

INFORMAL POLITICAL STRUCTURES AND PERFORMANCE OF PARTY CANDIDATES IN THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper is aimed at interrogating the role of political structures in shaping party performance in elections in Nigeria. The interplay between formal party structures and candidates' informal political structures often decide political outcomes in the country. This paper argues that in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria, the three major political parties and their candidates differed in the strength of their structures. Whereas the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) were strong in their formal and informal structures, the Labour Party (LP) turned out strong in informal structures. Using the qualitative research design and relying essentially on secondary data, this work also utilised structural functionalism as the theoretical framework of analysis. The paper argues that it was the difference in the strength of structures that largely made for the outcome in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. Among the leading candidates in that election, whereas the advantage of Labour Party's Peter Obi in informal structures of support propelled him to a strong third-place finish at the polls, it was the noticeable advantages in formal structures possessed by Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party and Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress, that ultimately gave them superiority at the polls and eventually propelled Tinubu to victory. The paper recommends that parties must be able to institutionalise their support bases and build structures that have depth and which can stand the rigours of elections in the country and help them achieve victory at the polls.

Key Words: 2023 presidential elections; All Progressives Congress; Labour Party; Nigeria; Peoples Democratic Party; political structures.

Introduction

Although described in pejorative terms by one of the presidential candidates in the 2023 elections as “structures of criminality” (Imukudo, 2022), the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria clearly shows that it was significantly shaped by the interplay between the formal structures of the political parties that participated in the election and the informal political structures of the individual candidates. The 2023 elections featured three dominant parties and their candidates, namely the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which had Atiku Abubakar as its

candidate, the All Progressives Congress (APC) with Bola Tinubu as flag-bearer, and the Labour Party (LP) whose candidate was Peter Obi. Political structures are often cultivated to enhance the support base and electoral prospects of political parties and their candidates. A party and/or candidate with wide and well-coordinated structures during elections will most likely perform better at the polls (Duverger, 1954).

Political structure here refers to the formal and informal networks of support and activities that make for the operational and electoral efficacy of political parties and their candidates. According to Ukonne (2022), structure could mean a robust network of institutional, financial, and human support that connects a political aspirant to the grassroots. Political structure is often the result of decades of groundwork laid by politicians and political parties. Political parties have their formal structures—organs and branches, and patronage networks; and candidates also build their individual structures, including loyalty networks and volunteer support groups. Candidates' performance in an election refers to the electoral showing posted by individual candidates and their political parties at the end of the election. Every election will have the winning candidates and parties as well as other candidates and parties that will be the losers. Political structures play an important role in the fortunes of political parties and in the performance of their candidates during elections (Folorunsho-Francis, 2025).

Political structures were important in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria, and the major political parties that contested that election were differentiated to a large extent by the strength of their formal structures of support. Political structures provide a framework for coordination and resource allocation and bolster voter mobilisation and campaign reach. In the run-up to 2023, the PDP and APC were believed to have formidable formal structures, reaching to virtually every state/local government area/ward in the country. In contrast, the LP was a relatively small party supported by the labour unions in the country. Although it maintained a formal structure as required by the law, its structure did not permeate the length and breadth of the country. Apart from the formal structures, each of the major candidates in the 2023 election had his own political structure.

The eventual winner of the election, Bola Tinubu of the APC promoted such a formidable informal structure that he was known to have through that means helped in largely installing President Buhari in office in 2015. He was a well-known political ‘godfather’ in Lagos and the

southwest of the country and was known to have extended his patronage tentacles to other areas around the country (Lawal, 2023). This was almost the same situation with Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, who was known to have used his position as the country's Vice President in the earlier years of the Fourth Republic (1999-2007) to build widespread patronage networks and other tentacles around the country. In contrast, Peter Obi's reputation for personal integrity had helped to organise a segment of the electorate ready to work for his election, consisting mostly of a coalition of disaffected young and urban voters discontented with the widespread economic hardships as well as the failures of governance in the country (Igwe & Maduka, 2023A; Ojo, 2023).

This concept of political structure highlights the synergy between institutionalised party mechanisms and candidate-specific support systems, which collectively determine a party's capacity to engage voters, navigate electoral processes, and achieve advantageous competitive outcomes in elections (Ikpa, 2025). This is what this paper interrogates. This paper will study the structures of the political parties and the candidates that participated in the 2023 presidential election to see what roles these structures played in determining the outcome. Both the formal and the informal structures will be examined, as well as their interplay in the elections in order to determine how each contributed to the outcome of the 2023 election.

Statement of the Problem

Whether or not political structures play a role in elections in Nigeria has remained under contention. Although some politicians dismiss political structures as not important (Imukudo, 2022), yet the evidence from the 2023 presidential election seem to suggest otherwise. In that election, the parties and candidates that had robust structures appeared to perform better than those that did not boast of such structures. This work therefore sets out to address this problematic, namely, do political structures matter? Do political structures play a role in shaping party performance in elections in Nigeria? The work will attempt to find out the place of political structure in the campaign of political party candidates and what effect it has on the final outcome of elections in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study/Research Questions

This study has the general aim of determining the impact of political structures on the performance of party candidates in elections in Nigeria, using the 2023 presidential elections as case study. To achieve this aim, the study has the following specific objectives: examine the role of political structures on the emergence of party presidential candidates in the 2023 presidential elections; interrogate the impact of political structures on the campaigns for the 2023 presidential elections; and, assess the effect of the interplay between formal party structures and candidates' informal political structures in deciding the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in the country. To achieve the above, this work will attempt to answer the following research questions. What was the role of political structures in the emergence of party presidential candidates in the 2023 presidential elections? Did political structures have significant impact on the campaigns for the 2023 presidential elections? What was the effect of the interplay between formal party structures and candidates' informal political structures in deciding

the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in the country?

Methodology

Methodology essentially involves data gathering, interpretation, and analysis. This study adopts a qualitative research design that relies predominantly on secondary data. This design is suitable as there are many writings on the topic of elections in Nigeria. Some of the available materials are reports of primary data obtained from surveys, interviews and observations by researchers who have put them down for public use. Secondary sources are used for the needed data throughout this work. The use of secondary data is justified as much of the data in the area of the topic is relevant and reliable. Specifically, data for this work were obtained from books, journals, reports of government agencies, local and international organisations, and newspapers. The data gathered was analysed using the systematic content analysis method, based on the specific contexts of the particular election under study.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Clarifications

Political Structure: Political structure here refers to the intricate web of formal and informal networks that underpin the operational and electoral efficacy of political parties and their candidates. Formal structure refers to the web of organs through which political parties organise their activities, usually along the lines of the country's federal structure – federal-level, state-level, and local government-level executive committees, as well as constituency-level structures such as the (senatorial) zonal executive committees, and the ward-level executive committees. Informal structure could refer to the system of Nigeria's political patronage, which enables political aspirants to pay obeisance to godfathers and kingmakers, and the godfathers to support the political aspirations of their followers. The structure guarantees that members are on the ground to disseminate a party's or a candidate's message in every corner of the nation.

Candidate's Performance: Candidate's performance in elections refers to the electoral showing posted by individual candidates and their political parties at the end of the election. Every election will have the winning candidates and parties as well as other candidates and parties that will be the losers. The rules of election normally determine the threshold of victory and loss, such that in the majoritarian electoral system being practiced in Nigeria, the candidate/party that scores a majority of votes at the election is ultimately declared the winner. It is this victory in itself, plus the margin of such victory, that measures the performance of candidates and their parties in elections. In this regard, victories could be slim or wide, depending on the gap between the candidates/parties in the number of votes they garnered at the polls. The elections themselves could be tight or one-sided also, depending on the strengths of the candidates/parties at the election.

Political Spread: Spread here means that a political party must have members and branches across a majority of the states and local governments in the country. Following the requirements of the Nigerian constitution for political parties to have spread, formal political structures of political parties in Nigeria must take the form of the

structures of the Nigerian political system. Thus, political parties organise their structure along the lines of the country's federal system – federal level structures such as the federal executive committee of the party; state-level structures such as state executive committees, local government level structures and constituency-level structures such as the (senatorial) zonal executive committees, as well as the ward-level executive committees.

Review of Related/Empirical Literature

The origin of structural considerations for political parties and their candidates during elections is perhaps traceable to the constitution of the country. Nigeria's constitution has provisions requiring that a political party must have "spread" before it can be registered to operate. Spread means that a political party must have members and branches across a majority of the states and local governments in the country. Following those constitutional provisions, formal political structures of political parties in Nigeria often take the form of the structures of the Nigerian political system. Beyond the formal framework of a political party, individual politicians often cultivate their own political structures to enhance their influence and electoral prospects. The structures of individual candidates are often built around the persons of the candidates, although in the quest for patronage or hierarchy, some such structures could also take the form of the political system. In most cases, the dominant form of organisation of informal political structures is domiciliation in areas where perceived members are concentrated or in areas deemed as aligned to the candidate.

Many writers have argued that political structure, encompassing formal party organisations, candidate networks, and independent support groups, is pivotal to the success of political parties and candidates in elections. In fact, research by Lewis (2023) confirms that Nigeria's political system favours parties with embedded grassroots networks, particularly in rural constituencies. Duverger (1954) posits that well-structured parties with hierarchical organisation and internal cohesion are more successful electorally than fragmented or loosely coordinated movements. Panebianco (1988) reinforces this view by arguing that institutionalised parties- those with established leadership, financial stability, and enduring grassroots networks- are better equipped to compete in elections, especially in fluid or unstable democracies. Ibeanu, *et al* (2023) argued that in Nigeria, dominant parties like the APC and PDP have consistently benefited from entrenched patronage systems, elite alliances, and extensive geographic reach. These structural advantages translate into superior voter mobilisation, control over electoral processes, and greater visibility.

Norris (2004) argues that candidate-centred approaches can generate enthusiasm but struggle to convert popularity into tangible electoral gains without a solid party infrastructure. Studies by Mabweazara (2015) and Nwankwo (2023) also suggest that while digital activism is useful for political expression, it cannot substitute the physical ground games required for electoral success, especially in regions with limited internet access or strong traditional loyalties. Historical comparisons with initiatives like the Third Force coalition in 2019 support this trend (Adekoya, 2020). Despite their innovative platforms and media appeal, such movements lacked institutional presence and were unable to translate political

momentum into electoral victory (CDD West Africa, 2023; Ibeanu *et al.*, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

In interrogating the role of political structures in shaping party performance in elections in Nigeria, this work will be guided by the Structural-Functional theory as a framework of analysis. Structural functionalism was propounded by Almond and Powell (1966). The theory views society as a political system of structures and functions. Just like the human body is made up of structures (organs, such as heart, lungs, brain), which each has specific functions, society (and by extension, politics) is made up of parts (e.g. political parties, judiciary, legislature, executive) that each performs specific roles (functions). When all the parts do their job well, the society remains orderly and successful. Durkheim (1933), a French sociologist, laid the foundation for this theory. He argued that society is a system of interdependent parts held together by shared values and norms. Parsons (1951) expanded on this by proposing that societies work to maintain equilibrium through institutional functions. Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell adapted this theory into political science by arguing that every political system has structures that must perform certain key functions for the system to survive, grow, and maintain legitimacy.

According to Almond and Powell (1966), all political systems, no matter the country, must carry out essential functions such as rule-making by the legislature, rule application by the executive, and rule adjudication by the judiciary, as well as the conversion process, by which political inputs are turned into outputs (Onah, 2010). The political system is in equilibrium when the structures perform the functions which they are meant to perform. Specifically, during elections, political parties take the centre stage, as one of the major structures in the system that is involved. It is the parties that maintain registers of members and conduct primaries for aspirants for the various offices. From these primaries, candidates emerge who will fly the flag of each party at the general elections. The party as a formal structure has its own sub-structures, including the national executive committee, state executives, zonal, local government and ward-level units. These candidates are thus expected to operate first, within the formal sub-structures of the party, especially during the primaries (Ugwoke, 2003).

In addition to the formal structure of a political party, a party candidate often has his own informal structures, which they utilised for political advancement. The informal structures may include candidate-driven networks, volunteer-driven initiatives, patronage-based groups, social media support systems, and even primordial support systems. Afterwards, the candidates are expected to operate with the formal structures of the party as well as the informal structures, as they confront the candidates of the other parties in the general elections. The general elections are conducted by and within the structures of the political system. Thus, the electoral management body is a structure of the political system, and the electoral laws it administers and to which the parties and candidates and the electorate are expected to adhere are part of the political system (Wiseman, 1966).

Structural functionalism is apt for this work. In applying this theory to the work, the argument is that the prospects of a party and candidate in an election are determined by

the strength of the formal and informal structures of that party and candidate, as well as how well the structures are deployed for the elections. Thus, the party that has the needed structures and can deploy them effectively will likely win the election, just as the party that does not have enough structures or whose structures cannot hold their own during the election is likely to lose the election. In the same vein, the informal structures of a candidate can be significant for victory at the polls, as these informal structures can and do play a huge role at the various stages of an election. The roles of the informal structures could help to strengthen the formal structures or to compensate for the weakness or absence of formal structures (Ibeanu, *et al.*, 2023)). Ultimately, it is the party and candidate that have the most effective structures that win the elections.

Political Structure and the Emergence of Party Presidential Candidates in 2023

At the beginning of the Fourth Republic, only 3 parties had met the provisions for spread required for registration, namely the PDP, the All Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). The PDP won the first presidential election in 1999 and continued to expand its structures afterwards, but the APP and the AD dwindled thereafter, and then transformed to the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) respectively. Both the ANPP and the ACN later merged with the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) to form the All Progressives Congress (APC) in 2013. The APC went on to win the 2015 presidential election. The 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria were fought as a straight battle between three political parties and their candidates, namely, the All Progressive Congress (APC) and its candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu; the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and its candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar; and, the Labour Party (LP) and its candidate, Peter Obi. The election was coming at the end of the eight years' rule of President Muhammadu Buhari. Buhari's tenure was during a period of economic recession, and this, coupled with the manner of his ascension to power (defeating an incumbent president at the election), were enough to ensure that the entire period of the Buhari administration was one of tension. Buhari had won the 2015 general elections after defeating President Goodluck Jonathan. President Jonathan was a Southerner and a Christian. He was also a minority from the south-south region of the country. Throughout Buhari's tenure, there was visible conflict between the North and the South, between Muslims and Christians, and between minority and majority groups (Onah & Olajide, 2020).

There was thus an atmosphere of socio-political conflict in the country in the Buhari years, as well as a sharp increase in ethno-religious sentiments in the country. All these were made worse by an increasing level of poverty in the country at the time, occasioned largely by the economic recession which had set in even before President Buhari took office, and which was worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, there was a serious situation of insecurity in the country (Abdulyakeen, 2023). The Boko Haram conflict was still ongoing and new conflicts were emerging in different parts of the country, particularly the Farmers-Herdsmen conflict in central Nigeria, which was then spreading to other parts of Nigeria; the brief secessionist agitation in the Southwest of the country, as well as the Biafra agitation in the Southeast, and banditry in the North. Kidnapping was also rife in parts of the

Southsouth and the Southeast. For a time, it was actually as if the 2023 general elections would not take place.

This was until new electoral laws were signed into law in October 2022, only six months before the elections (FRN, 2022). Immediately, however, electoral activities kicked off, and the parties got set to conduct internal elections or primaries to pick their candidates for the various elections. For the presidential elections, a number of issues were at stake. President Buhari was from the north and was about to complete eight years in office. By virtue of the rotation principle- an unwritten arrangement to rotate the presidency between the regions, the presidency was to return to the south. But even this issue brought its own contentions. There was the argument that the spirit of rotation was not just about rotation between the two regions, but that there was to be rotation among the zones within a region. By this virtue, the Southeast argued that 2023 was their turn since a Yoruba had been president in the Fourth Republic and another was Buhari's vice (Olasupo, 2023). In the midst of this argument, some elements in the North even argued that rotation was not binding and therefore, the North was not excluded from the presidency in 2023 (Adebanwi, 2023).

At formation, APC was dominated by Northern and Southwestern elements, and now that Buhari, a northerner, was leaving office, it seemed natural that the position would fall on the Southwest (Uremadu, 2020). However, there were still currents of zoning and rotation in the party, and the Southeast zone also hoped to get the ticket. Although elements from the Southeast zone were not significant in the APC, there was evidence that the then president wished that the position went to the Southeast (Nwabufu, 2019). The arrangement was constrained however by the fact that many people from the zone continued to despise the party and were even expressing the view openly that they will not vote for the party and will instead prefer to vote for even a northerner in another party than vote for their fellow Igbo in APC (Ekpu, 2022). Perhaps, seeing this seeming incongruence, prominent aspirants arose from the Southwest, including the then serving Vice President of the country, and Bola Tinubu, the leader of the party. Other aspirants eventually declared their interest in the race.

The situation in APC was tumultuous. Delegates to the primaries were chosen from among officials at the national, state, and local government/ward level structures of the party. Four aspirants were notable before the primaries, namely, Bola Tinubu, who was the national leader of the party and was noted to control the political structures in many states, particularly the Southwest (France 24, 2023). Professor Yemi Osinbajo, the Vice President of the country, was believed to be close to many governors. Chibuike Amechi, a serving minister, was the former governor of Rivers State, and Dave Umahi, a serving Governor, was the most prominent aspirant from the Southeast. All eyes were initially on the president, who had asked the governors in the party to allow him to choose his successor. But when the president did not make any further effort to actualise this demand, the focus shifted to the individual candidates, who all along had been cutting deals with delegates and forming alliances with governors and stakeholders from the different sections of the country. In the subsequent primary election, Bola Tinubu emerged winner with a wide majority of 1271 votes. He was followed by Amaechi, who came a distant

second with 316 votes (Alabi, 2022). Vice President Osinbajo took the third position.

In the midst of the seeming confusion in the parties, an ad hoc committee set up by the PDP for the purpose of deciding where the party was to zone its presidential ticket announced that the party would not adopt zoning and therefore there would not be rotation in 2023. This opened the way for northern candidates in the party to contest, and candidates like Atiku Abubakar and Aminu Tambuwal immediately became the frontrunners for the position in the party. The Southeast had hoped that the party would zone the position to the region as an acknowledgement that it was their turn and also as compensation for the long loyalty of the people of the zone to the party. So, when the party threw its doors open to all regions and zones, prominent members from the Southeast region, led by one of the presidential contenders, Peter Obi, left PDP and went to the Labour Party (Obadare, 2023). The nomination primary in the PDP was a very hectic exercise. Delegates to the nomination convention were drawn from among officials at the local government, state and national levels.

The primaries featured three relatively powerful candidates among others, namely, Nyesom Wike, then Governor of Rivers State; Aminu Tambuwal, former Speaker of the House of Representatives and then Governor of Sokoto State; and Atiku Abubakar, former Vice President of Nigeria, who was also the presidential candidate of the party in the previous general elections. Wike hoped to win in the South-South states and many other southern states and make a good showing in some northern states. Atiku hoped to win a majority of the northern states and the Southwest and Southeast, while Tambuwal hoped to make a good showing in many northern states as well as in some states of the south (Adewole, 2022). In the resulting showdown, Atiku and Wike largely performed as envisaged, although none of the candidates won in the first ballot. Wike must have then calculated that he would be able to force a compromise before the second ballot that could at least guarantee him the Vice Presidential slot. However, the surprise announcement by Tambuwal, asking his supporters to vote for Atiku in the second ballot, changed the entire scenario in the PDP. Atiku thereafter won the subsequent second ballot handsomely, with Wike apparently getting no deal (Alike & Okocha, 2022).

Until the entry of Peter Obi into the Labour Party in 2022, LP had been a marginal party in Nigeria. Since being formed in 2002, LP's best electoral performance was in 2009 when it won the governorship election in Ondo state (Ezeamalu, 2012), a feat that was repeated in 2013. Beyond this, the party was just an outpost of the Nigerian labour unions, which largely provided the officials who occupied the party structures at various levels. When the party lost Ondo State in 2016, there was no other state that it controlled. When Peter Obi entered the party in 2022 however, he came with his supporters. But although some of the new entrants were allowed to occupy some vacant positions in the structures of the LP at various levels, especially at the national level, LP formal structures remained largely unchanged after Obi's entry. Instead, Obi's supporters coalesced into informal groups within their new party. Notwithstanding, Obi was overwhelmingly elected as the party's presidential candidate for the 2023 presidential elections at its

nomination congress held on 30th May 2022 (Oluwafemi, 2023).

The 2023 presidential elections were thus, a 3-pronged affair between the APC candidate, the PDP candidate, and the LP candidate. With this line-up, the election immediately became a matter of not only the organisational depths of the parties, but also a question of which of these parties will be able to integrate its formal structures with the individual structures of its presidential candidate to ensure victory at the polls.

Informal Political Structures and the Campaigns for the 2023 Presidential Elections

The campaigns proper for the presidential election in 2023 took off, therefore, with three candidates in the forefront, namely, Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the ruling APC; Atiku Abubakar of the major opposition party, PDP; and Peter Obi of the LP. Each candidate had tried to use their personal structures to dominate their political parties during the primaries. Afterwards, the political structures of each of these candidates then became embedded in the political campaign of his party. The political structure of the LP was thus shaped by Peter Obi's Obidient Movement, a decentralised, volunteer-driven initiative fueled by social media activism and his personal reputation. According to Ojo (2023), the party's campaign was primarily driven by the Obidient movement, comprising largely of youth and urban voters. The Obidient Movement was a grassroots initiative powered by volunteers, social media activism, and Obi's personal reputation for integrity, fiscal responsibility, and good governance (Igwe & Maduka, 2023B).

This unconventional mobilisation strategy stood in contrast to Nigeria's traditional patronage-based structures of the PDP and APC, which often hinges on patronage networks, financial inducements, and institutional loyalty. For the APC, this included the Tinubu Mandate Group, comprising party loyalists, regional alliances, state governors, and grassroots influencers. For the PDP, this involved the Peoples Democratic Movement, an amorphous group maintained over the years by Atiku Abubakar; and whose members included many ex-government, former and present party officials and other influencers at various levels. The informal groups in these two parties helped extend the reach of the parties to far-flung places as well as bolster voter mobilisation and vote canvassing (Ibeanu, *et al*, 2023).

The campaigns were going to be hectic from the start. First, the time available for campaigns was short- less than three months from the end of the primaries. Then, the primaries had thrown up many controversies, including the issue of whose turn it was to bring the next president. While the southeast was busy arguing that it was their turn, Tinubu of the APC was quoted as insisting it was his turn. Then, there was the controversy of the Muslim-Muslim ticket in the APC, involving another Muslim as vice presidential candidate of the party (Dickson & Weinoh, 2024). The political system had been so overheated that it was almost at a breaking point by the time formal campaigns took off.

The APC presidential campaign was billed to take place across the zones, starting with a rally in Jos on November 15th, 2022 and ending on February 18th, 2023, with a grand rally in Lagos (Olokede, 2023). The campaigns were to

involve the candidate making stops at the various states in a zone within the period assigned to the zone. The PDP campaign essentially took this same format. These two parties relied on their formal internal organisational architecture as a framework for campaign coordination and resource allocation. These were supplemented with the informal candidate-driven networks. For the LP, however, their presidential campaign took a different form. The LP had remained a fringe political entity for much of its existence, largely dependent on labour union backing. However, this began to shift following Peter Obi's defection from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in 2022. Peter Obi's entry introduced a unique structure distinct from the LP's traditional hierarchy (Ojukwu, Mbah & Eze, 2024).

Inheriting such a party and with no time to build up significant formal structures, the LP and its candidate had to rely on the more informal structures to try to win the 2023 elections. The LP's unprecedented campaign, fueled by youth and urban voters frustrated with governance failures, highlighted the potential for third-force parties to challenge Nigeria's two-party dominance (Adekoya, 2020; Akinyemi, 2024). A third force is a party in a two-party-dominated political space. The peculiar campaign mounted by the LP and its candidates was able to energise a new segment of the electorate that was largely apathetic in previous elections, especially among the youth and urban voters. In the urban areas of the Southeast and Abuja, LP campaigns were something of a carnival.

However, outside these places, especially in the rural areas and in far-flung states where internet access was low, the party lacked significant impact. Any impact in these places was restricted to traditional bases, such as among Igbos in the areas and among Christian groups in such states. Obi's campaign was thus concentrated in relatively few areas, without much attempt to penetrate the areas where the party had no traditional support. This was unlike the APC and PDP, which each controlled many state governments, who then used the party structures in their states to ensure that the party campaigns reached the nooks and crannies of the various states.

Structural Factors and the Outcome Of the 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria

A party with formidable and well-coordinated structures typically performs better in elections (Panbianco, 1988). In Nigeria's 2023 general election, the interplay between formal party structures and individual political structures significantly shaped outcomes, as seen in the contrasting performances of the three major parties that featured in that election. Peter Obi's candidacy in LP propelled the party into national prominence. However, the LP's limited organisational depth and inability to integrate Obi's decentralised structure exposed critical weaknesses, restricting its success to strongholds like Lagos and Abuja. Despite its innovation and appeal, Obi's structure ultimately lacked the institutional depth and logistical reach necessary for national electoral victory. This limitation was evident in his third-place finish in the 2023 presidential election, where he secured approximately 6.1million votes (Kohnert, 2023).

In contrast, Atiku Abubakar and Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the candidates of the APC and PDP, respectively, capitalised on deeply entrenched political structures built over decades (Ibeanu, *et al*, 2023). These well-oiled structures

enabled comprehensive voter mobilisation and electoral dominance (Igwe & Maduka, 2023). While the Obidient Movement succeeded in energising a new segment of the electorate, especially among youth and urban voters, its volunteer-driven model could not match the scale and sophistication of Atiku's or Tinubu's long-established political structures (Folorunsho-Francis, 2025). This structural imbalance played a pivotal role in the Labour Party's inability to secure key states beyond Lagos and Abuja, highlighting the centrality of political structure in determining electoral outcomes in Nigeria (Folorunsho-Francis, 2025).

The All Progressives Congress (APC) demonstrated how a deeply rooted political structure can translate into electoral dominance. This concept of political structure highlights the synergy between institutionalised party mechanisms and candidate-specific support systems, which collectively determine a party's capacity to engage voters, navigate electoral processes, and achieve competitive outcomes in elections. This finding on the role of political structures in shaping party performance in Nigeria's elections is corroborated by many political scientists, who have consistently emphasised the role of party structures in determining electoral outcomes. Conversely, marginal parties like the Labour Party (LP) have historically been constrained by weak institutional frameworks and financial limitations (Ojukwu, *et al*, 2024). The LP, previously marginal, only emerged as a formidable force due to the candidacy of Peter Obi, whose appeal cut across traditional party lines.

The 2023 presidential elections however showed that while candidate-driven campaigns have disrupted the dominance of traditional party politics, they often lack the institutional depth to maintain momentum beyond elections. The LP's reliance on digital campaigns and volunteer networks limited its effectiveness outside urban centres such as Lagos and Abuja. In contrast, the APC, through structures like the Tinubu Mandate Group (TMG), leveraged its longstanding relationships with governors, incumbent legislators and other officials, traditional rulers, and financiers to mobilise voters nationwide (Igwe & Maduka, 2023). The final result of the 2023 presidential election showed that the traditionally entrenched parties dominated. Whereas APC scored 8,794,726, PDP had 6,984,520, while LP got 6,101,533.

Conclusion

This research has shown that political structures are central in determining electoral outcomes. Whereas dominant parties usually have institutionalised structures, marginal parties have often depended on informal structures to mount significant challenges to institutionalised parties. Informal and formal political structures can each reinforce the other to deliver victory to a party, such that where one exists and the other is weak, the one can be used to strengthen the other. The paper found, however, that while candidate-centred campaigns can energise voters, sustained electoral success requires institutionalised structures. A party's long-term viability, therefore, depends on its ability to institutionalise its support base and build structures that have depth and the logistical reach necessary for navigating election realities towards national victory.

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