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THE ROLE OF DELEGATES AND EMERGENCE OF CREDIBLE LEADERS FROM PARTY PRIMARIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The delegates system in any democratic setting always helps to nurture good ethics and democratic values that produce credible leadership in the country. The practice however, in Nigeria, has not brought about the emergence of credible leaders and the attendant unwholesome practices and corruption witnessed during the 2023 presidential primaries raised grave concern for the future of leadership in the country. The position of extant studies established the misdemeanor of delegates and its corrosive effects on the selection of credible leaders into public elective offices in Nigeria. The study sought to fill the gap in literature by putting forward measures that can curtail the fraudulent excesses of party delegates and ensure the emergence of only credible leaders from party primaries in Nigeria. The objective of the study was to investigate how the observed lapses in the delegates system in Nigeria can be reduced significantly and thereby improve the system to produce only credible candidates for the leadership of the country. It adopted the qualitative research approach and using ex-post facto design, established a cause-and-effect relationship between the party delegates (independent variable) and the emergence of credible leaders (dependent variable) from party primaries in Nigeria. The data was collected from secondary sources for the study. It found that malpractices and electoral bribery have attained a high magnitude as both digital and foreign currencies were used in bribing delegates so the winners in the primaries were actually the highest paymasters. Their elections had nothing to do with credibility, integrity and competence. The study recommended that the Nigerian Constitution should be amended to recognize and permit independent candidates as well as reform political party rules for primaries to be conducted using electronic means without recourse to convention or congresses.

Keywords: Delegate, Democracy, Election, Flag-bearer, Party-primaries, Credible-leaders

Introduction

The democratic institutions of any country include political parties that are well organized and seek to influence public policy by presenting candidates for election to public offices. They are composed of registered and fee paying members who participate in the processes leading to the selection of candidates for any election. Those nominated, selected or elected to select candidates to contest elective posts on the platform of the party are called delegates. Collins Advanced Learners Dictionary online defines a delegate as “a person who is chosen to vote or make decisions on behalf of a group of other people, especially at conference or a meeting.” One qualifies to be a delegate in a party’s convention if the individual has joined the party as a member, purchased the application form to be a delegate, and submitted the required documents for eligibility to the party secretariat. The delegates attend special conventions to elect their officials and standard bearers in the elections. They first contest elections from their individual wards to the national level to become eligible to vote for their representatives. This concept, borrowed from the United States, is to ensure that responsible candidates are elected for politics and governance. This is to strengthen and sustain the political institutions that undergird the electoral system internally within the parties (*Daily Trust*, 22 May 2022).

Credible leadership is critical to the development and survival of a country. However, to a large extent, the character, principles, antecedence and past achievements of the individuals are always the frame of reference when considering credibility for leadership positions. In Nigeria, elections are contested on the platforms of political parties and not political associations based on principles and ideological leanings. Therefore, the major challenge is to ensure that only the delegates select credible candidates for leadership from the political party primaries in the country.

The delegates are the select-few that act as the conscience of the general public. They use specific frame of reference to choose those to present for elective offices in the country. Their choices will have a resounding impact on the country because the consequences of their choice will affect governance if those selected become leaders because everything rises or falls on the head of leadership.

The recent activities of delegates in the political parties gained traction after the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) released the timetable for the 2023 general elections. The activities of the delegates heightened when the numerous aspirants of the different parties began canvassing for votes from elected party delegates to be the standard flag bearers of their parties for the offices being contested in the elections. After the issue of “automatic delegates or super-delegates” had already been solved by the new electoral act, the delegates rose up to their responsibility to abide by the process and choose credible leaders through the primaries.

In the recently concluded 2023 presidential primaries, delegates’ selection was compromised by electoral bribes and massive corruption. This paper has therefore, set out to investigate the observed lapses in the delegate system and possibly suggest ways of improving the system to significantly reduce the flaws and produce credible candidates for leadership positions in the country. The study is organized into eight sections. The first section is the introduction; literature review is in section two. Theoretical framework and methodology are in sections three and four, respectively. The conduct of the 2023 primaries is treated in section five. The way forward comes up in section six. The conclusion and recommendations are in sections seven and eight, respectively.

Literature Review

The delegate system was introduced into the political process but the results have been mixed. The delegate system involves voting for party officials and flag bearers at general elections. Some scholars have described the delegate system as similar to internal party democracy because all the positions and elective posts within the party are subjected to the elective process. But the delegates system has suffered gross abuse and corruption because the process is often hijacked by political heavy weights in the various political parties. Previously, the overwhelming majority of delegates at various congresses and conventions of political parties were often appointees of federal and state governments as well as other influential party officials. But, this practice has changed as delegates are handpicked rather than elected democratically (*Daily Trust*, 22 May 2022).

Handpicking delegates has led to the emergence of persons of dubious and questionable character as elected representatives. To streamline the process of emergence of elected representatives, section 84 of the Electoral Act 2022, dealt with party nominations to elective positions and the issue of the delegates system (*Daily Trust*, 22 May 2022). According to Onga'anya (2021), the process undertaken by a political party to elect or select candidates for an election is referred to as party primary because the political party is at liberty to elect or select a candidate to run for a particular public office. In Kenya, party primaries and nominations of party list are conducted in a manner that provides equal opportunities for all eligible candidates; not discriminate against any qualified candidate; inclusive and participatory; open, transparent and accountable; credible; and peaceful (Onga'anya, 2021).

Kenya's electoral system is governed by seven statute acts which include: The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission Act, 2011; The Elections Campaign Financing Act, 2013; and The Leadership and Integrity Act, 2012 (TI-Kenya, ND). Kenya's Constitution grants four different kinds of rights to citizens to participate in an election. They include the right to register as a voter; vote by secret ballot; be a candidate in an election and if elected, the right to hold a public office; and lastly, the right to belong and take part in the activities of a political party.

In addition, the country's constitution requires that the citizens not only be given the freedom to exercise political rights; but members of elective public bodies shall not be more than two-thirds of the same gender (TI-Kenya, ND). This suggests a constitutional development that will ensure gender affirmative action in Kenya as public elective bodies cannot be more than two-thirds of either male or female. Kenya's Political Parties Act, 2011 regulates the formation and operation of political parties, their registration, funding, accounting and the resolution of disputes within political parties. It created the office of the political parties' registrar independent of any direct or remote control by any person or authority.

The Act also established the political parties fund to be administered by the registrar of the political parties. The fund promotes accountability,

transparency and fair competition among parties. Another legislative provision that strengthens the political parties is the Election Campaign Financing Act, 2013 passed by parliament to provide for the regulation, management, expenditure and accountability of campaign funds during national elections and referendums. It equally set spending limits and enforces compliance amongst others (TI-Kenya, ND).

Similarly, in Nigeria, the electoral system is governed by the 1999 Constitution and the Electoral Act, 2022 whereas there are two different but complementary statutes' provisions for the electoral system in Kenya for the financing of political parties. Oji, Eme, and Nwoba (2014) assert that in Nigeria, the statutes include: the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria; Electoral Act 2010; Political Parties' Constitutions; Political Finance Manual and Handbook; Companies and Allied Matters Act and the Code of Conduct for political parties aimed at regulating political finance in Nigeria (Oji, Eme, & Nwoba, 2014, p:14).

Section 84 of the Electoral Act, 2022 focuses on the nomination of candidates by political parties. The Act states that "a political party seeking to nominate candidates for elections under this Act shall hold primaries for aspirants to all elective positions which shall be monitored by the Commission. The procedure for the nomination of candidates by political parties for the various elective positions shall be by direct, indirect primaries or consensus" (FGN, 2022). In the qualifications of aspirants and candidates, the Act clearly specifies that a political party shall not impose any nomination qualification or disqualification criteria or conditions on any aspirant other than the provisions prescribed in the Law of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN, 2004) encapsulated in the 1999 Constitution. Also, the provisions and guidelines for a political party to conduct its nomination of aspirants either by direct, indirect primaries or consensus are explicitly stated in the Electoral Act, 2022.

In Kenya, election expenses and campaign financing are governed by two instruments: the Political Parties Act, 2011 and the Election Campaign Financing Act, 2013. But in Nigeria, the limitation on election expenses and election expenses are stated in Sections 88 and 89 of the Electoral Act, 2022. These sections are relevant to this study and therefore deserve to be quoted

extensively because it defines undue influence in Section 127 during primaries or election as a criminal act by stating that:

“(a) a person who corruptly by his or herself or by any other person at any time after the date of an election has been announced, directly or indirectly gives or provides or pays money to or for any person for the purpose of corruptly influencing that person or any other person to vote or refrain from voting at such election, or on account of such person or any other person having voted or refrained from voting at such election; or (b) being a voter, corruptly accepts or takes money or any other inducement during any of the period stated in paragraph (a), commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of N100,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both” (FGN, 2022)

In Kenya, the responsibility to enforce compliance with election financing is vested in the registrar of the political parties but it is vague on regarding the person to do enforcement in Nigeria. Section 145 of the Electoral Act, 2022 made provisions for the trial of offences committed under the Act by stating that: (1) “An offence committed under this Act shall be triable in a Magistrate Court or High Court of a State in which the offence is committed, or the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja; (2) A prosecution under this Act shall be undertaken by legal officers of the Commission or any legal practitioner appointed by it” (FGN, 2022). In spite of the provisions attached to the offences committed during party primaries especially those bordering on undue influence, little, if any electoral offence committed by delegates has been prosecuted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria. This may be because the tasks of election monitoring and actual conduct of elections are too onerous and overwhelming for INEC to combine it with prosecuting offenders as required by the Act.

In Nigeria, extant literature has established that there is a serious mix involving party primaries, financing of political parties and production of

credible leadership. Because there had been cases of money bags hijacking the nomination process to install their lackeys into political offices in the country. According to Oji, et al (2014), “The term ‘Political Finance’ has been defined by Ujo (2000), Walecki (2002); Ilo (2004) Obiorah (2004), Pinto-Duschinsky (2004), Emelonye (2004), and Ayoade (2006) as the use of money or the use of other material resources for political activities. It also embodies the sources or means through which political activities are sponsored in a given polity.” The concept of political finance has two broad connotations: money used for electioneering (campaign funds) and money used for political party expenses (party funds)” (Oji, et al, 2014, p:2). The concept of electioneering or campaign funds and its impact on the emergence of credible leaders from party primaries is the main focus of this study.

In Nigeria, political financing dates back to many decades: Historical accounts recorded that political spending became noticeable in the politics of nationalism in the 1950s. Money was used to leverage politics in the Second Republic (1979 – 1983) with the introduction of the combination of private and public funding of political parties. Political financing was sustained during the administration of President Ibrahim Babangida where two parties – National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) were funded by the government in the effort to dispense with private or group ownership of political parties (Oji, et al 2014). Unfortunately, the experiment with two political parties not only ended up in disaster it promoted corruption. As if there was a silent conspiratorial agreement, those who cobbled the constitution in the present democratic era have been silent on government funding of political parties. Therefore, no public funding of political parties has been sustained. But this did not solve the problem of political financing rather; it has encouraged godfatherism in politics. Scholars have considered Godfatherism as a major plague of party politics because it is responsible for factionalism, acrimony, and conflict in political parties (Oji,et al, 2014).

Ikejiani-Clark (2008), posit that most politicians finance their political activities through getting *ubanginda* (godfather) as one means of funding. The *ubangida* would supply campaign monies and even pocket monies for daily political

expenses because he believes it is an investment and once the election is won, the godfather would come for returns on his investment. This undemocratic arrangement places the godfather either as the *de facto* chairman, or governor once election is won or he uses carefully calculated tactics to siphon the resources of the local government or the state to himself or his cronies (Ikejiani-Clark, 2008).

This scenario happened after the 2003 elections in Anambra State, when Chief Chris Uba in an interview with *Sunday Champion* newspaper declared: "I am the greatest godfather in Nigeria because this is the first time an individual single-handedly put in position every politician in the State.... It is not just the Governor [that I sponsored]; there are also three senators, 10 members of the House of Representatives and 30 members of the House of Assembly... I sponsored them...and this is the first time in the history of Anambra State that one single individual would be putting every public officer in the state in power" (*Sunday Champion*, June 8, 2003).

This review has shown that party financing has a direct correlation to corruption and unwholesome practices by political parties in Nigeria. The experiments with either sole public sector financing of political parties, or full private sector funding or an admixture of both have not curtailed electoral bribery and corruption in political parties activities in the country. The legal framework to curtail political party financing beyond specified limits is fraught with a lot of lacuna and has impaired the administration of justice. There is need for a very critical look at how to take measures that can discourage if not eliminate moneybags from hijacking political parties financing and exerting unwholesome influence on elected candidates. This will stem the steady drift, into chaos and helplessness, of credible individuals that contest elective offices. Ensuring the emergence of credible leaders through delegates is the missing gap that this study seeks to fill.

Theoretical Framework

Pareto's Circulation of Elites theory (1935); Mosca's theory of the Ruling Class (1939); and Michels' theory of the Iron Law of Oligarchy (1965 and 1966) are

the elite classic theories that best explain this study. Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels are Italian philosophers who worked extensively on the concept of elite theory. The works of the three scholars have striking similarities and some differences. Their contributions focused on social thoughts, understanding social life, social and political movements, and their direct and indirect effects on democracy.

According to Pareto, every society exists in classes and so, it is heterogeneous and the heterogeneity is accounted for on the basis of mental, moral, physical and cultural reasons that help to maintain social balance in the society. He uses elites as the parameter to classify society. The elites represent the higher stratum of the society whilst non-elites are the lower stratum. Amongst the higher stratum elites, Pareto further categorizes them into governing elites and non-governing elites. The governing elites are the individuals that directly or indirectly have a considerable role to play in the government or administration of the society. The non-governing elites comprise the rest individual elites not connected with administration but occupy such a place in society that they somehow influence the administration (Pareto, 1935; Pareto, 1968; Pareto, 1984).

Mosca (1939) propounded the Ruling Class Theory of Elites. He states that in any type of society, and at any point in history, there are two classes of people – a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The class that rules contains a few number of people and possesses all the political power and privileges whereas the class that is ruled consist of a huge number of people and is subjected to the class that rule but provides essential instruments for political organization. Just as Pareto's elite stratum consist of two strata: the higher stratum and lower stratum; Mosca's ruling class consist of the highest stratum and the second stratum. The highest stratum is the core of the ruling class but it could not sufficiently lead and direct the society unless the second stratum helps. The second stratum is larger than the highest stratum in number and has all the capacities of leadership in the country. So, the second stratum is needed not only in the political realm but also in any type of social organization for smooth administration (Mosca, 1939).

The Iron Law of Oligarchy propounded by Michels (1965 and 1966) explicitly

points out the indispensability of oligarchy from the organizations by stating that “it is organization which gives birth to the domination of the elected over electors, of the mandantes over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators, who says organization, says oligarchy” (Michels, 1966:365).

To Michels, regardless of any ideological concerns, all types of organizations have oligarchic tendencies. His major question in political parties was “how are oligarchic tendencies explained in socialist and democratic parties, which they declared war against?” (Michels, 1966: 50-51). He examines this question and observes the organization itself particularly bureaucracy, nature of human being and the phenomenon of leadership as being the major factors for oligarchical tendencies in organizations. However, to him, leadership itself is not compatible with most of the postulates of democracy, but leadership is a necessary phenomenon in every form of society. He argues that ideal democracy is impossible due to socio-economic conditions because democracy has inherent preference for authoritarian solution of the important questions. Therefore, he admits of his iron law of oligarchy, that there are elites in society but not elite circulation in terms of replacing one another. He does not redefine the concept of elite; rather, he took Pareto’s theory of circulation of elites and modified it. Michels states that there is a battle between the old and new elites, leaders, and the end of the war is not absolute replacement of the old elites by the new elites, but a reunion of elites, a perennial amalgamation and complete replacement of elites is rare in history (Michels, 1966; Michels, 1965).

This study is anchored on Michels’ Iron Law of Oligarchy because it deals with political parties, the issues of delegates and the “delegators” as well as the emergence of leadership in a democratic society. It aligns with the position that there are oligarchic tendencies even in political parties and most of those who are elected as delegates to elect political parties standard-bearers are influenced if not determined by the group with the socio-economic means that acts as oligarchs or aristocrats according to Pareto. The study also concurs with the postulation that elites are not replaced in the sense of circulation as defined by Pareto but they are absorbed by the old elites into their union. This is amply demonstrated by Nigeria’s Council of State members that are made up of the

present and past ruling elites.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative research method of the ex-post facto design. It attempted to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the party delegates (independent variable) and the emergence of credible leaders (dependent variable) from party primaries in Nigeria. The delegates present certain characteristic, trait and past occurrence that cannot be manipulated or altered and the study examines how they affect the emergence of credible standard bearers that stand for elections in Nigeria.

The study also uses content analysis approach to interrogate the data collected from secondary sources such as journals articles, textbooks, reliable web sources, newspapers, and policy documents which were sourced from the library, internet, online e-library resources in Baze University and newspapers obtained from the internet. The policy documents involving Kenya's Electoral Act, the 2022 Electoral Act and the Constitution of the FGN were equally sourced from open source online resources.

Conduct of 2023 Presidential Primaries

Except for few instances, the primaries that were conducted for the 2023 elections were violence-free for most of the gubernatorial primaries across the parties but riddled with malpractices and irregularities (*Tribune*, 16 June 2022). In some cases, those who lost the primaries condemned and rejected the outcomes. In others, some delegates and aspirants held parallel primaries by their factions of the parties. After holding parallel primaries, two separate lists of elected representatives were forwarded to INEC which placed the electoral body in a dilemma of determining the authentic faction and the list to accept. There were widespread claims that moneybags hijacked the primaries in some states (*Tribune*, 16 June, 2022).

According to media reports, the presidential primaries of the major political parties were characterized by undisguised influencing of the delegates' choice through the use of money. Vote buying, intimidation, backstabbing, intrigues

and mudslinging were deployed at the occasion. It was alleged that delegates were bribed with as much as \$50,000 during the presidential primaries (*Tribune*, 16 June, 2022). However, unconfirmed reports alleged that the All Progressive Congress (APC) presidential primaries received different amounts of bribes from the top three presidential aspirants but the eventual winner gave each delegate \$25,000. The leader of each state's delegation was alleged to have received \$50,000. It was also stated that each presidential aspirant that agreed to step down for the most prominent candidate got \$4m in exchange whilst the northern governors that insisted that their presidential ticket must go to the southern part of the country received each \$10m.

It was also alleged that currencies of different denominations were used to induce the delegates. This confirms the perception that electoral bribery and malpractices of the delegates have attained a high dimension. The widely held belief is that the primaries were won not on the basis of credibility, integrity and competence but by those that paid the biggest amount to the delegates. According to Komolafe (2022), it was obvious before the presidential primaries that the elected delegates to the conventions had some powers. As a result, the aspirants tried to cultivate the elected party delegates that had been chosen to elect the flag bearers of the respective parties. The exclusion of the statutory delegates in the Electoral Act 2022 even made the elected delegates more "powerful," because they assumed all the powers to 'make and unmake' things at the convention. The decision of who would be the next president started with what the delegates did with their votes to elect the candidates. The situation in which a political party was highly favoured to win the real election is a combination of factors initiated by the delegates' process of victory for its candidate.

Joseph and Shehu (2022) affirm that Nigerians were keenly watching as the two major political parties prepared to hold their presidential primaries. According to both Joseph and Shehu, many people doubted the ability of the delegates to elect credible individuals as party flag bearers in the 2023 presidential and general elections. The delegates are few individuals compared to the majority they represent to select the flag bearer of the various political parties during

election. Some scholars have contended that it is not feasible to depend on the judgment of a few people (delegates) to determine the leaders of a country, state and a local government from their own choice of candidates. Thus, they argue that the outcome of the delegates does not reflect the larger mind of the people and citizens of the country (Joseph & Shehu, 2022). Other scholars have however, argued that since the delegates were chosen from the generality of the public to elect flag bearers the delegates have the mandate to determine the leader of the country.

The widely held opinion is that most of the delegates ended up in self-enrichment by selling their votes during the primaries rather than scrutinize the candidate that becomes the ultimate winner. Therefore, Joseph and Shehu (2022) suggested that measures be put in place to discourage bribing of delegates during party congresses, so that credible and honest flag bearers can be selected from the parties. Iniobong (2022) explained that the *ad-hoc* delegates from the two major political parties were selected through a process that involved electing individuals that would vote on their behalf in the party's governorship or presidential primaries.

According to the 2022 Electoral Act (as amended), for presidential primaries, the *ad-hoc* delegates are elected from across the local governments in the country according to the stated number in the party's constitution or guidelines by the local governments in each state. PDP in Lagos State, for example, has only one authorized delegate from each of the twenty local government areas, as well as one physically-challenged individual, to get a total of 21 elected delegates for the presidential primaries. Similarly, the APC's constitution permits three *ad-hoc* national delegates from each local government for the presidential primaries. So, for Lagos State, come a total of 60 delegates that would participate in their presidential primaries. Kano state with more local governments would have more delegates. Since there is no statutory number of delegates permitted, it means that the delegates' list will be small and manageable.

Some scholars have, however, argued that having fewer delegates means a reduced democratic space and increased chances for manipulation of the outcome. Osori (2022) observed that with statutory delegates excluded, it

would be very costly to attain good governance from those elected in 2023 since about 90% of the struggle for decent leadership may have been lost during the primaries. Osori also argued that even with the new electoral law, Nigeria is not certain that credible elections could be achieved. Beside the fact that INEC does not regulate the internal mechanisms of political parties; does not control the cost of campaigning; and the violence associated with elections, a black hole still existed in how votes are collated and the 2022 Electoral Act has not addressed this gap. This point of view appears anachronistic because the new electoral act has taken care of both the collation of election results at the polling booths and electronic transfer of the same to collation centers.

According to Aluko (2022), the PDP pegged the number of delegates to vote at the primaries and national convention at three *ad-hoc* delegates per ward, for the ward congresses and one national delegate per local government, for national congress. From the current demographic data, the northwestern and the southwestern parts of Nigeria have the highest number of delegates for both the PDP and APC primaries, respectively. The northwest, having 186 local government areas, presents 744 ward delegates while the south-west, with 137 local government areas, presents 548 ward delegates. The southeast having 95 council areas presents 380 ward delegates (Aluko, 2022).

Ahmed (2022) noted that the existential threats facing Nigerians are serious enough to challenge the most capable, competent and courageous leaders and as such the government would have to find solutions to the difficult task of governance. Therefore, if in 2023, the electorate is forced to choose between incompetent and corrupt leaders, the situation will become a catastrophe. Thus, delegates across all parties needed to understand their enormous moral responsibility to determine the quality of the candidates that Nigerians will have to elect. They are the ones that would determine the country's future. Hence, they have to determine if the 2023 elections would bring hope or orchestrate the final blow that would knock out the country (Ahmed, 2022).

Yusuff (2022) expressing views similar to Ahmed's (2022), asserted that for a long time, we were told that our voting power will decide who becomes what and when. But our country has been associated with lack of credible leaders

to manage the affairs of the country. The critical issue is why has leadership-deficit been a bane of this nation? Poor and non-scientific choices of leaders by delegates have been identified as one of the greatest challenges to our democratic process. Nigeria has enormous human capital but the poor choices of party delegates at successive primary elections have denied the nation of capable and credible leaders. Some delegates consider their position as a privilege and a unique opportunity to gain some financial reward for their political toil over the years (Yusuff, 2022).

Conclusion

The delegates system plays a very important and strategic role in the selection of credible leadership in any nation. In Nigeria, the practice has not really brought out the best candidates for the general public to elect during elections because it is full of irregularities, malpractices and corruption. The lack of recognition of independent candidates by Nigeria's Constitution has limited the number of eligible candidates for leadership positions. That leaves the political spaces for godfathers or *ubangida* (Ikejiani-Clark, 2008) to dominate and manipulate. This study interrogated the conduct of the 2023 presidential primaries of the major political parties and found that malpractices and electoral bribery dwarfed the credibility, integrity and competence of leadership-selection. It is believed that if the current practice is left unchecked, election ethics and democratic values would be lost and the country will not be able to sustain its democracy.

This study suggested the recognition of independent candidates; reform of political party rules for voting from remote locations via electronic devices so as to eliminate conventions or congresses that give room to corruption and malpractices. Only if these suggestions are carried out can credible candidates present themselves for elective offices in the country.

Way Forward/Recommendations

The practice of conducting primaries by political parties in the selection of standard flag bearers for the parties in elections in the country has not provided the emergence of credible leaders for the country. The primaries conducted for the 2023 elections were marred by malpractices, corruption, and vote buying.

The media described the scenario with the onomatopoeic phrase, “dollar rain.” Despite the efforts to check the malpractices through the provisions in the new Electoral Act 2022 as amended, the unwholesome practices persisted.

A major factor that has prevented credible candidates from presenting themselves for election is the need to belong to a political party and use its platform in vying for elective offices. The moneybags and godfathers that control political parties remain shadow parties in the political configuration during elections of delegates and choice of party flag bearers and ensure they prevent the emergence of individual candidates.

First, there is an urgent need for the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as altered) to recognize independent candidates for all elective offices in the country. If the law allows independent candidates to compete for elective offices in the country, the influence of moneybags and godfathers will reduce in politics, leadership and governance. As a result, the public and not a small group of delegates would be responsible for electing credible leaders.

Second, Nigeria practices the American model of presidential system of government but deviated from the American selection method. In the US, for instance, the aspirants present their manifesto to the general public from counties to the state level. Through this, the American voters interrogate them and make their choices. The most popular candidates always emerge to contest against the other popular candidates from other parties. Perhaps, if Nigeria adopts that practice, it might produce the best and most credible candidates for elections.

Lastly, the contemporary age is suffused with digital systems. Nigeria should key fully into this rather than use individual electronic machines such as Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) because they have limitations. INEC, which is Nigeria’s Electoral Management Body (EMB) should encourage a more robust digital voting that would eliminate the traditional practice of exposing voters to the elements of the sun, rain, hazardous environment, among others just to vote. Through digital system, individual party members can compete for elections, and be voted for by the electorate from their houses

or remote locations. This practice will emasculate vote buying, bribing of delegates and ensure the emergence of cradle candidates. The present form of organizing party primaries to select candidates for elective offices encourages corruption. The cost is prohibitive and excludes independent candidates just as it prevents well-meaning individuals from participating in leadership and governance in the country. The study therefore recommends the following:

1. Amendment of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as altered) to recognize and permit independent candidates to stand for elections in the country.
2. Practice the selection of candidates from the wards, to the states and then to national congresses as practiced in the US presidential system should be embraced in the Nigerian political system.
3. Reform of political party rules to conduct the selection of candidates for elective offices through electronic means without conventions or congresses.

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