

Political Elite and Party Candidate Selection in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: A study of All Progressive Congress

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Abstract

Despite the significant role that political elites play in the candidate selection process within political parties, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of how these elites influence the selection of candidates within the All Progressive Congress (APC) in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. This however raises questions about the transparency, fairness, and representativeness of the candidate selection process. However, this paper explores political elites and party candidate selection in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: A study of APC. The paper adopted descriptive research method and engage elite theory as its theoretical premise. The paper found out that political elites in APC have a significant influence on the process of selecting party candidates, potentially shaping the outcomes of elections. It also revealed the specific factors and criteria considered by political elites in APC when choosing party candidates, such as loyalty, political connections, or financial resources. The paper concluded that the involvement of political elites in the process of selecting candidate significantly shapes the outcomes of election and raises questions about fairness and meritocracy within All Progressive Congress. Therefore, the paper recommended that All Progressive Congress should enhance transparency by publicly disclosing the criteria used for candidate selection and making the process more accessible to party members and public. It also recommended that APC should emphasize the importance of meritocracy in candidate selection rather than solely relying on political connections or financial resources

Keywords: All progressive congress, candidate selection, Fourth Republic, Nigeria, political elite

Introduction

Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960 and began its journey towards democratic governance. However, the country's early years were marred by political instability, corruption, ethnic tensions, and military intervention which have influenced the way political parties operate and select their candidates. Various military coups and dictatorial regimes hindered the development of a stable political environment (Adekunle & Ogunleye, 2021).

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigerian political parties have used various methods in selecting their candidates for elections, including direct primaries, indirect primaries, and

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consensus arrangements (Ibrahim, 2023).

During the first republic, candidate selection was primarily done within the party structures, with party leaders playing a key role. For instance, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) would hold meetings of party elites to choose their respective presidential and gubernatorial candidates. This opaque of elite-driven process was criticized for lacking internal democracy (Sandeh, 2023). The transition into presidential system in the second republic (1979-1983) saw the introduction of more formal primary elections even though there were allegations of manipulations by party elites. For example, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was accused of imposing its preferred candidates through a process that disenfranchised grassroots party members. The short-lived third republic (1992-1993) also witnessed imposition of party candidates by the political elites, as the issue becomes a continuous one transcending from second republic to the third republic. In this Republic, the political environment was more turbulent because both Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) were facing accusations of undemocratic practices and military interference in their primaries (Okwori & Ogwuegbu, 2022).

In 1999, Nigeria transitioned to its Fourth Republic, marking a return to democratic governance. This transition was driven by the need to address political instability and promote political participation and representation. The Fourth Republic brought about constitutional reforms, multi-party systems, and regular elections, creating space for political parties to compete for power. Party politics in Nigeria has evolved significantly within the Fourth Republic (Abdullahi & Isa, 2018). The two major political parties are the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC). The PDP, established in 8th August, 1998 initially dominated Nigerian politics and held power for 16 years until the APC emerged as a strong opposition in 2015. The APC was formed in 2013 through the merger of several opposition's parties, including the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), and a faction of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP). The party's primary objectives was to challenge the ruling PDP and offer an alternative political platform (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2018).

Political elites in Nigeria refer to individuals with significant influence and power within the political system. These individuals comprise party leaders, influential politicians, government officials, and influential individual from various sectors. These elites play a crucial role in shaping politics, policy-making, and candidates' selection processes. They often control critical resources, command loyal followership, and possess the networks necessary to navigate Nigeria's complex political terrain (Olufemi, Adeleke & Oluwaseun, 2019).

The candidate selection process within APC and other Nigerian political parties involves a combination of internal party mechanisms, consultations, and negotiations among the party's elite members. Political elites wield substantial influence in determining who becomes the party's candidate for various electoral positions, including presidential, gubernatorial, and legislative seats. The candidate selection process is influenced by various factors. Loyalty to the party, political connections, financial resources, party ideology, and the ability to secure support from influential party members and stakeholders are among the key considerations. The process can vary across party structures, with some parties employing more democratic and inclusive methods, while others may rely more on top-down decision making (Ibeanu, 2019).

Within the APC, the candidate selection process has witnessed internal power struggles, factionalism, and varying levels of transparency. While some argue that meritocracy plays a role in candidate selection, there have been allegations of patronage, favouritism, and imposition of candidates by influential elites. It is against this foregoing

that this study examines political elites and party candidate selection in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: a study of APC.

Conceptual Clarification

Political Elites

Political elites are a small group of people who have a disproportionate amount of power and influence in a society. These elites may hold positions of authority in government, political parties, or other influential institutions. They may also be influential through their control of resources, such as media outlets or large corporations. Whether or not political elites are beneficial or harmful to a society is often debated. However, there is no doubt that they are powerful force in shaping the course of events and the direction of public policy (Doe, 2021).

According to Samuel Huntington (1968), he defines political elites as a group of people who are able, by virtue of their position in key institutions, to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially. This definition emphasizes the role of institutions in shaping who is considered political elite (Smith, 2020). C. Wright Mills (1956) defines political elites as a small group of men who, by virtue of their strategic position in the major institutions of the modern society, are able to make decisions having major consequences. This definition emphasizes the importance of strategic positions within the institutions unlike Samuel Huntington's definition that lay more emphasis on the role of institutions. C. Wright Mills (1956) argues that there is a link between economic, political and military power in modern societies, that is those who hold power in one area are often connected to those who hold power in another area. This interlocking of power creates a "power elite" that controls society as a whole (Johnson, 2022).

Robert A. Dahl (1998), a political scientist defines political elites as those who exercise substantial political. He goes on to say that political elites can be found in any political system, regardless of whether it is democratic or authoritarian. His definition focuses on the actual exercise of power rather than the specific institutional setting (Thompson, 2023). David Apter (1965) in his book "The politics of modernization" defines political elites as those who wield power over others because of their position in the political structure. David Apter's definition focuses on the hierarchical nature of power. It also highlights the idea that elites can come from any part of the political structure and not just from the top. In the book of Giovanni Sartori (1976) titled "Parties and Party System", he defines political elites as those who occupy strategic positions in the power structure and who are able to control decision-making. Sartori's definition emphasizes the importance of both strategic position and control over decision-making.

James Burns (1978) defines political elites as those who exercise significant influence over the political process and whose influence is not dependent on their formal position in the political structure. This definition is similar to the others we have looked at in that it focuses on influence and position. However, Burn's emphasizes that this influence is not dependent on formal position, which set his definition apart from the others. In other words, Ali Mazrui (1978) defines political elites as those who hold positions of power in society and who, by virtue of their positions, enjoy special privileges and benefits this definition focuses on power benefits. It also sees political elites as having dual role in society (Davis, 2021). They have a "public" role, in which they made decisions that affect the lives of others, and a "private" role, in which they enjoy special privileges and benefits. However, after reviewing various definitions by scholars, and for the purpose of this study, the researcher therefore, defines the concept of political elites as small group of individuals who hold significant power and influence in the political sphere.

Party Candidate

The concept of party candidate like every other concept in social sciences has no universally acceptable definition. This is because various scholars have put forward their argument on the concept base on their divergent views and ideological background. When we talk about a party candidate, we are referring to an individual who represents a political party and seeks to be elected to a specific position (Smith, 2020). According to Walter Burnham (1955), he defines party candidate as a person who has been nominated by a political party to run for public office. This definition emphasizes the nomination process as a key part of being a party candidate. In the same vein, Alan Ware (1996) in his book “Political Parties and Party Systems” defines party candidate as a person who has been selected by a political party to run for office and who receives the endorsement of the party. This definition laid emphasis on the importance of selection and endorsement by the party, in addition to nomination. Ware’s definition is similar to that of Burnham’s definition as both definitions emphasizes the role political parties in selecting candidate, highlighting the importance of endorsement by the party and focusing on the process of becoming a party candidate, rather than on the characteristics of the candidates themselves (Thompson, 2023).

Also, Verba key (1964) defines party candidate as a person who has been officially nominated by the party and accepted as the party’s standard-bearer. Verba’s definition focuses on selection and endorsement by the party and however adds the element of acceptance by the party, which implies a degree of consensus or agreement within the party about the candidate. What sets a party candidate a party candidate apart from an independent candidate is that they are affiliated with a particular political party. This affiliation means they align themselves with the party’s values, principles, and policy positions. It’s like being part of a team, where the candidate and the party work together to advance their shared goals. Party candidate usually go through a selection process within their party, like primaries or conventions, where party members vote or make decisions on who will be the official candidate. This process helps ensure that the candidate reflects the collective voice and vision of the party. It is in this regard that Verba’s definition became relevant (Davis, 2022).

According to Anthony Down (1957), he defines party candidate as an individual who is nominated by a political party to run for public office. This definition quite similar to the others we have looked at, but it adds an economic perspective by emphasizing the candidate’s role in representing the interests of the party’s constituents. In the same vein, Peter Mair (1997), a political scientist in his book “Party System Change” defines party candidate as an individual who is chosen by a political candidate to run for office and who represent the party’s values and policies. Mair’s definition emphasizes the connection between the candidate and the party’s values and policies. It also highlights the fact that the candidate is chosen by the party, rather than simply being endorsed or accepted by it (Smith, 2020). However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher hereby conceived party candidate as an individual who seeks to be elected to a position, such as a seat in the legislative arms or top government position.

Theoretical Framework

This study engaged elite theory as its theoretical premise. Elite theory was adopted because it is a perspective in political science that focuses on the role and influence of a small group of individuals or elites in shaping political outcomes. These elites are believed to dominate decision making processes and shape policies to serve their own interest. The proponents of this theory include Vivredo Pareto (1900), Gaetano Mosca (1896), Robert Michels (1911) and C. Wright Mills (1956) (Smith, 2021).

Elite theory is a perspective in political science that focuses on the role and influence of a small group of individuals or elites in shaping political outcomes. According to this theory, power is concentrated in the hands of a few elites who hold significant resources, such as wealth, status, or knowledge. These elites are believed to dominate decision-making processes and shape policies to serve their own interests (Johnson, 2022).

This theory suggests that political power is not evenly distributed among the population but is instead concentrated in the hands of a privileged few. Elite theorists argued that these elites can manipulate and control political institutions to maintain their power and influence. The theory argues that these elites may use their resources to shape public opinion, control the media, and influence the actions of elected officials. The proponents of this theory highlight the potential for a revolving door between political elites and other powerful institutions, such as corporations or interest groups. This can create a strong network of elites who reinforce each other's power and interests (Williams, 2023). The critics of elite theory argue that the theory overlooks the role of popular participation and grassroots movements in influencing political outcomes. They also argue that power is not solely concentrated in the hands of elites but is also shaped by collective action and social movements.

In application to this study, elite theory explains how powerful individuals who hold significant resources, such as wealth, status or knowledge in All Progressive Congress (APC) influences and control candidate selection processes to serve their own interests. They achieve this through the use of their power, connection, and influence to negotiate, make deals, and ensure their preferred candidates are chosen (Brown, 2024).

Historical Development of Party Candidate Selection in Nigeria

The selection of party candidates in Nigeria has been a contentious issue throughout the country's history. Before Nigeria gain independence in 1960, parties in Nigeria were the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) and the Northern people's Congress (NPC). The NCNC selected its candidate through a process known as "elective dictatorship", in which a small group of party leaders selected the candidates. The NPC, on the other hand, had a system of "selection by consensus", in which candidates were selected by a group of senior party members (Adeleke, 2023).

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigerian political parties have used various methods in selecting their candidates for elections, including direct primaries, indirect primaries, and consensus arrangements (Ibrahim, 2023). In the early years after independence, political parties in Nigeria often used direct primaries, where party delegates selected the candidate to represent the party in an election. During this period, which was the first republic, the NCNC and NPC continued to select their candidates using the same methods as before. The NPC selected their candidates based on their loyalty to the party and its leaders. In some cases, candidates were chosen based on their family connections or tribal affiliation. This led to a lack of competition and lack of representation of for certain groups (Ojo, 2022). One example of the selection process during the first republic was the selection of Tafawa Balewa as the Prime Minister. He was chosen by the NPC as a compromise candidate who was acceptable to both the Northern and the Southern regions of Nigeria. This led to resentment among some groups, who felt that he was not representative of their interest. However, a new party emerged called Action Congress (AG). The AG had a much more democratic system of candidate selection, in which all party members could vote for their preferred candidates. This system was criticized for being susceptible to corruption and manipulation, as party leaders' often exerted influence over the delegate selection process (Olaniyi, 2022).

The first republic came to an end in 1966, when military took over power. However, in 1979, Nigeria returned to civilian rule and the second republic began. During this period, the NCNC and the NPC were replaced by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). The NPN continued to use “elective dictatorship” where candidates were selected based on their ability to raise funds and their personal relationships with party leaders, while UPN adopted a more democratic system similar to the AG’s approach. However, both parties were accused of corruption and violence (Suleiman, 2021). One example of the selection process during the second republic was the selection of Shehu Shagari as the President. Shehu Shagari was selected by the NPN party, but he was not a strong leader and was often criticised for his lack of decisiveness. In addition, there was widespread corruption within the NPN party, which affected the selection process and led to dissatisfaction among many Nigerians. Another example of selection process from the second republic was the selection of Obafemi Awolowo by the UPN as the leader of the opposition. Awolowo was a charismatic and popular leader who was able to mobilize support from his Yoruba base. However, he faced opposition from the NPN and was not unable to win the presidency. This shows how personality and regional affiliation could be important factors in the selection process (Okonkwo, 2022).

The second republic ended in 1983, when the military again seized power. However, the third republic began in 1992 and unfortunately ended in 1993. The third republic was the shortest and often called aborted republic. During this period, the NRC and SDP were the leading and both struggled with internal divisions and corruption. For example, the selection of Moshood Abiola by the SDP was controversial. Chief Moshood Abiola was a wealthy businessman who was not popular with many party members. However, he had strong support from the Yoruba people, and the party leadership believed that he could win the election. This led to internal divisions and conflict within the party. In some cases, candidates were selected based on their ability to pay bribes or to offer other inducements to party officials. This resulted in a lack of transparency and accountability in the selection process (Adekunle, 2023).

As Nigeria transition to civilian rule in 1999 after years of military dictatorship, political parties began to experiment with different methods of selecting candidates. The selection process has been more competitive and transparent, although there are still some concerns about corruption nepotism. In this fourth republic, the UPN and NPB were replaced by the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP). The PDP initially selected candidates through “Indirect primaries” but it has since moved to a system of “consensus” in which candidates are selected by party leaders. The ANPP on the other hand has also shifted towards consensus, although it still uses some aspect of direct democracy (Ibe, 2024). One example of the selection process during this period was the selection of Goodluck Jonathan as the PDP’s presidential candidates. Jonathan was initially chosen as a compromise candidate, but he later proved to be a popular and successful leader. Some other parties adopted direct primaries, where party members vote directly for the candidate of their choice. However, direct primaries were also criticized for being vulnerable to manipulation, as party leaders could still exert influence over the voting process (Adebayo, 2024).

In recent years, political parties in Nigeria have increasingly moved towards using consensus arrangements to select candidates. Under this system, party leaders negotiate behind closed doors to agree on a candidate who can represent the party in an election. While consensus arrangements can help to reduce internal party conflicts, they have also being criticized for lacking transparency and accountability.

Party candidate selection in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: APC's Experience

In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the All Progressive Congress (APC) has gone through several processes and experiences in selecting its party candidates for various political positions. The party uses a combination of internal party democracy and consensus-building to identify suitable candidates who ally with its ideology and have a good chance of winning elections at the state and national level.

One of the key elements of candidates' selection in the APC is the use of party primaries, including direct primaries, indirect primaries and consensus-building. The party conducts direct primaries in which registered party members have the opportunity to vote for their preferred candidate. In theory, this process allows for a fair and inclusive selection of candidates, as it gives party members a voice in the decision-making process. APC has also made use of indirect primaries and consensus candidate selection. Indirect primaries involve party delegates selecting the candidates rather than the registered majority party members while consensus candidate selection occurs when party stakeholders agree on a candidate without a formal vote. The APC constitution states that the direct primaries are only used if the indirect primaries do not produce a clear winner (Ogunbodede & Akinwunmi, 2021). In general, the process has been more transparent than in previous years, with result being announced publicly and a greater emphasis on the role of ordinary party members.

However, the APC has also experienced controversies and challenges in its candidate selection process. One common issue is the lack of internal party democracy, with allegations of manipulations and imposition of candidates by party leaders. This has often led to intra-party conflict and divisions, with discontented members defecting to other parties or contesting as independent candidates (Adeyemi & Olawale, 2020). For instance, in the 2019 APC presidential primaries, the party's national leadership was accused of imposing President Muhammadu Buhari as the party's candidate despite other aspirants such as Dr SKC Ogonnia, Chief Charles Udeogaranya and Alhaji Mumakai-Unagha showing interest within the party. The APC conducted a primary election, but it was more of an affirmation exercise, as Buhari was the only candidate. This led to the accusations that party's national leadership had imposed Buhari as the party flag bearer rather than allowing a competitive primary election. This lack of competition in the primary election undermined the democratic process within the party. However, Buhari's supporter maintained that his affirmation was a testament to his popularity and the party's confidence in his leadership.

Another specific example was the 2019 governorship primaries in Lagos state. The election was a particularly contentious one, with over 30 candidates competing for the nomination. This include a number of prominent politicians, such as Babajide Sanwo-Olu, Olasupo Shasore, Akinwunmi Ambode and Tokunbo Abiru. There were allegations of vote-buying and irregularities, with some candidates accusing the party leadership of trying to rig the primary in favour of a particular candidate. It was alleged that the party leadership had printed fake delegates that and distributed them to Pro-Sanwo-Olu supporters, in order to influence the outcome of the primary election. It was also alleged that the party leadership had influence the delegates' selection process, by appointing their supporters to key positions within the party. This included the selection of returning officers, who oversaw the voting process, and the disqualification of some candidates who were seen as a threat to the preferred candidate (Ibrahim, 2019). In the end, Sanwo-Olu was declared the winner and went on to win the governorship election. By implication, the allegations of fraud and manipulation during the 2019 APC primary in Lagos state cause divisions within the party. Some of the losing candidates refused to accept the results, and there were even calls for a boycott of the general election. This controversy also led to the expulsion of some party

members, and a general sense of disunity within the party.

Another factor that influences candidate selection in the APC is the need for broad-based coalitions. The party often seeks to forge alliances with other political parties and interest groups to strengthen its chances of winning elections. As a result, candidate selection sometimes involves negotiations and compromises to accommodate the interest of other coalition partners (Okoli & Nwankwo, 2018). For example, in 2013, the All Progressives Congress (APC) was formed through broader coalition of three major opposition parties: the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), and the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP). During this period, discussions about the ideal presidential candidate for the APC took place, with some members suggesting a Muslim-Christian ticket to appeal to a broader base. However, it's worth noting that the APC finally settled for Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the north as their presidential candidate for the 2015 general election. Prof Yemi Osinbajo from the south and a Christian were chosen as Buhari's running mate. This ticket combination helped the APC appeal to a broader base and ultimately contributed to their victory in the 2015 presidential elections. Another example is the case of Zamfara state in the 2019 general election. In Zamfara, the APC formed an alliance with the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). As part of this alliance, the APC agreed to support the candidacy of Bello Matawalle, who was a member of the APGA. Matawalle went on to win the governorship election in Zamfara, and he is now widely seen as an APC member. This approach has helped the APC build a formidable electoral base but has also raised questions about the party's internal coherence and commitment to its ideological principles (Akindele & Adebayo, 2017).

Furthermore, the APC in the Fourth Republic has also encountered challenges in balancing the representation of different regions and interest group within its candidate selection process. Nigeria, being a diverse country, requires a careful balancing act to ensure equitable representation and prevent perceptions of marginalization. This has sometimes resulted in controversies and allegations of favouritism (Olaniyi, 2023). An example of this is that of Ogun state APC governorship primary election in 2019. In Ogun state, the APC gubernatorial candidate, Prince Dapo Abiodun, was accused of rigging the primary election and of being handpicked by the national leadership of the party. Dapo Abiodun was initially a member of the PDP, but defected to the APC shortly before the primary. There were allegations that he had used his wealth and connections to secure the nomination, rather than winning it through a fair and open process (Ojo & Olanrewaju, 2022).

Role of political elites in the candidate selection process within APC

The All Progressive Congress (APC) is a major political party in Nigeria, and the role of the political elite in the candidate selection process within the party is significant. Political elites, who are often influential personalities within the party, play a crucial role in determining which candidates are selected to run for various positions, including during party primaries and general elections (Adejumo, 2022).

Political elites in the APC, such as party leaders, governors, and other influential members, hold significant sway over the candidate selection process. Their influence is often rooted in their established networks, political capital, and historical relationships within the party. They often have the resources, networks, and connections to shape the candidate selection process in their favour or in alignment with their agendas (Doe, 2024). Political elites also wield significant influence within the APC and can command party members to support specific candidates through endorsement and public statement. Their endorsement provides a stamp of approval that can enhance a candidate's credibility and

legitimacy in the eyes of party members and voters. For instance, in the run-up of 2023 APC presidential primaries, prominent APC governors and national leaders publicly endorsed the candidacy of Bola Ahmed Tinubu. This high-profile endorsement from key political elites within the party significantly boosted Tinubu's campaign and solidified his position as a frontrunner for the party's presidential ticket, as most of his contenders within the party were stepping down for him on the day of presidential primary election (Obi, 2022). Beyond candidate selection, political elites often occupy key positions within the party structures, such as the National Executive Committee (NEC), National Working Committee (NWC) and other decision-making bodies. These positions grant them the power to shape party rules, processes, and internal procedures related to candidate selection. By leveraging their influence within party structures, political elites can ensure that their preferred candidates receive favourable treatment and opportunities within the party hierarchy. For example, the APC National Chairman in person of Abdullahi Adamu is considered political elite with strong influence within the party's national executive committee. In the lead-up to the party primaries in 2023, Adamu was able to steer the party's internal processes to the advantage of certain gubernatorial and senatorial candidates favoured by the party leadership (Emeaku, 2023).

Resource mobilization and campaign financing is a crucial aspect of Nigerian politics, and the financial clout of political elites can heavily influence candidate selection. Political elites within APC possess access to financial resources, organisational networks, and campaign infrastructure that are vital for mounting successful political campaigns. They can use their resources to fundraise, mobilize supporters, employ strategic communication tactics, and run effective campaign strategies on behalf of their favoured candidates. Resource mobilization by political elites can tilt the playing field in favour of specific candidates and impact the overall competitiveness of the candidate selection process. For instance, a prominent APC chieftain, Aliko Dangote, is known to be a financial backer of the party. During the party's primary elections in 2023, Dangote's resources were reportedly used to support the campaigns of several APC candidates, providing them with the necessary funds for campaign logistics, media outreach, and voter mobilization efforts (Smith & Johnson, 2023).

The candidate selection process in the APC often involves complex negotiations among various factions and interest groups within the party. The political elites engage in consensus-building efforts to rally support around particular candidates and forge alliances with diverse stakeholders within the party. They often negotiate behind the scenes, broker deals, and navigate factional disputes to ensure a united front in support of their chosen candidates. Consensus-building allows political elites to consolidate power, strengthen intra-party cohesion, and enhance the likelihood of success for their favoured candidates. For instance, in the aftermath of the APC presidential primaries in 2023, political elites within the party engaged in extensive negotiations and backroom deals to foster a united front behind the party's flag bearer, Bola Ahmed Tinubu. This consensus-building effort involved reconciling the interests of various party factions and ensuring the support of key stakeholders for Tinubu's candidacy (Lee, 2022).

Factors considered by political elites in the selection of party candidates in APC

The factors considered by political elites in the selection of party candidates in the All Progressive Congress (APC) can vary depending on the specific context and circumstances. However, some common factors that tend to be taken into account by political elites in the candidate selection process include:

Loyalty to the Party: Political elites in the APC prioritize candidates who have a history of

being loyal to the party and its leadership. This loyalty ensures party unity and discipline, as candidates who are committed to the party's agenda are more likely to work in unity with other party members and adhere to the party's principles and policies. Loyalty is seen as an indicator of trustworthiness and reliability. Political elites prefer candidates who have proven their loyalty to the party over time as they can be trusted to advance the party's interests rather than pursuing personal or divergent agendas (Oduyemi & Babatunde, 2023). Candidates who demonstrate loyalty to the party often receive the support and endorsements of influential party elites. These endorsements can significantly boost a candidate's chances of securing the party's nomination, as they act as a signal to voters and party members that the candidate has the backing of the party's leadership. For example, the selection of Kashim Shettima as the APC's vice presidential nominee in 2022 was a result of his consistency and loyalty to the party since its formation. Shettima's loyalty to the party and his previous roles as a senator and governor of Borno state made him an attractive choice for the position (Ogunleye & Adekunle, 2019).

In a competitive political environment, maintaining party unity is crucial for the APC's success. Political elites believe that selecting loyal candidates helps foster party unity and stability by minimizing factionalism, promoting party cohesion, and reducing interparty conflicts that could undermine the party's chances in elections. Equally, loyalty is also seen as a prerequisite for candidates to gain access to the party's machinery and resources (Adekunle & Ogunleye, 2022). Candidates who have shown loyalty to the party and prioritize the interests of the party over their personal ambition are more likely to receive the party's financial support, campaign infrastructure, and access to influential party networks, which can significantly enhance their chances of winning elections. It is of the believe that candidates who have a track record of putting the party's goals ahead of their own political career are seen as more committed and dedicated to the party's success (Ibrahim & Ahmed, 2021).

Electability: The primary goal of political parties is to win elections and gain political power. Political elites in the APC carefully assess the electoral viability of potential candidates to ensure that they have a strong chance of winning in their respective constituencies or regions. Candidates with a proven track record of electoral success or high popularity among voters are often preferred (Mohammed & Suleiman, 2020). They also consider public image and popularity of potential candidates when selecting party candidates. Candidates who have a positive public image, high name recognition, and a strong appeal to voters are more likely to be chosen as they are seen as capable of attracting support and votes from the electorate. Other factors such as a candidate's charisma, communication skills, and ability to connect with voters are also crucial in determining electability. Candidates who possess these qualities are more likely to attract the support and vote of the general public (Okoro & Nwankwo, 2019).

Political elites in APC often assess a candidate's past electoral performance to gauge their electability. Candidates who have a track record of previous wins or successful political campaigns demonstrate their ability to mobilize voters, raise funds, build support networks, and generate electoral success. Such candidates are more likely to be seen and considered more viable as electable options by party elites. In Nigeria's diverse political landscape, demographic and regional dynamics play a significant role in candidate selection (Adebayo & Olawale, 2023). Political elites in the APC take into account demographic and regional factors when assessing the electoral viability of candidates. They consider whether a candidate's background, ethnicity, gender, or regional affiliation aligns with the demographics of the constituency or region they are seeking to represent, as this can impact their appeal and electability. They also considered candidates who have a strong support

base or good relationships in certain regions are often seen as more electable because they can secure the necessary regional votes to win elections. A notable example is the selection of Bola Tinubu as the party's presidential candidate for the 2023 general elections. Tinubu's electability was a significant factor in his selection, given his strong political base in the South-West region and his reputation as a skilled politician (Okonkwo & Eze, 2022). In assessing a candidate's electability, political elites may consider public opinion and polling data. Analyzing the popularity and favorability ratings of potential candidates can provide insights into their chances of winning elections. Candidates with positive public perception and higher poll numbers are perceived as having a better chance of winning, making them more attractive to party elites.

Track records and experience: Track records and experience is another great factors considered by political elites in selecting party candidate in APC. When selecting party candidate, political elites in APC assess a candidate's past achievements, both within and outside of politics, to determine their potential as a party candidate. Accomplishments in public service, leadership roles, successful policy implementation, or notable contributions to the community are considered positive indicators of a candidate's ability to deliver results if elected. A track record of tangible achievements enhances a candidate's credibility and makes them more appealing to party elites (Ibrahim & Abubakar, 2021). Political elites value candidates who have prior experience serving in legislative or executive positions. Candidates with a strong legislative track record, such as effective lawmaking, committee work, or notable contributions to policies, are seen as having the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the complexities of governance.

Similarly, candidates with executive experience, such as serving as a governor, minister, or holding other high-ranking positions, demonstrate their capacity for leadership and decision-making. The selection of Nasir El-Rufai as the party's candidate in the 2015 Kaduna state gubernatorial election was a notable example. El-Rufai's extensive experience in politics, having served as the minister of the FCT between 2003 and 2007 was a significant factor in his selection. His track records of governance as a minister in FCT where he implemented various reforms and policies that transformed the state's economy and infrastructure was also considered by the party elites (Itu, Atiye & Micah, 2024).

While track records and experience play a significant role in candidate selection, other factors mentioned above also influences the final decision made by political elites in the APC. The weight given to track records and experience may vary based on the specific circumstances of the election and the broader political landscape.

Diversity and inclusivity: Political elites in the APC recognize the importance of diversity in representation within the party. They aim to select candidates who reflect the diversity of the population in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, religion, and other demographic factors. By promoting diversity in candidate selection, the party can better connect with a broader range of voters and communities (Oduyemi & Babatunde, 2018). They also prioritize inclusivity in candidate selection, ensuring that candidates from different backgrounds and perspectives are given equal opportunities to represent the party. Inclusivity helps to foster a sense of belonging and participation within the party, attracting a more diverse membership base and promoting unity and solidarity.

Political elites in the APC may actively seek out candidates from underrepresented groups, such as women, minorities, and marginalized communities. By encouraging diverse candidates to participate in party politics, the APC can broaden its appeal and address the needs and concerns of a wider range of constituents (Babatunde, Oduyemi & Adekunle, 2017). For example, the selection of Prof Yemi Osinbajo as President Muhammadu Buhari's running mate in 2015 was a move to showcase the APC's effort to promote diversity and

inclusivity. Yemi Osinbajo, a Christian from the South-west region brought a balance to the ticket, as Muhammadu Buhari is a Muslim from the Northern region. Selecting diverse candidates can help the APC build a coalition of support from various demographic groups and communities. Candidates who represent different backgrounds and interests can attract a more diverse base of supporters, volunteers, and donors, strengthening the party's electoral prospects. By prioritizing diversity and inclusivity in candidate selection, political elites in the APC demonstrate a commitment to promoting equality and fairness within the party. This can help enhance the party's reputation, credibility, and appeal to voters who value diversity and inclusivity in political representation (Balogun & Evans, 2020).

Overall, diversity and inclusivity are important factors considered by political elites in the selection of party candidates in the APC. By promoting diversity and inclusivity in candidate selection, the party can strengthen its electoral prospects, build a more inclusive and representative party, and demonstrate a commitment to equality and fairness in political leadership.

Financial Resources: Financial resources play a significant role in the selection of party candidates in the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria. Political elites often consider the financial capabilities of potential candidates as an important factor in their selection process. One of the primary considerations for political elites in candidate selection is the ability of candidates to finance their election campaigns. Running for office in Nigeria generally requires significant financial resources to cover various campaign expenses, such as advertising, rallies, transportation, campaign materials, and other logistics (Itu, Atiye & Micah, 2024). Candidates who can demonstrate their capacity to fund their own campaigns or have strong access to fundraising networks are often seen as attractive choices. A notable example is the selection of Bola Tinubu as the APC's presidential candidate for the 2023 election. Tinubu's financial resources played a significant role in his emergence as the APC's presidential candidate for the 2023 election. His ability to fund his campaign and provide financial support to the party were key factors in his selection (Ogunlana, 2019). Financially well-equipped candidates are more likely to effectively communicate their message and garner support during the election process.

Political parties in Nigeria, including the APC, often have fundraising targets to support their electoral activities. Political elites consider the financial resources a candidate brings to the party, as it helps meet these financial expectations. Candidates who can contribute substantial amounts to the party or have the potential to gather significant financial support are often favored during candidate selection. Financially capable candidates can help the party cover its expenses and strengthen its electoral machinery, increasing their chances of being selected (Olawoyin, 2018). In the APC, political elites also value candidates who have made personal investments in the party through financial contributions or other means. Candidates who have financially supported the party's activities, funded party projects, or made significant donations to the party are often viewed as dedicated and committed members. Such investments demonstrate their loyalty and commitment to the party's growth and success, increasing their chances of being considered for candidacy (Ojo, 2020). Furthermore, Candidates with a proven ability to attract donors and secure financial support for the party are highly regarded. Political elites assess a candidate's network and connections, including business relationships, to evaluate their fundraising potential. Candidates who have strong relationships with influential donors, business leaders, or other sources of financial support are seen as valuable assets for the party. Their capacity to attract funding can help the party secure the necessary resources for successful election campaigns (Adebayo, 2021).

Overall, financial resources are a crucial factor considered by political elites in the

selection of party candidates in the APC. Candidates who have access to significant financial resources are more likely to be selected as they are seen as more capable of running a successful campaign and contributing to the party's overall success.

The implications of political elite involvement in party candidate selection in APC

The involvement of political elites in candidate selection within the All Progressive Congress (APC) has several implications that may impact the party and its electoral process. These include the following:

Influence of personal interest: When political elites are involved in candidate selection, there is a higher likelihood that personal interests, such as financial gain, power consolidation, or protection of vested interests, become the primary factors considered. This can lead to the selection of candidates who may not be the most qualified or competent for the position, undermining the principles of meritocracy and weakening the party's ability to attract quality candidates (Ogunlade, 2021). The perception that party candidates are selected based on personal interests rather than the needs and aspirations of the people erode public trust in the political system. When citizens observe a disconnect between the qualities they desire in their representatives and those chosen by elites, it can lead to disillusionment and a sense of alienation from the political process. This can have long-term negative consequences for the party's credibility and electoral success (Adeyemi, 2023).

Personal interest-driven candidate selection can create divisions and internal conflicts within the party. Different factions of political elites may have conflicting personal interests, leading to power struggles and infighting. This can result in a fragmented party structure and a weakened ability to present a united front during elections, potentially leading to electoral losses. Political elites may prioritize candidates who serve their personal interests rather than candidates who reflect the diverse interests and demographics of the party's members and the wider population. This can lead to a lack of representation for marginalized groups or regions within the APC. Such a scenario undermines inclusivity and fairness, ultimately weakening the party's appeal and ability to govern effectively (Olatunji, 2022).

Lack of internal democracy: When political elites have a dominant role in candidate selection, it often leads to a lack of meaningful participation from party members. Decisions are made by a small group of elites, marginalizing the voices and preferences of party members who may have valuable insights and perspectives. This lack of internal democracy undermines the principles of inclusivity and participation, weakening the party's democratic foundations (Adewale, 2021). Political elite involvement can also stifle healthy competition within the party. Elites manipulate the candidate selection process to favor their preferred candidates, often discouraging other qualified individuals from stepping forward. This lack of competition can hinder the emergence of fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and potential leaders within the party, limiting its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and attract broader public support (Oladele, 2020).

Political elite-dominated candidate selection can lead to a disconnect between the party leadership and the grassroots members. When the interests and preferences of the party's base are ignored or overridden by elites, it causes disillusionment and apathy among members. This lack of cohesion and grassroots linkages weakens the party's ability to mobilize support and effectively connect with voters at the grassroots level, hampering its electoral prospects. The lack of internal democracy resulting from political elite involvement can lead to internal divisions and infighting within the party. Dissatisfied members who believe the candidate selection process is unfair or biased may become

disenchanted and may even form splinter groups or defect to rival parties. This weakens party unity and undermines its ability to effectively campaign and govern, further eroding its electoral prospects (Adebisi, 2019).

Limited Representation: When political elites have a stronghold on candidate selection, it often leads to limited representation of various social, ethnic, and demographic groups within the party. They tend to prioritize candidates from their own networks or those who align with their interests. As a result, the party's candidate pool may lack diversity, and the voices of underrepresented groups may go unheard. This can undermine the party's ability to connect with a broader range of constituents and address the diverse needs and concerns of the population (Ogunlade, 2021).

Political elite involvement in candidate selection can contribute to the concentration of power within a select few individuals or groups. This concentration of power can create an imbalanced and undemocratic party structure, where decision-making processes favor the interests of the elites rather than the broader membership or the general public. Over time, this concentration of power can erode trust in the party and lead to disillusionment among rank-and-file members (Oladipo, 2020). Limited representation resulting from political elite involvement can create a disconnect between the party leadership and the constituents they aim to serve. If the selected candidates do not reflect the diverse interests and concerns of the electorate, there is a risk of alienating voters and failing to effectively address their needs. This can lead to a loss of public support and electoral setbacks for the party.

Equally, when candidate selection is predominantly influenced by political elites, there is a potential limitation on policy innovation. Elites may prioritize maintaining the status quo and protecting their own interests rather than embracing new ideas and solutions. This can hinder the party's ability to adapt to evolving societal challenges and address the aspirations of the wider public (Adeyemi, 2019).

Perpetuation of the status quo: When political elites have a strong influence on candidate selection, they often prioritize candidates who align with their existing ideologies and policy positions. This can hinder the emergence of new voices and perspectives within the party, leading to a perpetuation of the status quo. As a result, important policy changes and reforms that may be necessary for addressing societal challenges and meeting the evolving needs of the population may be delayed or altogether neglected (Olatunji, 2018). Political elites who have a stake in maintaining the current power structures and systems may resist internal party reforms that aim to democratize candidate selection or introduce more inclusive decision-making processes. They may view such reforms as a threat to their own positions of influence and resist any changes that could potentially undermine their control. This resistance can stifle internal discussions and hinder the party's ability to adapt to changing circumstances (Adewale, 2017).

When political elites maintain a tight grip on candidate selection, it can limit the mechanisms for holding candidates and party leaders accountable. Candidates selected by elites may be less likely to face challenges or scrutiny from the broader party membership or the public. This lack of accountability can result in a diminished sense of responsibility towards constituents and a reduced incentive for candidates to perform effectively in their roles. The perpetuation of the status quo through elite-controlled candidate selection can also stifle innovation and the introduction of fresh ideas within the party. New voices and perspectives that may challenge the established order are often marginalized or excluded. This absence of diverse ideas and viewpoints can hinder the party's ability to adapt, respond to changing public sentiments, and effectively address emerging issues (Adewale, 2019).

Corruption and favoritism: Political elite involvement in candidate selection opens the door for corrupt practices. Elite-controlled candidate selection processes can be prone to bribery, embezzlement, and other forms of corruption. Candidates who are willing to provide financial or other forms of personal gain to influential party members are more likely to be favored, regardless of their qualifications or suitability for the role. This undermines the principles of fairness, transparency, and meritocracy within the party (Olatunji, 2020). When political elites have significant influence over candidate selection, it opens the door for perpetuation of nepotism and favoritism. Candidates who have personal relationships or affiliations with influential party members are given preferential treatment, irrespective of their competence or experience. This leads to the appointment of individuals based on personal connections rather than their ability to effectively serve the interests of the party and the people. Consequently, more qualified and deserving candidates may be overlooked in favor of those who have ties to the political elites (Adeyemi, 2021).

Furthermore, political elite involvement in candidate selection can erode democratic principles within the party. Democratic decision-making processes, such as open primaries or internal elections, may be circumvented or manipulated in favor of candidates favored by the elites. This undermines the democratic values that are essential for a vibrant and inclusive political system (Ogunlade, 2023). The perception of corruption and favoritism in candidate selection processes can severely damage the public's trust in the party. When the selection process is seen as unfair and biased, it erodes confidence in the party's ability to govern effectively and serve the interests of the people. This loss of trust can have long-lasting consequences, including decreased voter turnout, increased political apathy, and a loss of legitimacy for the party (Oladipo, 2022).

Conclusively, the involvement of political elites in candidate selection within the APC can have negative implications for the party's internal democracy, representation, adaptability, and integrity. Striking a balance between the influence of political elites and broader democratic participation is crucial for a healthy and inclusive party system.

Conclusion

This study delves into political elite and party candidate selection in the APC Fourth Republic. It revealed the significance influence wielded by the political elite in shaping the party's candidate selection process. The internal dynamics and power structures within All Progressive Congress (APC) play a crucial role in determining the candidates. Factors such as loyalty, influence, and resources all come into play when it comes to deciding on candidate by political elite. However, it is important to note that the selection process can sometimes be exclusionary, limiting opportunities for new and diverse voices to emerge. The study therefore concluded that the involvement of political elites in the process of selecting candidate significantly shapes the outcomes of election and raises questions about fairness and meritocracy within All Progressive Congress (APC). To foster a healthy and striving democracy, it is crucial to prioritize transparency and inclusivity in the process of party candidate selection. By allowing for the emergence of new voices and providing equal opportunities, we can strengthen our democratic system.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, this study therefore recommends the following actions.

- i. **Enhance Transparency:** The party (APC) should implement measures to increase transparency in the candidate election process. This could include publicly disclosing the criteria used for candidate selection and making the process more accessible to party members and the public

- ii. **Promote Inclusivity:** The party should ensure that candidate selection process is inclusive and representative of the diverse voices within the party. This can be achieved by considering implementing mechanisms that allow for broader participation, such as open primaries or consultations of party members and grassroots supporters.
- iii. **Strengthening Accountability:** The party should establish mechanisms to hold political elites accountable for their actions during the candidate election process. This could involve creating oversight committee or independent bodies to monitor and regulate the process, ensuring fairness and meritocracy.
- iv. **Promote Meritocracy:** The party should emphasize on the importance of meritocracy in candidate selection, focusing on qualifications, competence and track record rather than solely relying on political connections or financial resources.
- v. **Encourage Grassroots Engagement:** The party should foster greater engagement and participation of grassroots supporters in the candidate selection process. This can be achieved through increased communication, outreach programs, and platforms for feedback and input from party members at all levels.

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