

THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION IN COMBATING CORRUPTION IN CAMPAIGN FINANCING IN NIGERIA, 1999-2023

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Abstract

This paper investigated the role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in combating corruption in campaign financing in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023. Corruption in campaign financing poses a significant threat to the integrity of the electoral process, undermining democracy and fostering a culture of electoral malpractice. The study identified critical issues, including inadequate regulatory frameworks, a lack of transparency in campaign funding, and the pervasive influence of money in politics. The following research questions guided the study: What measures has INEC implemented to regulate campaign financing in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023? How effective have these measures been in reducing corruption in campaign financing? What challenges has INEC faced in enforcing campaign financing regulations? The objectives of the study were to analyse INEC's regulatory framework for campaign financing, assess the effectiveness of its enforcement mechanisms, and identify barriers to effective implementation. The study was anchored on concepts of democratic governance and political accountability, with particular emphasis on the Principal-Agent Theory. Findings revealed that, although INEC has made progress through initiatives such as amendments to the Electoral Act and enhanced monitoring of campaign finances, significant challenges remain. These include inadequate funding, weak enforcement mechanisms, and the persistent influence of political actors, which hinder the effective implementation of campaign finance regulations. In conclusion, INEC's role in combating corruption in campaign financing is crucial for promoting free and fair elections in Nigeria. To enhance its effectiveness, the study recommends strengthening legal provisions on campaign financing, improving transparency and disclosure requirements, and fostering collaboration with civil society organisations to monitor campaign financing activities.

Keywords: INEC, corruption, campaign financing, Nigeria, electoral integrity.

Introduction

Corruption in campaign financing is a significant issue threatening the integrity of Nigeria's electoral processes. Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has played a central role in regulating elections, including the management of campaign financing. Despite the establishment of frameworks to foster transparency and accountability, electoral corruption remained pervasive, permeating various levels of political engagement and campaign financing (Duruji & Umeadi, 2021). This introduction outlined the nature of campaign financing corruption in Nigeria, the regulatory framework by INEC, and the challenges faced in effectively combating these corrupt practices.

The electoral landscape in Nigeria has been marred by various forms of corruption, particularly in campaign financing. Campaign financing refers to the funds raised by candidates and political parties to support their electoral activities. In Nigeria, these funds were often sourced from dubious means, including bribery, embezzlement, and illicit contributions from businesses seeking favours (Agbaje, 2020). This environment fostered a system where money politics often outweighed political ideologies, leading to the emergence of a political culture rooted in patronage and corruption (Orogbemi, 2019).

The lack of strict enforcement of campaign finance regulations has further exacerbated the situation. Many candidates relied heavily on personal wealth and financial patronage networks, thereby sidelining the tenets of democratic representation and accountability (Nnamani, 2021). As a result, voters often find themselves caught in a web of obligations to the political elite, feeling detached from the decision-making processes that govern their lives (Ezeani, 2022).

As the electoral management body, INEC's mandate encompassed the organisation and conduct of free and fair elections, ensuring compliance with electoral laws and regulations. The introduction of the Electoral Act of 2010

(as amended) established a framework for regulating campaign financing in Nigeria, enabling INEC to set limits on campaign expenditures and impose mandates for the disclosure of campaign contributions (INEC, 2022). This legal framework was designed to improve transparency in funding sources and maintain accountability among political actors.

INEC's efforts in regulating campaign financing include enforcing reporting requirements for political parties and candidates. The commission regularly monitored campaign financing activities, aimed to deter illicit funding practices and promote compliance with established regulations. However, these regulatory measures have faced challenges, including inadequate resources, a lack of political will among stakeholders, and the influence of corrupt practices on the electoral process (Duruji & Umeadi, 2021).

Despite INEC's mandate to oversee and regulate campaign financing, several systemic challenges hinder its effectiveness in combating corruption. One of the significant challenges is the lack of enforcement capabilities, as INEC has limited power to impose sanctions on violators of campaign finance regulations (Nnamani, 2021). This weak enforcement mechanism has allowed political parties and candidates to flout regulations without facing significant repercussions.

Moreover, the opaque nature of campaign financing in Nigeria often complicates INEC's oversight efforts. Many political actors exploit loopholes in the regulatory framework, disguising illicit funds through complex financial transactions and arrangements (Agbaje, 2020). Additionally, the political environment in Nigeria is often characterised by hostility towards the enforcement of electoral laws, with political actors frequently resisting regulatory scrutiny due to fear of compromising their electoral prospects (Orogbemi, 2019).

The influence of money politics further complicates INEC's efforts to promote clean campaign financing. Many candidates engage in vote-buying and other corrupt practices during elections, often exacerbating the cycle of corruption and impeding INEC's regulatory efforts (Ezeani, 2022). This not only undermined the credibility of the electoral process but also eroded public trust in democratic institutions.

The role of INEC in combating corruption in campaign financing in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 underscored the complexities and challenges associated with electoral governance. While INEC has made strides in establishing a regulatory framework intended to foster accountability and transparency, systemic issues, including weak enforcement mechanisms, lack of political will, and the entrenched culture of money politics, persist. As Nigeria continues to navigate its democratic journey, addressing these challenges will be fundamental to enhancing the integrity of the electoral process and fostering a political environment that prioritises accountability and public trust.

Literature Review

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), established by the 1999 Constitution, is Nigeria's statutory electoral management body responsible for supervising elections, including campaign financing (Ayobolu, 2024). Over the Fourth Republic (1999–2023), INEC's legal mandates expanded, yet enforcement of campaign finance regulations has struggled. This literature review examined key research on INEC's evolving role in understanding corruption in campaign financing, zeroing in on its monitoring capacity, institutional challenges, legal context, and emerging enforcement practices.

Ayobolu (2024) outlined the constitutional and statutory origins of INEC's mandates, especially the 1999 Constitution and Electoral Acts, including the 2022 Act. Theoretically grounded in elitist theory, Ayobolu critiqued persistent violations of campaign finance laws and underscored how impunity has undermined electoral integrity in every cycle since 1999. This source provided a foundational overview of INEC's formal responsibilities.

Sule, Mohd Sani, and Mat's (2017) study on the 2015 elections examined INEC's monitoring of campaign expenditure under the 2010 Electoral Act. Using qualitative interviews and focus groups (as primary data), they find widespread overspending by parties and weak enforcement by INEC, attributed to political inertia and legal loopholes.

Ajayi (2025) assessed INEC's monitoring during the 2023 elections, using secondary sources. He highlighted persistent enforcement deficiencies, including inadequate legal mechanisms, limited staffing and resources, and a lack of transparency, factors that compromised INEC's capacity to track campaign funding. Isaac et al. (2024) focused on third-party spending, an emerging area regulated by the 2022 Electoral Act. Using documentary

analysis, they demonstrated how INEC's inadequate supervision has allowed the persistence of third-party funding.

The Alliance for Finance Monitoring (ACFIM, 2023) revealed that, despite expanded powers under the 2022 Electoral Act, such as monitoring expenses and limiting contributions, INEC failed to develop mechanisms to enforce these provisions during the 2023 elections. Similarly, a 2024 report indicated that INEC and most political parties withheld their post-election audited financial reports, thereby defying legal requirements and compromising transparency.

Feyisayo, Ajayi (2025) argued that Nigeria's political funding system largely operates in obscurity, enabling corruption and weakening public trust. He noted that INEC is constrained by institutional inefficiencies and political interference, severely limiting its enforcement role.

During the 2023 elections, INEC declared its intention to collaborate with anti-corruption agencies (EFCC, ICPC) and media regulators to monitor campaign spending and curb vote buying. This cooperation demonstrated a shift in the direction of multi-stakeholder enforcement, but its efficacy remains questionable. In her 2023 evaluation, All Africa reported that INEC, along with security agencies, conducted public sensitisation campaigns on electoral laws, particularly the influence of money, and engaged banks and forex operators to report suspicious transactions under money-laundering frameworks. While laudable, the long-term impact of these initiatives on reducing financial corruption remains unclear.

Ocheja and Esomchi (2023) examined the impact of political party financing on electoral credibility in Nigeria, employing quantitative and qualitative methods. They concluded that excessive and unregulated financing erodes governance and development, distorting electoral behaviour and outcomes between 2015 and 2023.

Elizabeth Rike James (2017) explored the legal challenges that limit INEC's effectiveness in monitoring campaign finance, revealing historical debates and structural difficulties dating back to earlier republics. Moreover, Aiyede (2008) discussed the complementary roles of INEC, EFCC, and ICPC in curbing political corruption, arguing for institutional synergy, though resource and coordination challenges limit effectiveness.

Campaign funding in Nigeria refers to the financial resources allocated to political parties and candidates for their electoral activities. The landscape of campaign finance has evolved significantly since the 1999 elections, characterised by the increasing reliance on wealthy individuals and corporate entities for funding (Agbaje, 2020). Politicians often engage in extensive fundraising efforts, which can lead to the commercialisation of politics, where financial backing determines political viability and influence.

The Electoral Act of 2010 (as amended) provided a legal framework for regulating campaign financing, setting limits on contributions by individuals and entities. However, the enforcement of these regulations has been dismal (INEC, 2022). Political parties frequently disclosed misleading information about their funding sources, creating an environment rife with transparency issues. A report by the African Union indicated that campaign financing in Nigeria exhibits a lack of transparency, with funds often raised through informal channels, further complicating regulatory oversight (African Union, 2021).

Godfatherism refers to the phenomenon where influential political elites exert control over political candidates in exchange for financial support and other resources. This patronage system allowed wealthy individuals, often referred to as "godfathers," to have a firm grip of power over political processes and candidates, shaping electoral outcomes in their favour (Nnamani, 2021). Godfathers often provided financial backing for candidates in return for loyalty and guaranteed political favours once these candidates are elected.

The term "godfatherism" highlighted the dependency of politicians on these powerful individuals, leading to a political culture where allegiance to godfathers superseded adherence to democratic ideals and accountability (Duruji & Umeadi, 2021). The presence of godfathers has profound implications for the electoral process, as candidates often prioritise the interests of their benefactors over those of their constituents, resulting in a compromised democratic environment.

The impact of big money in Nigeria's electoral process is multifaceted. Firstly, it resulted in unequal competition among candidates. Wealthy candidates often have an advantage, enabling them to reach larger audiences through media campaigns, rallies, and other outreach efforts (Orogbemi, 2019). This financial leverage skewed the playing field, making it difficult for less affluent candidates to compete favourably.

Moreover, the reliance on big money often led to corruption and unethical practices, including vote-buying and electoral manipulation. During the 2019 general elections, several reports indicated ubiquitous electoral graft and

other illicit practices as candidates sought to secure votes through financial incentives (Suleiman, 2021). These practices eroded public trust in the electoral process, as citizens began to question the legitimacy of election outcomes.

Additionally, over-monetisation of the electoral process influenced policy decisions, as elected officials were beholden to their financial backers rather than their constituents. This tendency has resulted in the prioritisation of the interests of a few wealthy individuals over the broader public good, leading to policies that favour those with deep pockets and fat purses.(Ezeani, 2022).

The case of Rochas Okorocha, former governor of Imo State, exemplified the intersection of big money and godfatherism. Okorocha, who initially positioned himself as a champion of the people, relied heavily on financial backing from godfathers to win his gubernatorial seat in 2011. However, following his election, it became evident that the interests of his financial backers often took precedence over the needs of his constituents. Reports emerged of widespread allegations of mismanagement and corruption during his tenure, underscoring how dependence on big money and godfatherism can compromise governance (Nwankwo, 2020).

Another illuminating example is the Senatorial campaign of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a prominent political figure in Nigeria. Tinubu, known for his extensive political network and financial clout, has been identified as a key godfather in Lagos State. His support has propelled many candidates to political office, creating a political landscape where loyalty to Tinubu often outweighs the interests of the majority of the people. (Orogbemi, 2019). His influence underscored how godfathers can effectively shape political careers while simultaneously maintaining significant control over the political process.

As Nigeria approached the 2023 general elections, the role of big money and godfatherism became a more entrenched and contentious issue. The growing discontent with the established political order led to calls for reforms in campaign financing and a more transparent electoral process (Duruji & Umeadi, 2021). Civil society organisations have increasingly advocated for stricter enforcement of campaign financing regulations to curb the influence of money in politics. Despite these calls for reform, entrenched interests make significant changes challenging. Political elites often resisted efforts to increase transparency, fearing that such measures would erode their power. As the election season approached, the interplay between campaign financing, big money, and godfatherism became a defining feature of Nigeria's electoral landscape.

The role of big money and godfatherism in Nigeria's electoral process from 1999 to 2023 has significant implications for democracy, governance, and accountability. While efforts to regulate campaign financing existed, the challenges posed by inadequate enforcement, lack of transparency, and entrenched political patronage hindered the realisation of a truly democratic electoral process. As Nigeria continues to grapple with these issues, it is essential to promote reforms that ensure accountability in campaign financing and mitigate the influence of godfatherism to foster a more equitable and transparent political environment.

Nigeria's 1999 Constitution explicitly barred political parties from holding foreign funds and mandated annual submission of financial statements to INEC, which in turn reported to the National Assembly (2001–2022) . The Electoral Act (2001) and its amendments (2002, 2006, 2010, 2022) established campaign spending limits and individual contribution caps: 2006: ₦500 million presidential limit; 2010: ₦1 billion; 2022: ₦5 billion. Individual donation limits rose from ₦1 million in 2006 to ₦50 million by 2022. These legislative enhancements, however, contrast starkly with persistent enforcement challenges .

Despite regulatory frameworks, enforcement has remained weak. INEC has struggled with inadequate legal muscle, resource constraints, limited skilled manpower, and the absence of transparency mechanisms, particularly noticeable in the 2023 elections . For instance, the 2022 Electoral Act endowed INEC with powers to limit party contributions, monitor spending, and enforce disclosures; however, INEC failed to establish mechanisms to monitor campaign spending during the 2023 electoral cycle. Furthermore, audits of political party expenditures remained irregular. In the 2019 elections, the ruling parties (APC and PDP) reportedly spent three times more than permitted; many parties did not submit audited returns at all . The new law mandated public posting of audited returns in newspapers and provided disclosure rules, but enforcement remained absent.

Unregulated campaign financing creates barriers to entry. Steep increases in nomination form costs of over 300 per cent for presidential and 800 per cent for gubernatorial forms between 2015 and 2023 amplify money politics, inhibiting youth and women's participation . Such trends foster an electoral landscape dominated by wealthy elites and "godfathers," skewing competition and obstructing democratic pluralism .

Elite capture is facilitated through opaque financing. As comparative studies show, despite spending limits, Nigerian candidates routinely channel funds via traditional rulers, business elites, or religious organisations to evade controls. Parallel, untraceable campaign structures were evident in the 2023 elections, deepening clientelism and elite control. Weak financial disclosure enabled corruption. Usen (2024) observed that undisclosed funding sources underpin undemocratic practices and systemic corruption. The weakened institutional oversight compounds this, as executive and legislative interference often shields violators .

Legal inconsistencies also breed uncertainty. While the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020 prohibited corporate funding of political parties, INEC's Political Finance Handbook arguably allowed it, creating legal ambiguity that is exploited. Disclosure rules under the 2022 Electoral Act ban anonymous donations and require reporting of contributions over ₦1 million, yet such mandates are poorly observed, and anonymous “committee of friends” fundraising remains common . Additionally, social protection initiatives (e.g., SUREP, NPower, TraderMoni) sometimes serve as covert campaign tools, blurring lines between public resource usage and electioneering, in violation of the Code of Conduct .

Innovations like crowdfunding and diaspora donations further complicated oversight. Under the Electoral Act 2022, individual donations are capped, but parties retained the flexibility to raise funds. The law prohibited political parties from holding diaspora-sourced funds, yet allowed candidates to receive them, creating a legal grey area that could be exploited . For example, proposals to raise \$150 million from diaspora and ₦100 billion domestically for Mr Peter Obi’s campaign highlight the magnitude of this trend, raising questions about compliance and transparency. While the literature provides a solid foundation, key gaps remain, as exemplified in the following: Effectiveness of recent measures: Little evaluation existed of EFCC/ICPC collaboration or other financial sector interventions; Contextual nuance by election cycle: Comparative analysis of INEC’s response across different elections (e.g., 2011, 2019) is sparse; Role of civil society: The influence of organisations like ACFIM in pushing enforcement reforms is underexplored, and Technological innovations: There’s no substantial literature on how digital tools or BVAS influenced campaign finance monitoring.

Theoretical Framework

The persistent challenges of corruption in campaign financing in Nigeria necessitated a robust theoretical framework to analyse the dynamics between the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and its stakeholders. Principal-Agent Theory (PAT) offered a valuable lens to examine this relationship, particularly in understanding the delegation of authority, monitoring mechanisms, and the alignment (or misalignment) of interests between the principal (the electorate and the state) and the agent (INEC). This framework elucidated the complexities of electoral management and the systemic issues that hindered effective oversight of campaign financing.

Principal-Agent Theory, originating from economics and political science, explored situations where one entity (the principal) delegated authority to another (the agent) to perform tasks on its behalf. The theory highlighted the challenges arising from information asymmetry, divergent interests, and the costs associated with monitoring and enforcing compliance. In the context of electoral management, the electorate and the state acted as the principal, entrusting INEC as the agent to conduct free, fair, and transparent elections, including overseeing campaign financing.

Application of Principal-Agent Theory to INEC's Role

The Nigerian Constitution and the Electoral Act empowered INEC with the responsibility of organising and supervising elections, including regulating campaign financing. This delegation established INEC as the agent tasked with ensuring that political parties and candidates adhere to legal and ethical standards in their campaign financing activities. One of the core issues in the principal-agent relationship is information asymmetry, where the agent possesses more information about their actions than the principal. In Nigeria, this manifested in INEC's limited capacity to monitor and verify the financial activities of political entities. Factors such as inadequate resources, lack of technological infrastructure, and political interference exacerbated this asymmetry, leading to challenges in detecting and addressing financial misconduct.

While INEC is mandated to ensure transparency and accountability, political actors often have incentives to circumvent regulations to gain electoral advantages. This divergence in interests can lead to situations where political entities engage in illicit financial practices, knowing that enforcement mechanisms may be weak or ineffective.

Effective monitoring is crucial to align the interests of the agent with those of the principal. INEC's ability to monitor campaign financing is contingent upon its institutional capacity, legal authority, and political

independence. However, historical instances of electoral malpractices, such as vote-buying and financial misconduct, suggested that INEC's monitoring mechanisms have often been insufficient or compromised.

Empirical Evidence and Case Studies

Several studies have examined the application of Principal-Agent Theory in the context of Nigerian elections: Aboh and Obem (2021). In their study, they utilised Principal-Agent Theory to analyse the role of INEC in managing election-related conflicts, highlighting how the commission's actions (or inactions) can either mitigate or exacerbate electoral disputes. They noted that the effectiveness of INECs is often undermined by institutional weaknesses and external pressures. Odoziobodo (2015): In his appraisal of the 2007 general elections, Odoziobodo applied structural functionalism to assess INEC's performance. While not directly employing PAT, his findings underscored the importance of institutional integrity and accountability, themes central to Principal-Agent Theory. Madueke and Enyiazu (2025): In their research, which focused on the 2023 general elections, they examined how INEC's organisational attributes contributed to electoral integrity. They found that corruption, lack of adherence to rules, and lack of independence significantly constrained INEC's effectiveness, aligning with the challenges identified in Principal-Agent Theory.

Principal-Agent Theory offered a comprehensive framework to analyse the complexities of INEC's role in combating corruption in campaign financing in Nigeria. By addressing the challenges of information asymmetry, divergent interests, and monitoring inefficiencies, stakeholders developed targeted reforms to enhance electoral integrity and foster public trust in the democratic process.

Research Methodology

This research methodology outlined the approach used to investigate the role of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in combating corruption in campaign financing in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023. The study employed qualitative methods utilising secondary data collection. Existing literature and documentation were analysed to understand how INEC's strategies and interventions have impacted corruption in campaign financing.

The qualitative research design focused on exploring complex phenomena through rich, contextualised data. This methodology is particularly suited for examining the multifaceted area of campaign financing and corruption, as it enables in-depth understanding and nuanced interpretations from existing data. Qualitative research ensured the exploration of perceptions, experiences, and behaviours related to INEC and its regulatory framework, providing valuable insights into the operations and challenges the commission faces.

The primary purpose of this research is to critically analyse the role of INEC in regulating campaign financing and mitigating corruption. This involved examining historical data, official reports, and relevant literature to evaluate INEC's effectiveness in enforcing regulations and promoting transparency in campaign financing. The rationale behind employing qualitative methods lies in the complexity of corruption in Nigerian politics, which requires a thorough examination of various perspectives reflected in existing documents and reports.

The study relied exclusively on secondary data collection methods, focusing on documents, governmental reports, academic publications, and other relevant literature. Secondary data provided a wealth of information and insights that illuminated the dynamics of campaign financing and corruption. Several types of secondary data sources were evaluated to gather relevant information for this study:

Official reports produced by INEC and other governmental agencies are invaluable. These reports contained key data on campaign financing regulations, implementation outcomes, compliance rates, and instances of corruption. The INEC Annual Reports from 1999 to 2023 served as primary documents for this analysis, reflecting the commission's activities, challenges, and successes (INEC, 2022). Reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) detailing their monitoring and regulatory measures were crucial to understanding their role in tackling corruption.

Analysis of the Electoral Act of 2010 and its subsequent amendments was essential to understanding the regulations governing campaign financing in Nigeria. These legal documents outlined the limitations on campaign contributions and expenditures, as well as the responsibilities of INEC in enforcing these regulations (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010).

Non-governmental organisations such as Transparency International and the National Democratic Institute produced reports that examined electoral integrity and campaign financing in Nigeria. These documents often included analyses of INEC's performance, public trust in elections, and specific case studies on corruption in campaign financing (Transparency International, 2021).

Peer-reviewed journals, books, and articles provided analytical perspectives on INEC's role and broader issues related to campaign financing in Nigeria. Publications from journals such as the Nigerian Journal of Political Science and the African Journal of Political Science were examined to glean insights into the existing discourse on these topics (Adekanye, 2018; Smith, 2020).

Reputable Nigerian and international media sources were also reviewed. Investigative reports and analyses published in platforms like The Guardian Nigeria and Premium Times often delved into specific instances of corruption and the effectiveness of INEC in enforcing compliance within campaign financing.

The data collection process involved systematically identifying, selecting, and organising secondary data sources relevant to the study. The following steps guided this process: A comprehensive search for relevant documents was conducted using academic databases, government websites, NGO publications, and online libraries. Search terms included keywords such as "INEC," "campaign financing," "corruption in Nigeria," and "electoral integrity."

Sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and the time frame of the data. Only documents published between 1999 and 2023, which provided insights into the role of INEC and campaign financing practices, were included.

Once relevant documents were identified, they were organised thematically to facilitate analysis. This included categories such as regulatory frameworks, instances of corruption, and measures taken by INEC to enhance transparency.

Qualitative data analysis focused on interpreting the secondary data collected through thematic and content analysis. This approach enabled the identification of patterns and themes relevant to INEC's regulatory practices and the challenges posed by corruption in campaign financing.

Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and patterns within the secondary data. This involved systematically reviewing the data to extract major themes related to INEC's role in combating corruption.

The data were coded to identify recurring themes, such as the effectiveness of INEC's regulatory efforts, the impact of corruption on electoral outcomes, and public perceptions of INEC's integrity. Codes were developed inductively from the data, allowing for themes to emerge naturally. After coding the data, significant themes were identified and categorised. For instance, themes may include "ENFORCEMENT OF REGULATIONS," "PUBLIC TRUST IN INEC," and "CORRUPTION CASE STUDIES." Each theme encompassed various insights derived from different sources, showcasing the multidimensional nature of the research topic.

Content analysis complemented thematic analysis by allowing for a systematic examination of the nine regulatory documents, reports, and media articles. This involved assessing the frequency of certain terms, phrases, and concepts related to campaign financing and corruption. While the primary focus of the study is qualitative, some quantitative aspects were referenced. For example, the number of reported cases of campaign financing irregularities before and after specific INEC interventions can be noted. This quantification helped contextualise qualitative findings. The language used in reports and documents was critically examined to assess attitudes towards INEC and perceptions of its effectiveness. This analysis involved looking for rhetorical patterns, descriptive language, and the framing of issues related to campaign financing and corruption.

Acknowledging potential limitations enhanced the research's credibility and facilitated understanding of the findings within their context. The following limitations were considered: This study relied exclusively on secondary data, which limited the comprehensiveness of insights. Secondary sources perhaps lacked real-time updates or failed to capture the most current developments in campaign financing and INEC's actions; The analysis may, perhaps, be influenced by biases inherent in the secondary data sources. Reports from governmental agencies may present a positive image of INEC, while critical assessments from NGOs could reveal a more negative perspective. These variabilities were acknowledged when interpreting findings; The dynamic nature of Nigerian politics means that campaign financing regulations and INEC's effectiveness are subject to change. Historical analyses may not fully capture the evolving landscape of electoral politics and the new challenges in more recent years.

This research methodology established a qualitative framework focusing on secondary data collection to assess the role of INEC in combating corruption in campaign financing in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023. By utilising various data sources, including governmental reports, academic publications, NGO analyses, and media articles, this provided a comprehensive understanding of INEC's regulatory efforts and the challenges faced in addressing corruption. Through thematic and content analysis, the study highlighted key findings and concluded on the effectiveness of INEC in ensuring transparent campaign financing and electoral integrity in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This section presents both specific and general findings from various studies and reports concerning INEC's role in this domain.

Specific Findings

A study by Ajayi (2025) assessed INEC's performance in monitoring campaign financing during the 2023 general elections. The findings highlighted several challenges faced by INEC, including inadequate legal frameworks, limited resources, insufficient manpower, and a lack of transparency. These impediments hindered INEC's ability to enforce compliance with campaign finance regulations effectively, thereby compromising the integrity of the electoral process.

Madueke and Enyiazu (2025) examined the organisational attributes of INEC and their impact on electoral integrity. Their research identified significant constraints like corruption, lack of adherence to rules, and political interference, which undermined INEC's independence and effectiveness in managing campaign financing. Despite legislative reforms, which are meant to strengthen INEC, these challenges persisted, affecting the credibility of elections.

According to Section 91 of the Electoral Act, INEC is authorised to monitor and regulate campaign expenditures. However, reports indicated that political actors often circumvented these regulations. For instance, allegations surfaced regarding significant sums spent by political figures to influence election outcomes, with claims of expenditures ranging from N200 million to N400 million per state, exceeding the legal limits. In a notable development, the Federal High Court directed INEC to publish the financial statements of all registered political parties during the 2023 general elections. This ruling is meant to enhance financial accountability and transparency among political parties, compelling INEC to act in accordance with its constitutional mandate to monitor the organisation and operation of political parties, including their finances.

General Findings

Over the years, INEC has faced persistent institutional constraints that have impeded its capacity to regulate campaign financing effectively. These constraints included limited financial resources, inadequate technological infrastructure, and insufficient training for personnel. Such limitations have made it challenging for INEC to implement robust monitoring mechanisms and enforce compliance with campaign finance regulations.

While Nigeria's legal frameworks, such as the Electoral Act and the Nigerian Constitution, provided a basis for regulating campaign financing, enforcement remained a significant challenge. The existence of legal provisions does not necessarily translate into effective implementation, often due to loopholes, lack of political will, and the influence of powerful political actors who resisted accountability measures.

The political culture in Nigeria has often been characterised by a lack of accountability and impunity. Political actors frequently engaged in practices such as vote-buying and excessive campaign spending without facing significant repercussions. This culture undermined efforts to combat corruption in campaign financing and eroded public trust in the electoral process.

Conclusion

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has been a central institution in Nigeria's democratic process since the country's return to civilian rule in 1999. Its role in combating corruption, particularly in campaign financing, is pivotal to the sustenance of electoral integrity and democratic consolidation. From 1999 to 2023, INEC has faced numerous challenges and recorded varying degrees of progress in regulating campaign finance, with significant implications for the transparency and credibility of Nigeria's elections. This conclusion synthesises the key insights derived from the study and underscores critical lessons and policy recommendations for strengthening INEC's effectiveness.

Firstly, INEC's mandate to regulate campaign financing is anchored in Nigeria's constitutional and legal framework, particularly the Electoral Act and related statutes. The Commission is empowered to ensure that political parties and candidates operate within prescribed financial limits and maintain transparency in campaign funding sources. This legal foundation is crucial, as it provides INEC with the authority to monitor, investigate, and sanction breaches. However, the enforcement of these provisions reveals a complex landscape characterised by institutional weaknesses, political interference, and enforcement gaps.

Between 1999 and 2023, INEC encountered significant institutional constraints that limited its ability to effectively combat corruption in campaign financing. Resource inadequacies—both financial and human—hampered its capacity to conduct rigorous monitoring and verification of financial disclosures by political actors.

In addition, inadequate technological infrastructure reduced the efficiency and transparency of financial oversight. These challenges contributed to widespread underreporting, non-disclosure, and circumvention of campaign finance laws, often with impunity.

Moreover, political interference remained a pervasive challenge to INEC's independence and operational effectiveness. Political actors with vested interests have, at times, exerted pressure on the Commission, undermining its ability to act decisively against corrupt practices. The politicisation of INEC appointments and management has also affected public perceptions of its neutrality and impartiality. Such interference not only diminishes INEC's authority but also perpetuates a culture of impunity within the political system. Judicial interventions, including the 2023 Federal High Court ruling directing INEC to publish the financial statements of registered political parties, demonstrate progress in enhancing transparency and accountability in campaign financing. These interventions underscore the role of the judiciary as a critical check within the electoral process, compelling compliance with legal requirements. Nevertheless, judicial actions alone cannot address the structural and systemic deficiencies confronting INEC's regulatory functions.

Nigeria's political culture—characterised by clientelism, vote-buying, and excessive campaign spending—further complicates INEC's efforts. Political actors often resort to financial inducements and illicit funding to secure electoral success, thereby creating an uneven playing field. This environment undermines voter confidence and erodes the legitimacy of electoral outcomes, posing a threat to democratic governance.

Despite these challenges, INEC has demonstrated resilience and a commitment to reform. Legislative amendments aimed at strengthening campaign finance regulations, increased advocacy for transparency, and collaboration with civil society and international partners have contributed to gradual improvements. The Commission's deployment of technology in voter registration and result collation, although not directly related to campaign finance, reflects a broader institutional commitment to modernisation and accountability.

Going forward, INEC's role in combating corruption in campaign financing must be supported by comprehensive institutional reforms. This includes enhancing its financial and human resource capacity, investing in modern technological systems for real-time monitoring and auditing of campaign finances, and safeguarding its operational independence from political interference. Legal reforms should aim to close existing loopholes and impose stricter sanctions for violations, while ensuring that enforcement mechanisms are transparent and consistent.

Furthermore, fostering a political culture that values transparency and accountability is essential. INEC, alongside civil society organisations, the media, and other stakeholders, must intensify voter education and advocacy efforts to highlight the detrimental effects of corrupt campaign financing on democracy. Increased public awareness can generate pressure for reform and encourage political actors to adhere to ethical standards.

In conclusion, INEC's role in combating corruption in campaign financing between 1999 and 2023 has been both challenging and transformative. Although significant barriers remain, its legal mandate, supported by judicial oversight and ongoing reforms, provides a foundation for building a more transparent and accountable electoral system in Nigeria. Ensuring the integrity of campaign financing is not merely a regulatory necessity but a democratic imperative that shapes governance legitimacy and public trust. Strengthening INEC's capacity and independence is therefore critical to advancing Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of INEC's role in combating corruption in campaign financing from 1999 to 2023, several critical recommendations emerged to enhance the commission's capacity, effectiveness, and overall impact. These recommendations addressed institutional reforms, legal enhancements, technological adoption, stakeholder engagement, and cultural shifts necessary to promote transparency and accountability in Nigeria's electoral financing landscape.

1. Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Autonomy

INEC's ability to effectively regulate campaign financing is fundamentally linked to its institutional capacity and independence. The Nigerian government must ensure adequate and sustained funding for INEC to perform its functions without resource constraints. Increased budgetary allocations will enable INEC to recruit and train personnel specialised in financial auditing, forensic accounting, and compliance monitoring, which are crucial for scrutinising campaign finance disclosures. Furthermore, INEC's operational autonomy must be protected from political interference. The appointment processes for commissioners and key officials should be transparent, merit-based, and insulated from partisan considerations. This will reinforce INEC's independence, enabling it to act decisively against corrupt practices without fear or favour. Legal provisions guaranteeing this autonomy should be strengthened to shield the commission from undue external pressures.

2. Comprehensive Legal Reforms and Enforcement Mechanisms

While Nigeria has a relatively robust legal framework governing campaign financing, primarily through the Electoral Act, several gaps and weaknesses persist. It is recommended that the National Assembly undertake comprehensive reviews of the existing legislation to close loopholes that political actors exploit. This includes clearly defining permissible campaign expenditure limits, sources of funding, and timelines for disclosure. Equally important is the establishment of stronger enforcement mechanisms. INEC should be empowered with clear authority to impose meaningful sanctions on political parties and candidates who violate campaign finance rules. These sanctions must go beyond fines and include disqualification from elections, suspension of party activities, or criminal prosecution where appropriate. The creation of an independent electoral finance tribunal or strengthening existing judicial structures to expedite campaign finance-related cases can enhance the enforcement process.

3. Adoption of Advanced Technological Solutions

INEC's monitoring and reporting of campaign financing can be significantly improved through the deployment of modern technological tools. Implementing a centralised digital platform where political parties and candidates are required to submit real-time campaign finance reports will increase transparency and facilitate timely audits. This platform should allow public access to financial disclosures, thereby promoting accountability. Blockchain technology and artificial intelligence (AI) could also be explored to secure data integrity and detect irregularities or suspicious transactions in campaign funding. Technology can assist INEC in tracking the sources of funds, monitoring expenditure patterns, and identifying discrepancies that may signal corruption. Investing in such innovations will enhance INEC's capacity to oversee complex campaign financing activities in an increasingly digital political environment.

4. Enhanced Collaboration with Civil Society and Media

INEC's efforts to combat corruption in campaign financing should be complemented by strategic partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs), media, and anti-corruption agencies. CSOs play a vital role in voter education, advocacy, and watchdog activities. INEC should actively involve these organisations in monitoring political financing and reporting irregularities. Joint capacity-building initiatives can strengthen these partnerships, equipping civil society actors with the knowledge and tools necessary to hold political actors accountable. The media, as a critical pillar of democracy, should be supported to carry out investigative journalism focused on campaign financing. Access to campaign finance information and periodic press briefings by INEC can foster a more informed electorate and deter corrupt practices by increasing the risk of public exposure.

5. Promoting a Culture of Transparency and Accountability

Beyond institutional and legal reforms, combating corruption in campaign financing requires a fundamental shift in Nigeria's political culture. INEC, in collaboration with educational institutions, CSOs, and the media, should spearhead comprehensive civic education campaigns emphasising the detrimental impact of corrupt campaign practices on democratic governance and national development. These campaigns should target political actors, party officials, and voters alike, promoting ethical campaign behaviour, responsible political participation, and zero tolerance for illicit funding. Building public awareness and demand for transparency will pressure political parties to adhere to campaign finance laws and discourage voters from accepting inducements during elections.

6. Periodic Review and Evaluation Mechanisms

INEC should institutionalise periodic reviews of campaign finance regulations and its enforcement practices to keep pace with evolving electoral dynamics. Establishing an internal audit and evaluation unit focused on campaign financing can provide continuous feedback and identify emerging risks. Such mechanisms enable INEC to adapt its strategies proactively, ensuring its regulatory framework remains relevant and effective. Regular publication of comprehensive campaign finance reports and public performance audits will further enhance transparency. These documents should be accessible to the public, researchers, and international observers, facilitating accountability and scholarly scrutiny.

7. International Cooperation and Best Practices

INEC can benefit from international partnerships and exchanges to adopt best practices in campaign finance regulation. Collaborating with electoral commissions from other democracies and international organisations such as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) or the Electoral Integrity Project can provide technical assistance, training, and policy guidance. Learning from countries that have successfully curbed campaign finance corruption through innovative laws, technology, and enforcement can provide valuable insights for Nigeria. Furthermore, adherence to international standards and treaties related to electoral transparency and anti-corruption will enhance Nigeria's democratic credentials and attract greater global support.

Combatting corruption in campaign financing in Nigeria requires a holistic approach centred on empowering INEC through institutional strengthening, legal reform, technological advancement, and robust stakeholder engagement. While challenges persist, these recommendations offer a roadmap for transforming INEC into a more effective regulator of political finance, thereby safeguarding electoral integrity. The success of these initiatives hinges on political will, sustained commitment, and a collective effort from all democratic actors to uphold transparency, fairness, and accountability in Nigeria's electoral processes.

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