voter awareness and political literacy.

In summary, political behaviour is a multifaceted concept that encompasses a wide range of activities and attitudes shaped by individual, institutional, and contextual variables. In democratic systems like Nigeria's, studying political behaviour offers insights into how governance can be strengthened by fostering inclusive, transparent, and participatory political processes.

Political Party Funding

Political party funding plays a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of electoral competition, policy formulation, and democratic representation in Nigeria. Understanding the intricacies of party financing is essential for comprehending the broader challenges and opportunities facing the country's political landscape. In Nigeria, political parties derive funding from a diverse array of sources, including public subsidies, private donations, membership dues, and income-generating activities. However, the dominance of private financing, particularly from wealthy individuals and corporate entities, has raised concerns regarding transparency, accountability, and undue influence. According to Oyewole (2019), political parties in Nigeria often rely on contributions from affluent elites, popularly known as "godfathers," who provide financial support in exchange for political patronage and influence. This phenomenon perpetuates a culture of dependency and clientelism within the political arena, wherein parties prioritize the interests of their benefactors over those of the electorate.

Nigeria has enacted legislation aimed at regulating political party financing and promoting transparency in the electoral process. The Electoral Act of 2010, for instance, introduced provisions requiring parties to disclose their financial records, impose limits on campaign expenditures, and establish oversight mechanisms for monitoring compliance. However, the implementation and enforcement of these regulations have been marred by challenges such as weak institutional capacity, inadequate monitoring mechanisms, and political interference. A study by Afolabi (2018) highlights the limited effectiveness of Nigeria's regulatory framework in curbing illicit practices, as political actors exploit loopholes and engage in circumvention strategies to evade scrutiny.

The manner in which political parties are funded in Nigeria has profound implications for the country's democratic governance. Opaque financial practices, undue influence from vested interests, and the lack of accountability undermine the integrity of electoral processes, erode public trust, and perpetuate systemic inequalities. Research by Olaniyi and Oyewole (2020) underscores how the nexus between political party funding and corruption exacerbates social and economic disparities, as resources are diverted away from public goods and services towards the enrichment of political elites. Moreover, the concentration of financial resources in the hands of a few undermines the principle of political equality and stifles the participation of marginalized groups in the political process.

Political party funding in Nigeria is a complex phenomenon that reflects the broader challenges facing the country's democratic governance. From the dominance of private financing to the inadequacies of regulatory mechanisms, addressing the systemic issues underlying party funding requires concerted efforts from both state and non-state actors. Moving forward, strengthening transparency and accountability measures, enhancing oversight mechanisms, and promoting civic engagement are crucial steps towards fostering a political environment that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of all Nigerians.

Empirical Review of related literature

Ajayi et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive study examining the influence of political funding on corruption in Nigeria. Their findings suggest a significant correlation between the sources of political party funding and the level of corruption within these parties. The study highlights that parties relying heavily on private donations, especially from corporations and wealthy individuals, tend to be more susceptible to corruption. Ojo (2019) delves into the nexus between electoral campaign financing and corruption in Nigeria. Through a qualitative analysis of electoral campaigns, the study reveals how the lack of transparency in campaign financing contributes to corrupt practices within political parties. Furthermore, it emphasizes the role of illicit funds in distorting electoral processes and perpetuating systemic corruption.

Nnamdi (2020) explores the legal framework and regulatory challenges surrounding political party funding in Nigeria. The study highlights deficiencies in existing laws and regulations, which create loopholes for corrupt practices, such as undisclosed donations and misappropriation of public

funds. It calls for stronger enforcement mechanisms and institutional reforms to enhance transparency and accountability in political finance. In a comparative analysis, Okonjo (2017) examines the impact of foreign influence on political party funding and corruption in Nigeria. The study underscores the role of external actors, including foreign governments and multinational corporations, in shaping the financial landscape of Nigerian politics. It argues that undue foreign influence exacerbates corruption by promoting vested interests and undermining democratic principles.

Adeyemi and Ibrahim (2021) investigate the role of civil society oversight and anti-corruption measures in mitigating political party corruption in Nigeria. Drawing on case studies and empirical data, the study highlights the importance of civil society organizations in promoting transparency, monitoring campaign financing, and advocating for electoral reforms. It underscores the need for collaborative efforts between civil society, government agencies, and international partners to combat corruption effectively. The empirical literature on political parties funding and corruption in Nigeria underscores the complex interplay between financial resources, regulatory frameworks, and democratic governance. While existing studies offer valuable insights into the dynamics of corruption within political parties, further research is needed to address gaps in knowledge and inform evidence-based policy interventions aimed at enhancing accountability and integrity in Nigerian politics.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the *Rational Choice Theory* of political behaviour, originally propounded by Anthony Downs in his seminal work “*An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957)”. The theory assumes that political actors—both voters and politicians—act based on self-interest, making decisions aimed at maximising personal gains and minimising losses. Downs argued that individuals are rational actors who weigh costs and benefits before engaging in political activities, including funding or supporting political parties. Political parties, in turn, are seen as vehicles for securing power and distributing benefits to their supporters.

Assumption of the Theory

A core assumption of the theory is that party financing is motivated by strategic interests. Individuals or groups fund political parties not merely out of ideological alignment but in anticipation of rewards such as government contracts, policy influence, or protection of business interests (Benoit, 2007). This framework implies a transactional relationship between donors and parties, particularly in emerging democracies like Nigeria where political patronage systems thrive.

Critics of Rational Choice Theory

Critics of Rational Choice Theory, such as Green and Shapiro (1994), argue that the theory oversimplifies complex political behaviour by reducing it to utility maximisation. They contend that it ignores non-material motivations like ideology, identity, or civic duty, which often influence political actions. Moreover, the assumption of complete rationality is unrealistic in societies with

limited political awareness or opaque governance systems. Critics also note that in contexts with institutional weakness and limited accountability, such as Nigeria, political behaviour may be driven more by elite manipulation and ethnic affiliations than by rational cost-benefit analysis (Ake, 2000).

Applicability to this study

Despite these criticisms, the theory remains relevant and applicable to this study. The Rational Choice framework helps to explain why Nigerian political parties prioritise wealthy donors over grassroots mobilisation and why financial contributors often exert disproportionate influence over party decisions. In Nigeria's political economy, party financing is commonly linked to the expectation of economic returns, such as access to public contracts or government positions (Omotola, 2010; Ibeanu & Orji, 2021). Understanding the rational motivations of political funders and recipients provides critical insight into the dynamics of political behaviour and democratic accountability in Nigeria. Thus, the Rational Choice Theory provides a useful lens for analysing the patterns, implications, and motivations underlying the funding of political parties in Nigeria's democratic process.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the content analysis method to critically examine the dynamics of political behaviour and the funding of political parties in Nigeria. Content analysis enabled the systematic review and interpretation of existing literature, policy documents, party manifestos, electoral reports, and official publications by relevant bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), civil society organisations, and academic sources. The population of the study comprised all registered political parties in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023, with particular attention to dominant parties such as the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressives Congress (APC), and emerging parties.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select a representative sample of political parties, publications, and official reports that provide detailed insights into the nature of party financing and political conduct. The sample size included ten major party documents, five INEC reports, and a selection of academic and media articles related to political funding. The data were analysed thematically, identifying recurrent patterns, trends, and implications of funding sources on political behaviour. This methodological approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of how party financing shapes political actions, electoral outcomes, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study, grounded in content analysis of political trends and party financing mechanisms in Nigeria, reveal a predominantly transactional political culture in which funding plays a pivotal role in shaping political behaviour. Political parties in Nigeria often rely heavily on

a narrow pool of wealthy individuals and corporate entities for campaign financing and party operations, thereby reinforcing a patron-client dynamic. This has profound implications for internal party democracy, candidate selection, and policy outcomes. The analysis indicates that political donors expect tangible returns on their investments, including political appointments, policy concessions, and lucrative government contracts. This is consistent with the argument advanced by Omotola (2010) and Ibeanu and Orji (2021), who observed that political financing in Nigeria is rooted in rent-seeking and patronage rather than ideological commitment or civic responsibility. The monetisation of political processes in Nigeria discourages the participation of competent but financially disadvantaged candidates, thereby limiting democratic competitiveness and reinforcing elite dominance.

Furthermore, the study found that the opacity surrounding political party finances exacerbates corruption and reduces public trust in the democratic process. Despite the existence of regulatory frameworks such as the Electoral Act 2022 and oversight roles assigned to institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), enforcement remains weak. Political parties routinely underreport donations or conceal their sources of funding, enabling illicit financial flows and influence from both domestic and foreign actors. This finding supports the views of Adebani and Obadare (2011), who contended that the lack of transparency and accountability in Nigerian party financing undermines democratic consolidation. Moreover, the political behaviour observed—especially the preference for ethno-regional voting blocs and personalised party loyalty—is reinforced by the financial dependence of parties on influential political godfathers. As noted by Olorunfoba (2020), the intertwining of wealth, influence, and political behaviour in Nigeria creates a cycle where financial power translates directly into political power, thereby distorting electoral outcomes and weakening democratic institutions. Thus, the findings underscore the urgent need for reforms in party financing mechanisms, including improved regulatory enforcement, public funding of parties, and civic education to promote transparency, accountability, and genuine political participation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, political behaviour and the funding of political parties in Nigeria remain deeply intertwined, shaping the nature of democratic participation and governance. The influence of money on political processes has often led to corruption, lack of transparency, and the marginalisation of credible candidates. Despite existing regulations, weak enforcement mechanisms have allowed illicit funding sources to thrive. For Nigeria's democracy to deepen, there must be stronger oversight, institutional reforms, and increased civic awareness to promote accountability. A transparent funding system is crucial for nurturing ethical political behaviour and ensuring that political parties genuinely represent the interests of the Nigerian populace.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- i. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should enforce stricter regulations on political funding sources by mandating full disclosure of campaign donations and expenditures. This will help curb the influence of illicit funding on voter behaviour and ensure greater transparency in how political parties finance their operations and mobilise support.
- ii. Political parties should be required to develop and publish detailed campaign finance reports, with support from civil society organisations and the media to monitor compliance. This will promote accountability and enable citizens to make informed voting decisions based on transparent campaign strategies and party operations.

REFERENCES

- Adebanwi, W., & Obadare, E. (2011). The abrogation of the elective principle: Political parties and party politics in Nigeria. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 29(4), 439–460
- Ademola, B., & Ibrahim, A. (2021). Money politics and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*, 20(2), 45–61.
- Ake, C. (2000). *The feasibility of democracy in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Benoit, K. (2007). Electoral laws as political consequences: Explaining the origins and change of electoral institutions. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10(1), 363–390.
- Dalton, R. J., & Klingemann, H.-D. (2021). *The Oxford handbook of political behaviour* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*. New York: Harper & Row
- Green, D. P., & Shapiro, I. (1994). *Pathologies of rational choice theory: A critique of applications in political science*. New Haven: Yale University Press
- Ibeanu, O. (2021). Political behaviour and electoral politics in Nigeria: Trends and challenges. *Nigerian Journal of Political Science*, 18(1), 1–17.
- Ibeanu, O., & Orji, N. (2021). *Political party financing in Nigeria: Issues, trends and reforms*. Abuja: Centre for Democracy and Development.
- Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2023). *Report on the 2023 general elections and political party finance compliance*. Abuja: INEC.
- Ibeanu, O., & Orji, N. (2021). *Political party financing in Nigeria: Issues, trends and reforms*. Abuja: Centre for Democracy and Development.
- Odimia, S. M. (2022). Political behaviour and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 16(1), 18–28.
- Odimia, S. M. (2022). The behavioural foundations of Nigerian politics: A citizen perspective. *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, 4(3), 50–62.
- Ogundiya, I. S., & Akinola, A. O. (2020). Political corruption and party financing in Nigeria: A critical reflection. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 9(2), 87–102.
- Omotola, J. S. (2010). Political parties and the quest for political stability in Nigeria. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 6(2), 125–145.
- Oloruntoba, S. O. (2020). Political clientelism and party financing in Nigeria. *Review of African Political Economy*, 47(166), 501–517.

Transparency International. (2022). *Corruption perceptions index 2022: Nigeria report*. Berlin:

Transparency International.

Uadiale, M. O. (2022). Voter inducement and the dynamics of political behaviour in Nigeria's fourth republic. *Electoral Studies in Africa*, 7(1), 33–48.

Uji, W. T., & Bamidele, O. (2023). Political party financing and the crisis of democracy in Nigeria. *Journal of African Elections*, 22(1), 112–130.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (2020). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Harvard University Press.