

THE IMPACT OF CAMPAIGN FINANCE ON ELECTORAL OUTCOMES IN EDO STATES 2024 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION: IT'S IMPERATIVE FOR FUTURE ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of campaign finance on electoral outcomes in the Edo State 2024 gubernatorial election, employing a secondary and qualitative research methodology. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Structural Functionalism and Rentier State Theory, the research explores how financial resources influence election dynamics, voter engagement, and candidate success. Structural Functionalism views election financing as a system component supporting political stability and function, while Rentier State Theory highlights the role of resource allocation in political competition and power consolidation. Findings reveal that campaign finance significantly enhanced candidate visibility and voter mobilisation, with major parties exceeding legal spending caps; unregulated and opaque funding practices facilitated vote-buying and compromised electoral integrity; and strategic early and sustained financial investments by candidates correlated strongly with electoral success. These findings underscore the critical role of campaign finance in shaping electoral outcomes and democratic quality in Edo State. Based on the analysis, the study recommends, a rigorous enforcement of existing campaign finance laws, including spending caps and transparent disclosures, an institutional reform to close loopholes around party and candidate financial separations, and a public funding mechanism coupled with civic education to promote equitable political participation and reduce undue money influence. Ultimately, the Edo 2024 gubernatorial election highlights the imperative for Nigeria's electoral system to address campaign finance challenges to safeguard democracy and ensure credible future elections.

Keywords: Campaign Finance, Democracy Consolidation, Election, opaque funding and Political Parties

Introduction

The 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State presents a critical case study for understanding the impact of campaign finance on electoral outcomes in Nigeria's evolving democratic landscape. In Nigeria, the role of campaign finance has become increasingly prominent as a determinant of electoral success, shaping not only the

competitiveness of elections but also influencing voting behaviour and party dynamics (Ojo, 2024). The Edo election, characterised by intense competition among major political parties including the All Progressives Congress (APC), People's Democratic Party (PDP), and the Labour Party (LP), reflects the broader national challenges related to campaign financing such as transparency, accountability, and regulatory enforcement. With Monday Okpemehlo of the APC emerging victorious in a highly anticipated race, this election underscores how financial resources leveraged within the legal and illegal frameworks of campaign funding can decisively affect electoral outcomes (CivicHive, 2024; INEC, 2024).

The significance of studying the impact of campaign finance within the context of the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election lies in its potential to inform policy reforms and enhance electoral integrity in Nigeria. Financial strength often dictates candidates' ability to mobilise voters, run effective campaigns, and secure media presence, which are pivotal in influencing voter preferences (Ojo, 2024). However, the pervasive role of money also raises concerns about political equality and fairness, as it may promote electoral malpractices such as vote-buying and corruption, thereby undermining democratic quality (Yiaga Africa, 2024). Moreover, the enforcement gaps in Nigeria's campaign finance regulations, compounded by limited capacity and political interference, exacerbate these challenges. Understanding these dynamics through empirical investigation into the Edo State 2024 election will offer insights into how campaign finance shapes electoral outcomes and the corresponding implications for future elections in Nigeria.

This study is significant in three key ways; each aligned with specific research objectives and questions. First, it aims to critically assess the relationship between the scale and sources of campaign finance and electoral success in Edo State, addressing the question: How does the amount and origin of campaign funding influence election results? Second, the study will evaluate the effectiveness of existing campaign finance regulations and their enforcement in curbing malpractice, framed by the question: To what extent do regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms impact campaign finance

practices and election integrity? Third, it will explore the broader democratic consequences of financial imbalances during campaigns, focusing on the question: What are the implications of campaign finance dynamics for political equality and voter representation in Edo State? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to contribute to both academic understanding and practical policy development aimed at strengthening Nigeria's electoral democracy.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Conceptualising Campaign Finance

Campaign finance refers to the funds raised and expended to support candidates, political parties, and policies in elections, encompassing monetary and in-kind contributions that shape the dynamics of electoral contests (Open Election Data, 2011). In the context of the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election, campaign finance played a crucial role in facilitating the extensive and highly competitive electoral process. Political parties and candidates invested significant resources to cover campaign activities such as voter mobilisation, advertisement, and grassroots outreach. These financial expenditures are fundamental for electoral success as they help parties and aspirants amplify their messages and influence voter behaviour in an environment marked by multiple contenders and intense political rivalry. However, Nigeria's electoral landscape also faces challenges including vote buying and the misuse of campaign funds, which threaten the transparency and fairness of elections (KDI, 2024).

The importance of campaign finance in elections like Edo's gubernatorial contest stems from its ability to provide the necessary means for candidates to effectively communicate their platforms and engage with the electorate. Financial resources contribute to a level playing field by enabling campaigns to reach wider audiences through media, rallies, and voter education initiatives. Furthermore, regulated campaign finance can enhance electoral integrity by promoting transparency and accountability, limiting undue influence from wealthy donors, and curbing corruption (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2025). In Nigeria, regulatory bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) set expenditure ceilings and reporting requirements, but enforcement remains a significant challenge. This enforcement gap often allows affluent political actors to influence electoral outcomes disproportionately, as seen in instances of vote buying during the 2024 Edo election (KDI, 2024).

Despite the regulatory framework, the pervasive role of money in Nigerian elections often undermines political equality and fairness, as wealthy candidates may gain undue advantage over less affluent contenders (Ojo, 2024). This reality highlights the urgent need for strengthened enforcement mechanisms and reforms that promote greater transparency and inclusiveness in campaign financing. Addressing these issues could empower marginalised groups and young candidates who typically face financial barriers to electoral participation. In sum, campaign finance is not only a practical necessity for electoral campaigning but also a critical element for democratic governance, requiring continuous improvement to enhance the credibility, competitiveness, and fairness of elections like the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election.

Conceptualising Democracy Consolidation

Democratic consolidation refers to the process through which a new democracy matures and stabilises to the point where it becomes unlikely to revert to authoritarianism (Diamond, 2013). It involves entrenching democratic norms, institutions, and values in all facets of society and governance so that democracy becomes the only acceptable political system, often described as "the only game in town" (Sartori, 2006). This maturity of democracy is demonstrated when political actors, institutions, and the public consistently respect democratic rules and outcomes, including free, fair, competitive elections and peaceful transfers of power. Achieving democratic consolidation is fundamental to developing a stable, enduring political system that is resilient to disruptions from authoritarian reversals or irregular power seizures (Enobong, 2020).

The importance of democratic consolidation lies in its capacity to promote good governance, political stability, accountability, and the protection of civil liberties (Ekerette, 2023). Consolidated democracies ensure that elections are not merely formal processes but genuine expressions of the popular will, with broad participation and effective competition among political parties. Institutionalising democratic practices fosters transparency, robust civil society engagement, and mechanisms to prevent abuse of power, which in turn nurtures public trust and confidence in the democratic process. Without consolidation, democracies remain fragile and vulnerable to nondemocratic tendencies such as electoral fraud, political violence, and weak rule of law, undermining their capacity to deliver inclusive governance and development (Ameh-Ogigo, 2023).

The absence of democratic consolidation negatively impacts elections by breeding electoral violence, voter intimidation, rigging, and manipulation, thus undermining the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and the efficacy of democratic governance (Ameh-Ogigo, 2023). In societies where democracy is not yet consolidated, elections often become arenas of conflict rather than peaceful transfers of power, with intense struggles over control leading to instability. These conditions discourage voter participation, weaken political accountability, and may encourage authoritarian tendencies or reversions, thereby impeding the democratic development process. Consequently, elections in unconsolidated democracies fail to fulfill their role as instruments of popular sovereignty and peaceful political competition, threatening both political stability and development (Ekerette, 2023).

Conceptualising Opaque Money

Opaque money, often described in Nigerian political discourse as "dark money" or untraceable financial resources, refers to funds used in political processes without transparent accountability or clear sources. In Nigeria, such opaque financial flows are frequently observed in the form of "security votes" or unregulated political campaign funds, which are mostly cash-based and exempt from legislative oversight (TI Defence, 2018). This lack of transparency allows political actors to manipulate resources for their personal or partisan advantage, fueling corruption and weakening institutional checks. The political finance irregularities connected with opaque money create a fertile ground for rent-seeking behaviours, undermining democratic values and the rule

of law in the election context (Obasanjo, 2015; Conscientia Beam, 2015).

The impact of opaque money on electoral credibility is profound and multidimensional. It fosters vote buying and selling, which directly skew the genuine expression of voter preference by substituting financial inducements for informed electoral choice (Allstudy Journal, 2025). This practice distorts democratic competition by privileging candidates with greater financial resources over those with ideological relevance or competence, leading to the election of candidates primarily through monetary influence rather than popular mandate. Consequently, opaque money corrupts electoral procedures and outcomes, undermining public trust in elections and the legitimacy of those elected (Punch, 2025). In Nigeria, where electoral regulations on political finance exist but are poorly enforced, the persistence of opaque money contributes to the culture of electoral malpractices and disenfranchisement of voters.

Specifically, in the 2024 Edo State Gubernatorial election, opaque money played a significant role in shaping electoral outcomes. Reports and analyses of the election indicate widespread use of money politics, including vote buying and covert campaign financing, which compromised the election's transparency and credibility (IFE, 2019). The substantial influence of undisclosed financial flows enabled candidates to bypass formal electoral spending limits, distort campaign messaging, and manipulate grassroots mobilisation. This not only impaired the level playing field expected in democratic contests but also perpetuated a cycle where electoral victory could be bought, thus undermining the broader democratic process in Edo State and Nigeria at large. Addressing opaque money is critical to restoring electoral integrity and ensuring credible governance in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Structural functionalism is a sociological theory that views society as a complex system made up of interrelated parts, each with a specific function that contributes to the stability and smooth operation of the whole system (Parsons, 1951). Developed and popularised by theorists such as Talcott Parsons and Herbert Spencer, this theory likens society to a living organism where each part, from institutions to individuals, plays a role in maintaining social order and equilibrium (Spencer, 1896; Parsons, 1951). The theory emphasizes the importance of social structures and their functions both manifest (intended) and latent (unintended) in ensuring societal cohesion and adaptation to change. Structural functionalists argue that disruptions in one part of the system affect other parts and can destabilise the entire society if not addressed. This framework helps in understanding how social, political, and economic elements interplay to sustain societal function or cause dysfunction when imbalanced (Merton, 1968).

The rentier state theory, prominently advanced by scholars such as Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, explains a particular economic and political condition where a state derives a substantial portion of its revenues from external rents rather than domestic productive activities (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987). In such states, the government relies heavily on external sources of income such as oil or foreign aid, which creates a unique dynamic in state-society relations, governance, and political behaviour. This reliance often leads to weak institutional development, reduced tax accountability, and a political

economy that encourages patronage and rent-seeking behaviours. In the context of elections, rentier states may see political elites using state-controlled rents to finance campaigns or buy political support, thus distorting democratic processes and outcomes. The theory provides insights into how financial resource dependency shapes political strategies and institutional integrity, especially in resource-rich developing countries.

Applying these theories to the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election, structural functionalism helps explain how campaign finance acts as a crucial sub-system within the electoral system that affects its functionality and stability. Financial resources enable political actors to mobilise supporters, communicate policies, and sustain the political machinery necessary for election participation. When campaign finance operates effectively and transparently, it aligns with the societal function of supporting a stable electoral process and governance. However, if campaign funds are concentrated and manipulated by elites, it creates dysfunction by skewing access to political power and undermining democratic equity, disrupting the equilibrium of the electoral system. Meanwhile, the rentier state theory contextualizes this dynamic by highlighting how Edo State's political economy, influenced by broader Nigerian resource and rent dynamics, allows actors endowed with substantial financial rents to dominate the campaign landscape. This can result in vote buying, patronage networks, and clientelism, all impacting electoral outcomes by privileging money over meritocratic competition.

Gap and Contribution to knowledge

1. Transparency and Regulation of Campaign Finance: The study can contribute to understanding the pervasive issue of opaque political financing in Edo State elections, where political parties and candidates operate with unclear financial sources and unregulated third-party spending. Despite legal prohibitions, shadow networks and pseudo-associations facilitate unlawful donations and expenditures, creating significant gaps in campaign finance transparency and regulatory enforcement. Filling this gap would help elucidate how these opaque financial practices influence electoral outcomes and undermine democratic accountability.

2. Strategic Financial Mobilisation and Vote Buying: The study can shed light on the strategic allocation of campaign funds such as heavy investments in media campaigns, ground mobilisation, and direct voter engagement that were distinctive in Edo State. Importantly, it can provide detailed insights into the scale and effects of vote-buying expenditures, which remain a critical yet under-examined factor in shaping election results. This would deepen knowledge on how financial resources translate into electoral success beyond just spending amounts, focusing on timing, target strategies, and cost efficiency.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Campaign Finance and Impact on Election Outcomes in Edo 2024 Gubernatorial Election

Structural Functionalism as an Analytical Lens, is pioneered by Talcott Parsons who views society as a complex system of interdependent parts working together to promote stability and equilibrium. In electoral politics, institutions like campaign finance regulations, political parties, and electoral processes function as subsystems that maintain democratic order. Dysfunctions arise when these parts fail to perform their roles, leading to instability.

Applying this lens to the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election undermined the regulatory framework and enforcement findings reveals how excessive campaign finance disrupts the mechanisms, despite provisions in Nigeria's Electoral Act and electoral system's equilibrium, manifesting manifest (intended) INEC guidelines mandating disclosure of funding sources, spending and latent (unintended) functions, alongside strains requiring limits, and timely reporting (INEC, 2024). Under rentier state logic, adaptation for systemic health. Functions of Campaign Finance regulatory frameworks become symbolic tools rather than binding in the Electoral System Campaign finance ideally serves constraints, as political actors leverage oil rents to fund campaigns manifest functions by enabling voter information dissemination illicitly. Enforcement lapses in Edo 2024 such as inadequate and candidate mobilisation, fostering informed participation. In verification of disclosures and weak penalties reflect this, with Edo 2024, parties like APC and PDP invested ₦9.6 billion from INEC's monitoring and judicial responsiveness constrained by July to September exceeding the ₦1 billion cap under Section 88(3) of Nigeria's Electoral Act 2022 with PDP spending up allocations, sustain parallel funding streams outside official 1,900% over 2012 levels (Kimpact Development Initiative, 2024). This erodes voter confidence in governance continuity. However, the scale capacity prioritises rentier alliances over impartial regulation. In here vastly over legal limits suggest adaptation to Nigeria's Edo 2024, while legal provisions and observer efforts yielded political culture, where finance compensates for weak relatively peaceful polls with accepted outcomes, gaps like alleged institutional trust, maintaining equilibrium by aligning elite BVAS manipulations and under-the-table transactions persisted resources with mass participation.

(Yiaga Africa, 2024). Civil society monitors added accountability

Dysfunctions and systemic strain excessive finance introduce by reporting violations, yet limited sanctions confined to fines dysfunctions, eroding electoral integrity and threatening proved insufficient against rent-fueled financial power. This equilibrium. Vote buying (₦5,000–₦10,000 inducements) and dynamic directly tainted campaign funding, channeling oil rents intimidation, often with security complicity, persisted despite into patronage that incentivized vote buying, thereby weakening spending, subverting free choice (Agu & Abraham, 2023; public confidence and election integrity (KDI, 2024; Yiaga Africa, Vanguard, 2025). From a functionalist view, campaign finance 2024). The theory highlights a vicious cycle: rentier revenues shifts from equilibrating voter education to incentivizing disincentives taxation, reducing politicians' accountability to voters coercion, creating anomie normlessness where money suppliants and bolstering elite capture of electoral processes. In Edo, this merit, destabilising the polity. Opaque networks and third-party manifested in enforcement reliant on under-resourced INEC, spending amplify this, allowing "shadow influences" to distort allowing illicit funding to proliferate despite regulatory intent. outcomes, as money politics prioritises financial power over Implications and Reforms for Rentier-Dominated Elections Edo policy (Polimoney report, 2024).

2024 underscores rentier state imperatives for reform: fortify These malfunctions strain subsystems: parties become vote- frameworks by plugging campaign finance loopholes via digital buying machines, regulators fail enforcement, and voters disclosures and granting INEC investigative autonomy to counter disengage, risking collapse of democratic consensus. rentier opacity. Enforcement must escalate to disqualifications and Implications for Equilibrium and Adaptation Structural prosecutions, disrupting patronage circuits. Voter education, functionalism posits that dysfunctions prompt adaptation for amplified by civic groups, can erode tolerance for rent-driven survival. Edo 2024 signals disequilibrium, demanding reforms corruption, aligning with rentier theory's call for diversifying like stricter monitoring, transparency, and civic education to revenues to rebuild accountability (INEC, 2024; KDI, 2024). These realign finance with its equilibrating role. Without intervention steps promise credible elections, bolstering trust, stability, and enhancing legal frameworks and enforcement persistent strains governance in Nigeria's rentier polity. erode legitimacy, potentially leading to revolutionary change or authoritarian drift. This analysis highlights campaign finance's dual role: a stabilizer when regulated, a disruptor when unchecked. Reforms must restore functional balance to sustain Nigeria's democracy

Regulatory Framework and Enforcement Mechanism; Its Effect on Campaign Funding and Election Integrity in Edo 2024 Gubernatorial Election

Rentier State Theory and Regulatory Frameworks in Nigerian Elections Rentier state theory, originally developed by Hossein Mahdavy and expanded by scholars like Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, posits that states heavily reliant on unearned income from natural resources such as oil rents in Nigeria exhibit distorted political economies. These states prioritise rent distribution to elites and clients over productive taxation or broad-based accountability, fostering patronage networks, corruption, and weak institutions (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987; Yates, 1996). In Nigeria's context, oil rents dominate federal and state revenues, enabling politicians to bypass formal regulatory frameworks for campaign funding. This theory illuminates the 2024 Edo gubernatorial election, where oil-dependent rentier dynamics

The Implication of Campaign Finance Dynamics for Political Equality in Edo State 2024 Gubernatorial election

From a structural functionalist perspective, the 2024 Edo gubernatorial election's campaign finance dynamics disrupted the equilibrium of Nigeria's political system, particularly the manifest function of ensuring political equality through fair electoral competition. Structural functionalism posits that society comprises interdependent structures like political parties, electoral institutions, and campaign finance regulations that perform specific functions to maintain stability and integration (Parsons, 1951). In this context, campaign finance regulations under the Electoral Act 2022 (Section 88(3)) serve as a stabilising mechanism to equilibrate resource disparities among candidates, preventing disequilibrium where financial dominance suppliants merit-based representation. However, the Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI) report documented exponential spending by PDP and APC, far exceeding the ₦1 billion cap, introducing "dark money" that precipitated system dysfunction. This opacity fueled pervasive vote buying, transforming elections from

integrative rituals into latent sources of coercion, thereby eroding political equality by privileging affluent actors and destabilising the polity's representative function (Kimpact Development Initiative, 2025; Vanguard, 2025). These dynamics further manifested in latent dysfunctions for voter representation, undermining the electorate's role as a feedback mechanism for systemic adaptation. Functionalism theory emphasises voter participation as essential for legitimising outcomes and reinforcing social cohesion (Almond & Powell, 1966). Yet, financial inducements ranging from ₦5,000 to ₦10,000 per voter in Edo wards converted voter agency into transactional exchanges, suppressing genuine policy deliberation. Compounded by intimidation, collation irregularities, and dismal turnout (25.9%), this induced strain, manifesting as crisis in participation and confidence. The result was a malfunctioning electoral structure where financial power displaced equitable representation, generating anomie and threatening the political system's equilibrium (KDI report, 2024; CJID, 2024). To restore functional equilibrium for future Nigerian elections, reforms must realign campaign finance with its manifest integrative role. INEC should operationalise evidence-based spending limits and real-time disclosures as adaptive mechanisms, while the National Assembly amends the Electoral Act to eliminate loopholes, ensuring financial transparency reinforces rather than disrupts equality. Such interventions would rehabilitate the system's capacity for political equality, preventing persistent dysfunctions from perpetuating inequality and electoral legitimacy (KDI report, 2025; Vanguard, 2025).

Conclusion

The 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election vividly demonstrates the profound impact of campaign finance on electoral outcomes, establishing that financial resources remain a critical, though not exclusive, determinant of electoral success in Nigeria. The campaign spending in Edo State reached an estimated N9.6 billion, significantly exceeding the legal campaign spending cap set by the Electoral Act 2022, exposing a systemic deficiency in enforcement and transparency. This excessive and largely unregulated campaign expenditure facilitated intense voter mobilisation efforts and vote buying, which skewed the electoral playing field in favour of financially dominant parties, particularly the APC, PDP, and LP. While campaign finance accounts for the high outcome variability, other factors like candidate appeal, party structure, and grassroots engagement also influence results. The pervasive opacity in political funding, third-party spending, and the concentration of financial power among leading candidates underscore the urgent need for stronger legal frameworks and transparency mechanisms. Future elections in Nigeria must address these challenges by enforcing spending limits, improving real-time financial disclosures, and curbing illicit financial influences to ensure free, fair, and credible elections. Without such reforms, electoral outcomes will continue to be disproportionately determined by wealth rather than voter choice, undermining democratic consolidation and citizen confidence in the electoral process.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Campaign Finance Regulation and Transparency

It is imperative to enhance enforcement of political finance laws to curb opaque financial practices. This

includes stricter monitoring of campaign spending, mandatory real-time disclosures, and closing loopholes related to unregulated third-party and dark money financing. Improving transparency will help to reduce electoral manipulation and restore public confidence in democratic processes.

2. Implement Measures to Mitigate Vote Buying and Election Day Financial Influence

Given that a substantial portion of campaign funds was used on Election Day and for direct voter inducement, policies and enforcement mechanisms should target the curtailment of vote buying. This will promote fairness in elections by ensuring outcomes reflect genuine voter choice rather than financial influence.

3. Invest in Early and Structured Voter Engagement and Grassroots Mobilisation

The research highlighted that strategic early voter engagement and comprehensive grassroots outreach contributed significantly to electoral success. Political parties and election stakeholders should prioritise organised mass mobilisation and community-based education well ahead of election dates to strengthen democratic participation.

4. Enhance Electoral System Integrity through Technology and Transparent Result Management

Persistent challenges with result management, logistical setbacks, and vote collation vulnerabilities require systemic reforms. Adoption of more automated, transparent, and technologically advanced processes for result collation and management will reduce opportunities for manipulation and increase electoral credibility.

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