

# Taming a Lion: Barriers to Monitoring Campaign Finances of Political Parties Prior to the 2015 Elections in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The role of money is germane to the survival of political parties and the conduct of their campaigns during electioneering periods. In fact, electoral processes in liberal democracies cannot end successfully bereft of requisite finances. However, this does not warrant the excessive deployment and vile use of money in the electoral process thus, contravening acceptable ethical standards. This is why in all democratic climes, there exist rules that guide against illicit acquisition and utilization of funds by political parties in financing their activities. The Nigerian democratic scenario is not different from this general norm as there are electoral laws that parties should observe in their quest to obtain finances to execute their programmes. These laws also specify penalties the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) can use in punishing erring political parties. In the build-up to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, did the political parties adhere to existing laws while generating funds? Did the INEC adequately monitor how the political parties expend money during their campaigns? This paper examines and attempts to answer these questions by qualitatively analyzing the conduct of political parties with regards to their campaign funds before the 2015 polls. It assesses INEC's efforts at monitoring their finances and the obstacles hampering the process in Nigeria and proffers solutions to the hydra-headed problem of monitoring the finances of political parties in the country.

**Keywords:** Campaign finances, Political parties, Elections in Nigeria, Democracy

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## 1. Introduction

The common adage that expresses a practical reality that a fish and water are inseparable, also applies to the relationship between money and political parties. This means that the existential potency of political parties will be deeply depleted in the absence of adequate funds. Therefore, it follows that political parties everywhere in the world need a very bountiful financial base in order to function properly if their objective of retaining or capturing political power is to be met. The indispensability of money in the affairs of political parties is even more pressing in the case of evolving democracies where the culture of democracy is still in its weaning stage. Political parties in developing democracies need more funds because of the avalanche of daunting tasks before them in terms of problems associated with establishing themselves as new political structures, overcoming the vagaries of outgoing authoritarian regime, building confidence and popularity in the electorate, etc. Due to the intensity of some of these problems and their negative impact on new democracies, there is, sometimes, the predisposition towards authoritarian reversals as has been the case in some Third World Countries. Even where political parties in evolving democracies manage to survive these vicissitudes, there is always the temptation by such parties to access funds at all costs in order to withstand the rigors of political competition in the electoral process. As a result, some parties usually fall into the trap of acquiring funds from illegal sources anathema to existing electoral laws. Of course, there is no justification whatsoever for any political party to engage in illicit fund-raising and expenditure, whether it is in new democracies where the political climate is very harsh; or in mature democracies where the political environment is relatively conducive for parties to thrive.

The issue of political party finance has been acknowledged as having a complex nature globally (Pinto-Duschinsky 2002). It is complex because of the inability of existing mechanisms put in place by different countries to adequately monitor how political parties raise funds and spend them. Examples exist to show that monitoring the finances of political parties is a problem even in advanced democracies. For instance, there have been problems in observing the financial dealings of political parties in the United Kingdom (Pinto-Duschinsky 1989; Fisher 2000); the United States (Alexander 1989; McSweeney 2000); Canada (Palthiel 1989); Germany (Saalfeld 2000); Italy (Ciaurro 1989) and so on. Notwithstanding this intricacy, it does not diminish the ability of any country to develop a system that is capable of subduing the negative influence of money on its electoral process. This explains why despite the convoluted associated with political party financing, democracy in the countries listed above as examples, has flourished for centuries.

The Nigerian experience since 1999 as it affects monitoring the sources of funds of political parties in Nigeria have been very problematic (Aluaigba 2009a). The political parties that have participated in the electioneering process in Nigeria have not only deviated from adherence to existing electoral laws concerning generating and spending party finances; the problem has asphyxiated internal party democracy, amplified

wrangling within the parties, scandals, defections, violence, etc. (Emelonye 2004: 45). A study conducted by the Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Kano intended to investigate how political parties in Nigeria were financed from the 1999 to 2007 period revealed that most of the parties were hijacked by “money bags” or “godfathers”. During the period, the parties that were financially buoyant outwitted their peers in the electoral competition making most of them to engage in fraudulent financial practices (Centre for Democratic Research and Training 2008: 89). In order to address the increasing cases of corrupt financial practices by political parties in Nigeria since 1999, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has endeavored to strengthen the laws safeguarding the behavior of parties in their drive to raise funds and spend same in pursuit of political power acquisition or retention. This is why the Electoral Act 2006 was amended to give way to the Electoral Act 2010 version in a bid to incorporate more clauses detailing on where a party can source funds, how much it can acquire and the manner such funds can be expended during electioneering activities such as party primaries and campaigns.

In the period leading to the conduct of the 2015 general elections, the political atmosphere in Nigeria was agog with election-related activities mainly by political parties, politicians and the INEC. Given that the 2015 elections were keenly competitive because the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) that has been in power for sixteen years since 1999 faced a formidable opposition from a coalition of parties under the All Progressive Congress (APC); these two major parties and other ones embarked upon an aggressive drive to source funds to prepare for the polls. As required by the *Electoral Act 2010*, it was obligatory upon the INEC to perform its key function of monitoring what sources the 28 political parties it registered got their funds, how these funds were spent during political campaigns to ensure that the parties adhered to laws, audit their accounts and make the audit reports public. However, after the 2015 elections, some questions have been asked that demand answers. Did the political parties actually adhere to existing laws in their frenzied efforts to generate funds preparatory to the 2015 general elections? Did the INEC adequately monitor how the political parties utilized the money they sourced during their campaigns to ensure that erring parties received penalties in line with the laws? This paper examines and attempts to answer these questions through the qualitative analysis of secondary data on the conduct of political parties before the 2015 polls. It also assesses INEC’s efforts at monitoring their finances and highlights the discernible obstacles in the process. It proffers solutions to the intricate problem of monitoring the finances of political parties in Nigeria.

## **2. Financing Political Parties in Nigeria: A Glance at the Pre-2015 Era**

The years that preceded the 2015 general elections in Nigeria as it affects financing political parties were enmeshed in practices that obstructed the emergence of a viable democracy through free and fair elections (Aluaigba 2009b). The pre-2015 period particularly during the 1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections, the issue of political party finance was in a messy state because the laws regulating it were loosely defined while political parties had access to unwarranted sources of raising money including the public purse. The scenario slightly changed during the 2011 and 2015 elections due to series of reforms carried out by the Professor Attahiru Jega-led INEC. Let us briefly look at three key areas in the era under discussion here up to 2015. These areas include the legal framework for financing political parties in Nigeria, sources of funds available to political parties and some unethical practices these parties indulged in while sourcing and expending their funds.

The legal framework stipulating the rules and regulations that political parties must adhere to are contained in Nigeria’s 1999 constitution and the *Electoral Act 2010*. On its part, the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999* in Section 225(2) specifically requires the political parties to disclose their sources of funds and their manner of expenditures. The section states that “every political party shall submit to the Independent National Electoral Commission a detailed annual statement and analysis of its sources of funds and other assets together with a similar statement of its expenditure in such form as the Commission may require”. The areas touched by the constitution are sources of funds to parties, declaration of assets and annual account statements. The Constitution is silent on other details like specific amounts parties can receive as donations and how much is to be expended for campaigns. The *Electoral Act 2010* on the other hand, is more detailed than the Constitution about party finances. The Act provide details in Sections 86, 91 and 93 on monitoring the finances of political parties by the INEC, limitations on election expenses and penalties for violators, and disclosure of sources of funds by parties respectively. Specifically, in Section 91(9) the Act limits the amount of donations to parties by stating that “an individual or other entity shall not donate more than ₦1m to any candidate”. In the same section, the Act limits the expenses on elections into various political offices to a maximum of ₦1 billion for president, ₦200 million for governor, ₦40 million for senate, ₦20 million for House of Representatives, ₦10 million for state assembly and local government chairman, and ₦1million for councilor. Furthermore, on disclosures, the Act categorically states that “a political party shall not accept any monetary or other contribution exceeding ₦100,000 unless it can identify the source of the money or other contribution to the Commission [INEC]”. All these provisions are supposed to guide political parties in their conduct during any electioneering period and help the INEC in monitoring the parties to ensure compliance to these standards. How well these provisions were

adhered to before the 2015 elections will be discussed in the subsequent section of this paper.

Prior to 2011, the sources of funds available to political parties were twofold, namely public and private sources. During this era, political parties in Nigeria received funds from the public purse in form of grants from the INEC to the extent that in 2008, the then 50 parties received as much as ₦300 million from the electoral body (Bisalla & Jimoh cited in Aluaigba 2009a) to finance their activities. However, when Professor Attahiru Jega was appointed the chairman of the INEC in June 2010, he introduced a number of reforms in INEC. One of the reforms was a stoppage to financing political parties by the INEC. The justification for this change was to forestall the evolution of very weak political parties that existed only to collect the INEC’s annual grant without substantive contribution to, and impact on the electioneering process in Nigeria. Following this development, parties were left with only one option that is, to generate funds from private sources. As shown in Figure 1 below, a recent study has confirmed that private sources make-up the bulk of the financial resource of candidates contesting elections in Nigeria. These sources include corporate donations, fund raising, donations from friends and family, personal funds, support from the party and so on.

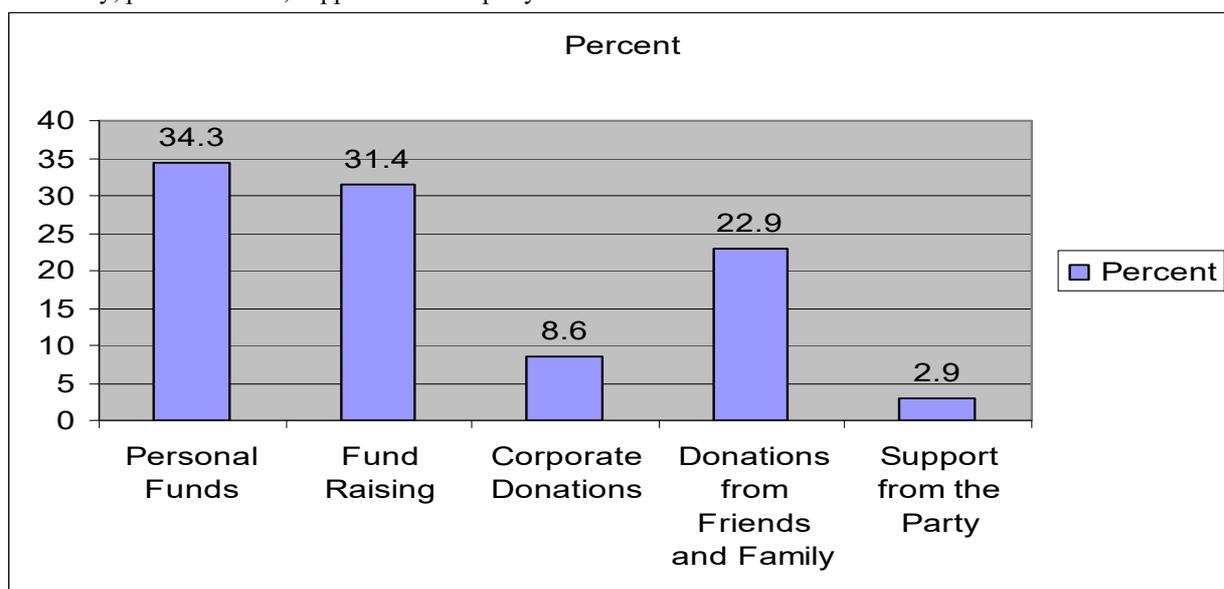


Figure 1: Sources of Funds for Financing Political Parties' Primaries by Candidates

Source: Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Mambayya House, Bayero University, Kano, (2008), *Research Report on Financing Political Parties in Nigeria, 1999 – 2007*, 74.

It is noteworthy to point out that it is in the process of generating funds from these private sources particularly fund raising, that often provide avenues for candidates and their political parties to engage in fraudulent and corrupt financial practices. This is because, as averred by Walecki (2003: 3), the “restrictions imposed on political parties and individual candidates by funding regulations often create loopholes allowing for irregular political finance”. This applies to the Nigerian case where individual politicians and political parties capitalize on the lapses in the provisions of the 1999 Constitution and the *Electoral Act 2010* regarding political finance to commit unlawful acts.

The most common unethical practices political parties and individual politicians in Nigeria indulge in include but not limited to illegal expenditure including vote buying, funding from infamous sources, selling appointments, honors, or access to information, abuse of state resources, demanding contributions from public servants and activities that contravene political finance regulations. Other financial irregularities are political contributions for favors, contracts or policy change, forcing private organizations to pay ‘protection money’, limiting access to funding for opposition parties and the like (Walecki 2003; Saffu 2003; Bryan & Baer 2005; Orji, Eme & Nwoba 2014). These illegal practices have been orchestrated during all the elections conducted in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria from 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 to 2015. For instance, in 1999, at the fundraising dinner of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the candidate who eventually became its flag bearer turned-in over ₦400 million (Saffu 2003: 23) well above the ₦100,000 stipulated by the then existing electoral law. In its assessment report of the January 2003 primary elections, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of civil society organizations bitterly complained that during the primaries by the PDP, the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), the All Progressives’ Grand Alliance (APGA), the National Democratic Party (NDP) and the United Nigeria People’s Party (UNPP), “there was widespread bribery of delegates with sacks stuffed with money to influence their votes” (cited in Orji, Eme & Nwoba 2014: 7). On November 15, 2008, the PDP organized a fund raising ceremony to construct a new secretariat in Abuja. At the occasion,

businessmen such as Femi Otedola and Aliko Dangote were reported to have contributed ₦1 billion and ₦3 billion respectively, while Strabag, one of the construction companies in Nigeria donated ₦100 million. There was an anonymous donation of ₦100 million (Okocha & Taiwo 2008).

Despite the fact that these and other donations to political parties contravened the electoral laws, no action was instituted by the INEC to prosecute the ailing parties and individuals either because the electoral body did not monitor the parties or lacked the will and capacity to take legal action against them. As it will be demonstrated in the next section of this paper, electioneering events leading to the 2015 general elections were not different from the episodes presented above and cannot be absolved from similar financial misconducts.

### 3. How Well Did INEC Monitor Political Party Campaign Funds Prior to the 2015 Elections?

In order to answer this question, let us quickly highlight the trend of events relating to fund-raising by political parties preparatory to the 2015 general elections to clearly appreciate the trajectory of the process. In doing this, we will stress the nature of funds generated by parties, whether they adhered to existing laws or contravened them and the efforts (if any) made by the INEC to monitor the fund-raising process.

As shown in Table 1 below, a total of 28 political parties were registered by the INEC to partake in the 2015 general elections. Expectedly, following the lifting of the ban on campaign activities on November 16, 2014 in line with the INEC's election timetable; all political parties sprang into action. It must be noted that despite the long list of recognized parties, two major ones dominated the political terrain. They were the then ruling party, the PDP and the All Progressive Congress (APC), the erstwhile major opposition party before April 2015. Their dominance of the electioneering process before the 2015 elections was exhibited by the political maneuver of some 'smaller' parties who declared their allegiance to either of the two mega parties by adopting their presidential candidates. For instance, the Accord Party (AP), the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the Labour Party (LP), the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), the Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA), etc. all adopted the former President Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP as their presidential candidate (*Thisday* March 12, 2015; *Daily Post* February 7, 2015 and *Premium Times* February 4, 2015). The scheming by some of the parties was to ensure victory in the 2015 elections or at least to identify with the party that was likely to emerge victorious after the polls.

Table 1: List of Political Parties Registered by the INEC for the 2015 General Elections

S/No.	Political Party	Acronym
1.	Accord	A
2.	Action Alliance	AA
3.	Advanced Congress of Democrats	ACD
4.	Allied Congress Party of Nigeria	ACPN
5.	Alliance for Democracy	AD
6.	African Democratic Congress	ADC
7.	African Peoples Alliance	APA
8.	All Progressives Congress	APC
9.	All Progressives Grand Alliance	APGA
10.	Citizens Popular Party	CPP
11.	Democratic Peoples Party	DPP
12.	Fresh Democratic Party	FRESH
13.	Hope Democratic Party	HDP
14.	Independent Democrats	ID
15.	Kowa Party	KP
16.	Labour Party	LP
17.	Mega Progressive Peoples Party	MPPP
18.	National Conscience Party	NCP
19.	New Nigeria Peoples Party	NNPP
20.	People for Democratic Change	PDC
21.	Peoples Democratic Movement	PDM
22.	Peoples Democratic Party	PDP
23.	Progressive Peoples Alliance	PPA
24.	Peoples Party of Nigeria	PPN
25.	Social Democratic Party	SDP
26.	United Democratic Party	UDP
27.	Unity Party of Nigeria	UPN
28.	United Progressive Party	UPP

Source: [Online] [http://www.inecnigeria.org/?page\\_id=18](http://www.inecnigeria.org/?page_id=18) (June 18, 2015).

Following the alignments and re-alignments by the 28 political parties, they, apart from jostling internally to produce their party flag bearers at different levels, they embarked on aggressive fundraising drive to finance their campaigns. However, as already mentioned above, attention was focused on the two major parties, the PDP and the APC. A look at how these two parties raised their campaign funds suffices at this point.

The main public fundraising event by the PDP was held on Saturday December 20, 2014 at a dinner in the old Banquet Hall of the Presidential Villa, Abuja. During the occasion, ₦21.27 billion was raised via donations from individuals, corporate bodies, key sectors of the Nigerian economy and state governments. For instance, individuals who donated at the dinner included Professor Jerry Gana, who donated ₦5 billion; Chief Tunde Ayeni, ₦1 billion; Sam Egwu, ₦1 million; Halima Jubril, ₦5 million, etc. Some corporate bodies that made donations at the dinner were Cizaly Limited, ₦250 million; Ajuji Best Western Hotel, ₦1 million; Cifex, ₦10 million; Shelter Development Limited, ₦250 million; Emzor, ₦50 million; SIFAX, ₦100 million and so on. Donations also came in from different sectors of Nigeria's economy; they were from the construction sector, ₦310 million; transport sector, ₦1 billion; real estate sector, ₦4 billion; energy sector, ₦500 million; auto sector, ₦450 million; food and agriculture, ₦500 million; oil and gas ₦5 billion, etc. On the part of state governments, the 21 PDP states governors donated a total of ₦1.05 billion to the campaign fund (*Thisday* December 21, 2014; *The Nation* December 21, 2014; *The Focus* December 21, 2014; *Punch* December 21, 2014; *PM News* December 21, 2014). There were also numerous donations from anonymous and unidentified sources simply classified as friends or associates of the PDP. Due to the colossal amounts of money donated to the party which clearly breached the 1999 Constitution and the *Electoral Act 2010*, the event generated some reactions from members of the public. For example, Professor Jonah Onuoha in an interview with the *Punch* newspaper on January 4, 2015 made a critical assessment of the PDP fundraising as follows:

But if you look at the recent fundraiser for President Goodluck Jonathan's 2015 re-election bid, it's all too easy to see there is a problem. The electoral act stipulates that a presidential candidate cannot raise more than N1bn for his or her campaign. Therefore, what we are contending with here is not the fundraiser but the amount generated - the amount cannot be justified. The law is very clear on the amount of money to be donated. What we have seen in that fundraiser is a clear violation of the electoral law. Other issues like whether those who donated money for the president are corrupt people or not do not arise here. I will admit that they have a right to raise money for campaigns but the Peoples Democratic Party will have some explanations to do about the amount donated to it.

The APC, one of the major political parties that participated in the 2015 elections also organized fund raising for its campaigns. Its method however, differed from its counterpart the PDP. The method adopted by the APC was what it called "crowd funding platform" in which members of the public were free to make donations through direct deposit and purchase of recharge cards. Through this strategy, on December 24, 2014, the party raised a total of ₦54,415,386.70. The actual target of the APC was to generate ₦50 billion in all; out of this amount, it was "set to raise ₦10 billion from the general public through direct contribution. Another ₦40 billion was to come from donations and contributions from the party's elected members including state governors and APC members of the national and state assemblies, to take the money being shopped for to ₦50 billion" (*Vanguard* February 22, 2015). The inclusion of APC state governors and members of the national and state assemblies as donors to the party's campaign funds raises questions on how compliant it was with the *Electoral Act 2010* and the 1999 Constitution that forbids elected public office holders from making donations to political parties.

Arising from the foregoing illustration that shows the fragrant contravention of Nigeria's electoral laws by the two key political parties that participated in the 2015 general elections, the questions that beg for answers are, did INEC make effort to monitor the process of fund-raising by these parties? If the electoral body indeed monitored the parties, did it apply the penalties as prescribed by the *Electoral Act 2010* against these two political parties and any other ailing one for contravening the electoral laws?

A consideration of some aspects of the monitoring of the finances of political parties by the INEC will show some strides the body has made in the past to ascertain the state of finances of these parties. If we take the issue of auditing of political parties' accounts for example, the INEC has attempted to audit the parties' accounts and publish the reports in line with Section 89(4) of the *Electoral Act 2010*. In the 2011 audit report of political parties that was published (see [http://www.inecnigeria.org/?page\\_id=18](http://www.inecnigeria.org/?page_id=18)), the INEC indicted all the then existing 55 parties for their inability to properly keep their books of accounts as enshrined in Section 93(2) of the electoral act (*Vanguard* February 20, 2013). The indictment demonstrated INEC's willingness to keep the parties on their toes with regards to transparency and accountability in their finances. The electoral body went further to delist or deregister some of the political parties, thus reducing the number of parties to 28 in readiness for the 2015 elections. In order to provide a structure for monitoring political parties' finances before the 2015 polls, the INEC further established a department to monitor the campaign expenses of parties (*Daily Post* November 18, 2014).

However, despite these bold steps that the INEC took, there are still overarching questions that the body should provide answers to. Has the electoral body penalized the PDP and its presidential candidate in the 2015 elections, former President Goodluck Jonathan for receiving far above ₦1 billion from individuals and business entities as shown earlier in this paper, in contravention of Section 91(9) of the Electoral Act 2010? Has the APC been prosecuted for not revealing those who contributed to its multi-billion naira fund? Orji, Eme & Nwoba (2014: 4) further question:

Did the Commission place any limit on the amount of contribution which individuals or cooperate agencies made to political parties in the course of fund raising for the [2015] elections? Do all political parties have records of all contributions to their campaign funds? Does INEC have a record, which shows the total expenses of all the political parties for the purposes of invoking the provisions of section 84, 92 and 93 sub sections (2), (3) and (6) of the 2004, 2006 and 2010 Electoral Acts? What steps have been taken to sanction corporate bodies that contributed to the campaign funds of political parties in total disregard of the provisions of section 38 (2) of the Company and Allied Matters Act (1990), which prohibits donations or gifts of any of its property or funds to a political party or association.

These and many other questions have revealed one important point, namely that the INEC has the will to monitor the finances of political parties but lacks the capacity to do so. In 2005, almost a decade before the 2015 elections, the electoral umpire admitted clearly that “there are no available records on the exact amount of money spent by candidates and political parties” (INEC 2005: 9). This lays bare the INEC’s weakness in cleansing the financial threshold of political parties in Nigeria in order to make the electoral process in the country more transparent and accountable at tandem with universally acceptable standards.

#### **4. Roadblocks to Monitoring the Finances of Political Parties in Nigeria**

There is a vast cache of literature on the multifaceted problem of monitoring the finances of political parties in Nigeria specifically (Ilo 2004; Adeyi 2008; Walecki 2008; Aluaigba 2009a & 2009c) and generally worldwide (Pinto-Duschinsky 2002; Biezen 2003; Ferdinand 2003; Institute for Democracy in South Africa 2003; Bryan & Baer 2005; Ghana Center for Democratic Development 2005; Johnston 2005; Ohman 2014). Most of these data point to the difficulty or near impossibility of fully checking how parties generate, and spend their money due to certain factors that are either unique to Nigeria or are common across countries. In other countries especially in advanced democracies of the west, notwithstanding the menacing effect of these factors on financial practices by political parties; certain mechanisms have been developed to forestall the palpable denigration of financial regulations by political parties. For instance, in the USA, the matching method is used. It allows candidates contesting in elections to raise funds from private donors, but must provide matching funds for the first amount of donations. For example, the government might “match” the first \$200 of every donation. This has the potential to effectively make small donations more valuable to a campaign, thus making the candidates to double their effort at pursuing such donations, which are believed to be less amenable corruption compared with larger gifts and this boost the power of less-wealthy individuals in the process. But in Nigeria, coupled with the fact that her democracy is tender, these obstacles have a combined effect of asphyxiating the efforts at enhancing transparency and accountability in the processes through which political parties acquire funds to finance their activities. What are some of these roadblocks to efforts at ensuring that there exists translucent financial conduct by political parties in Nigeria?

One of the prominent obstacles facing the INEC in monitoring the finances of political parties in Nigeria is lack of capacity by the electoral body itself. The INEC lacks adequate manpower and skilled staff who will practically track the expenditures of the 28 political parties considering that all the parties are expected to have offices in all the 36 states of the country plus the Federal Capital Territory and the 774 local government areas. This problem is further compounded during electioneering periods when all the parties engage in political activities at local, state and national levels simultaneously. This demands a large pool of personnel, which the INEC presently lacks, to sufficiently watch how political parties raise their funds and the ways they spend them at all levels.

There is a barrier posed by the expensive nature of Nigeria’s electoral process in terms of how much candidates aspiring to contest for political offices have to pay to secure their party’s ticket to run for an election. Prior to the 2015 elections, the cost of nomination forms by the PDP was ₦22 million, while the APC charged ₦25.5 million per nomination form. One of the APC candidates in its primaries, General Muhammadu Buhari had to take a bank loan in order to pay for the forms (*Vanguard* October 17, 2014). The implication of this political trend is that, politics is inadvertently commercialized because if politicians have to borrow to pay the very exorbitant rates for their parties’ nomination form to contest elections on their platforms, they (the politicians) will source funds from any means including vile ones to pay in order to contest and it will be difficult for INEC to verify such sources. Logically, when they win elections into any public office, the tendency is to recoup the money they spent during elections, thus compounding the phenomenon of political corruption in

Nigeria. This development enhances the misdemeanor associated with the Nigerian political elite and has rendered democracy in the country ironic (Aluaigba 2002) because elected office holders seek to pursue their interest rather than that of the electorate that voted them into office.

Similar to the above is the complex nature of Nigerian politics and party campaign process. It is a common political practice in Nigeria for a candidate running for election into a given office during campaigns to pay visit as homage to godfathers, traditional rulers, religious leaders, etc. to solicit their support. During such visits, discussions are often held behind closed doors where whatever transpires is unknown to the public. For example, in similar meetings in the South-West before the 2015 polls by the former President Jonathan while seeking re-election, “a handful of Obas received as high as \$250,000 each, while the least paid were traditional rulers of small towns who were given \$10,000 each” (*Punch* March 15, 2015). The point is that this kind of campaign expenditures is difficult to track because of the conditions under which they are expended and this explains why the INEC was unable to monitor and consequently prosecute any political party or its candidate despite glaring evidences of super campaign expenditures in the build-up to the 2015 elections.

Another obstacle encumbering the effective monitoring of campaign expenditures by political parties relates to the elephantine privileged position ruling political parties usually occupy in Nigeria. A political party controlling power at the centre wields tremendous influence on the political landscape to the extent that it becomes a near impossibility to question what its leader, the ruling president and by the same token, the party does. In this instance, it therefore becomes very difficult to draw a demarcation line between what a president does for the generality of the people and his/her political party. This confusion definitely creates room for the diversion of state resources (especially state funds) to serve the interest of the ruling political party to the disadvantage of other parties. This happens at all levels of government. During the 2015 electioneering activities “the ruling PDP held series of partisan political meetings in the State House (Presidential Villa), including a fund-raising dinner for the President/PDP, or using presidential aircrafts, motorcade (convoys of SUVs), state house facilities and other paraphernalia, including deploying publicly paid presidential aides/staffers for electioneering campaign purposes” (*The Nation* February 12, 2015). At the state level for example, the APC-controlled Rivers State Government almost denied the PDP the usage of the state-owned Adokiye Amiesiemeka 40,000 capacity stadium in Port Harcourt for the PDP presidential rally. Earlier, before the 2007 general elections, the ruling PDP used state funds, the police and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to harass opposition parties and candidates that were likely contenders for the presidency (Human Rights Watch, 2007). This kind of scenario is antagonistic to any effort at monitoring how state funds are utilized.

Funding constraints is one of the commonest problems virtually every organization faces and the INEC is not an exception. Preparatory to the conduct of the 2015 elections INEC itself identified “insecurity, lack of adequate funding, attitude of the political class and inactive citizenry” (*Premium Times* August 29, 2014) as the four major hindrances to the conduct of free and fair elections. The practical demonstration of the INEC’s financial woes was when the electoral body demanded ₦93 billion but only ₦45 billion was approved by the National Assembly (*Daily Trust* April 14, 2014). The amount approved was a far cry from what the commission needed to adequately prepare for the 2015 elections in terms of procuring materials, training and emoluments for ad hoc staff, training of its staff in the political parties’ campaign monitoring unit, etc. This was one of the likely reasons that the expenses of political parties during the campaigns were not properly monitored because of non-availability of adequately trained staff to cover the entire vast country. The lack of funds coupled with other factors such as the dependence of the INEC on the executive where the President appoints the chairman of the commission diminishes the will power of any INEC chairman to raise questions and investigate the financial dealings of the president’s ruling party. This makes the monitoring of campaign finances of political parties in Nigeria an uphill task.

## 5. The Antidotes

Monitoring how much political parties expend during campaigns is significant for the growth of democratic culture in emerging democracies. If such funds are left unregulated, there cannot be a fair ground for candidates and political parties to compete during elections. In short, it will amount to “inviting two people to participate in the race, with one participant turning up with a bicycle, and the other with a sports car” (Ewing cited in Walecki 2003: 7). This is true because not all parties have equal economic prowess. There is thus, the need to find concrete remedies to the problem created by uncontrolled party finances in Nigeria. But how can we go about this? Some suggestions are made here.

From all practical indications, the burden and task of covering Nigeria entirely for the sake of monitoring the expenditures of political parties is a gargantuan one that the INEC alone cannot handle. It is therefore, suggested that a Special Advisory Council or agency on financing political parties in Nigeria separate from the INEC should be established to relieve the body the yoke of monitoring political parties. The council or agency can work in collaboration with the INEC. However, if the INEC should continue with the herculean

responsibility of overseeing the finances of parties, then, the capacity of its newly established unit for monitoring the finances of political parties needs to be beefed up. It should have well trained and adequate staff in addition to proper funding and logistic support. The unit can work in alliance with the State Security Service (SSS) for intelligence information gathering on the financial activities of political parties.

The role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in fighting corruption in Nigeria is indispensable (Mohammed and Aluaigba, 2012) and in the case of monitoring political parties' expenses, it is even more desirable (Ohman 2013: 124). The INEC can work in collaboration with Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that are dispersed in all nooks and crannies of Nigeria. One CSO can be selected to cover each of the 774 local governments in Nigeria and with modest training and material support from INEC, proper monitoring of the financial conduct of existing political parties will be achieved. However, in deciding which CSO to work with, INEC should be very cautious about the credibility and integrity of the ones to be selected. This is significant in order to avoid selecting CSOs that are often loyal to a particular political party and may end up serving the interest of that party rather than that of the INEC. The very active role of the so-called NGO, the Transformation Ambassadors of Nigeria (TAN) in the former President Goodluck Jonathan's re-election bid during the 2015 elections raised questions on the character of Nigerian NGOs that are required to be neutral and independent. Furthermore, CSOs can assist the INEC in creating awareness in the electorate on the dangers of over-reliance on money rather than ideology by political parties to attract voters' support. This will raise political awareness and enhance informed choices by voters during elections.

As a follow-up to the above proposal, the deployment of technology is one way of monitoring party campaign expenses with ease. Just as the case of monitoring elections through the use of social platforms such as text messaging through mobile cell phones, facebook, twitter, instagram, etc. has proved useful in tracking electoral malpractices; the same strategy can be applied for monitoring the expenditures of parties on elections. If the INEC builds a network of CSOs all over the country, the reliance on this form of technology will make instant tracking of political party finances an attainable feat.

It is important to make the political parties part of the solution. The problem created by unlawful expenditures on campaigns emanates from the political parties themselves and can be solved by involving them by the INEC in the process of finding a cure for the political ailment. The INEC should work closely with all the political parties by enhancing their capacity for disclosures. The political parties should be educated on the significance of instituting reliable book keeping culture and virile internal control mechanisms. This will simplify the task of rendering annual accounts by parties and obtaining financial data from them by the INEC.

The mass media has a great role to play in enhancing transparency in political party finances. The utility quotient of this tool will be very high if investigative journalism is adopted by all practicing journalists to publish and expose all irregularities committed by any political party. As the watchdog of the society, the public receives information about the conduct of elected public office holders, agencies, political parties, etc. through the media more often and faster than any other means. Moreover, journalists are always in company of key government functionaries, they attend virtually all public events and so are in a better position to obtain first hand information on what transpires in political parties' meetings, rallies, fund-raising dinners and so on. The involvement of the media in the crusade against campaign financial malpractices will fasten the inculcation of the ideals of adherence to electoral laws, transparency and accountability by political parties and this will trickle down to a healthy development of democracy in Nigeria.

In all this, the INEC must ensure that appropriate sanctions and penalties are meted out to political parties that flagrantly breach the existing electoral laws on campaign spending. The reason why political parties treat electoral laws on campaign expenditures with derision is the mundane nothing-will-happen psyche that fortifies the faith of defaulting politicians based on previous unpunished episodes. If the INEC is resolute on checkmating the finances of parties in Nigeria by investigating, prosecuting and chastising political parties, then, what the PDP and APC did prior to the 2015 elections would not be repeated.

## 6. Conclusion

Political parties still remain central to the business of democracy inasmuch as they seem to be declining in their vigor in advanced industrial democracies (Gunther and Diamond 2001). The health of these parties, oiled by vibrant and transparent means of sourcing their funds thus remains sacrosanct especially to a fledgling democracy as we have in Nigeria. Notwithstanding the thorny task of tracking the funds flowing into the coffers of political parties and the extent to which they spend them which makes it look like a venture to tame a wild lion; it does not foreclose the tenacity of electoral bodies including the INEC from devising a mechanism to ensure that transparency reigns in the financial dealings of parties. In Nigeria, the political horizon in the area of political parties' campaign finances looks bright given the growing political awareness among Nigerians. The onus is for the electoral umpire, the INEC that has the constitutional mandate to monitor political parties to mobilize all agencies and other stakeholders to step-up and sustain the fight against financial impropriety by

parties so that the sordid practice does not undermine the process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria

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