

Political Parties, Electoral Motives, and Campaign Financing of Electoral Processes in Sub-Saharan Africa



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Paul Kariuki, Stanley Osezua Ehiane, and
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Contents

Foreword	i
Editors and Contributors' Bios	iii
Abbreviations and Acronyms	vii
Chapter One: A Long-Standing Friction: Political Parties, Electoral Motives and Financing in Electoral Processes in Sub-Saharan Africa	1
<i>Stanley Osezua Ehiane, Paul Kariuki, Bhekithemba R. Mngomezulu</i>	
Chapter Two: Evolution and Role of Political Parties in Sub-Saharan Africa	15
<i>Thelma Nyarhi</i>	
Chapter Three: Drivers of Electoral Choice: Ethnicity, Patronage, and Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa	39
<i>Sunday Israel Oyebamiji</i>	
Chapter Four: The Campaign Financing Patterns and Sources by Political Parties in Sub-Saharan Countries: Selected Country Case Studies	67
<i>Bongiwe Khumalo, Paul Kariuki</i>	
Chapter Five: Legal and Policy Frameworks Governing Campaign Financing	87
<i>Ndwakhulu Tshishonga</i>	
Chapter Six: Impact of Campaign Financing on Electoral Integrity and Governance	111
<i>Lizzy Ofusori</i>	

Chapter Seven: External Influence and International Donors	137
<i>Bhekithemba R. Mngomezulu</i>	
Chapter Eight: Reforms and Innovations in Campaign Financing	159
<i>Maria Lauda Goyayi, Stanley Osezua Ehiane</i>	
Chapter Nine: Beyond Ballots: Parties, Patronage and Campaign Finance in Sub-Saharan Africa	177
<i>Stanley Osezua Ehiane, Paul Kariuki, Bhekithemba R. Mngomezulu</i>	

Foreword

Since the advent of democracy – whose origin is often traced to Ancient Athens in Greece, specifically during the late 6th century BCE (around 508–507 BCE) – several democratic typologies have emerged based on a multiplicity of underlying principles, be they institutional and electoral design, power distribution, participation and representation logic, deliberative quality, accountability architecture, or constitutional order. Whereas different polities have adopted different types of democracy – be they direct democracy, representative democracy, liberal democracy, participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, social democracy, constitutional democracy, procedural democracy, substantive democracy, minimalist democracy, maximalist democracy, elite democracy, pluralist democracy, parliamentary democracy, presidential democracy, hybrid democracy, and many more – the operationalisation of all these typologies of democracy illuminate the complex nexus between political parties, electoral motives and election campaign financing.

The advancement of democratisation across the world in the late 20th century, which witnessed the adoption of liberal-democratic electoral systems based on principles of universal suffrage, secret ballot and multiparty electoral competition, has now resulted in elections being widely viewed as a mechanism and opportunity for the government (elites) and the people (masses) to influence each other. However, in Africa, whilst political parties have mediated the relationship between the state and society, election campaign finance has also mediated and sustained the nexus between the government and society through resource mobilisation for electoral competition, election campaign messaging, organisational capacity-building and citizen engagement. Since the election campaign, finance has enhanced and sustained competitive politics in Africa; it has also negatively influenced electoral competitiveness and undermined the integrity of electoral outcomes. Based on the trends and patterns of election campaign funding and election outcomes in several African countries, this is increasingly resulting in what other scholars have termed “moneyocracy”, “cashocracy”, “financocracy”, “donorocracy”, “fundocracy”, “plutocracy”, or “cashball politics” on the continent. In the end, the “*demos*” in African democracies are increasingly being displaced, replaced and supplanted by

“*pluto-demos*” or wealth-based power structures in society, political parties and general body politic in Africa. Ultimately, it regrettably corrupts and disfigures Abraham Lincoln’s otherwise canonical and paradigmatic definition and conception of democracy to “*Government of the elites, by the elites, for the elites*”. Despite notable attempts by many African states to legally regulate political party and election campaign funding systems, this remains one of the critical factors behind democratic backsliding, democratic erosion, democratic regression, democratic retreat, democratic degeneration, elite capture, patronage politics and state capture in Africa. Such complications convolute the effective role played by African political parties, elections and election campaign funding in building, nourishing and sustaining democratisation processes.

These related aspects are comprehensively explored in this Book Volume, critically dissecting the role of political parties in sub-Saharan Africa, electoral motives and voter behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa, trends and patterns of election campaign financing, the legal and policy frameworks guiding election campaign funding, the implications of election campaign financing on electoral integrity and governance, the role of international election campaign financiers on local electoral dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as election campaign financing reforms and innovations in sub-Saharan Africa.

Through critical references to various case studies, divergent methodological approaches and in-depth analysis anchored in different conceptual and theoretical frameworks, the Book Volume presents fresh insights, critical reflections and polycentric perspectives on how party politics, election motives and campaign finance influence electoral integrity in sub-Saharan Africa. The Book Volume creates intellectual authority and credibility, and its strength also lies in providing practical ideas and interventions necessary to enhance and safeguard electoral democracy, electoral competitiveness, political equality, democratic legitimacy and democratic consolidation in sub-Saharan Africa and other regions.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACDP	African Christian Democratic Party
ANC	African National Congress
APC	All Progressive Congress
AU	African Union
CR	Campaign for Cyril Ramaphosa 2017
DA	Democratic Alliance
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
HI	Historical Institution
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
MP	Members of Parliament
MPDF	Multi Party Democracy Fund
NCNC	National Council of Nigeria and The Camerron
NP	National Party
NPC	Northern People's Congress
NRC	National Republican Convention
NRM	National Resistance Movement
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PFA	Political Funding Act
PFRAP	Public Funding of Represented Political Parties Act
PPFA	Political Parties Funding Act
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACP	South African Communist Party
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

Chapter One

A Long-Standing Friction: Political Parties, Electoral Motives and Financing in Electoral Processes in Sub-Saharan Africa

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The history of democratic governance in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is best understood through a critical political economy perspective that examines the relationships among political parties, electoral motivations, and campaign financing. These aspects comprise the institutional, behavioural, and material dimensions of electoral politics, and their interaction has a fundamental impact on democratic consolidation, governance outcomes, and state legitimacy. No doubt, in contemporary society, the ideal of democracy has become the only acceptable form of political system. While the region has seen a formal transition from authoritarian and single-party regimes to multiparty electoral systems, the result has largely been hybrid regimes in which democratic institutions coexist with entrenched informal practices such as neopatrimonialism, clientelism, and monetised politics (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997; Hyden, 2006; Cheeseman, 2015).

Political parties in SSA have historically served as instruments of anti-colonial struggle, mobilising nationalist feelings and articulating ideological commitments to self-determination, social justice, and economic emancipation. According to Ake (1996), early African political parties were profoundly rooted in mass struggles

and had enormous credibility as agents of change. However, in the post-independence period, these parties quickly institutionalised into vehicles of state control, frequently justified by national unity and developmental authoritarianism (Mkandawire, 2001). The reintroduction of multiparty democracy in the late 1980s and 1990s, prompted by internal opposition, economic crises, and external pressures from international financial institutions, reshaped political competition but did not fundamentally alter the underlying power structures (van de Walle, 2003; Adejumobi, 2000).

Studies have shown that political parties in SSA have minimal institutionalisation, low ideological distinction, and rely heavily on personality and patronage systems (Salih, 2003; Randall & Svåsand, 2002). As Cheeseman and Daley (2018) point out, many parties are more like coalitions of elites seeking access to state resources than programming organisations. This has serious ramifications for democratic representation, as the lack of clear policy platforms undermines issue-based competition and turns electoral politics towards identity and material incentives. Scholars, such as Omotola (2010) and Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006), have shown that political parties frequently lack internal democracy and ideological clarity, limiting their ability to function as effective intermediates between the state and citizens.

Within this framework, electoral motivations in SSA are affected by a complex interplay of structural restrictions and rational adaptability. Ethnicity and identity politics remain crucial to electoral behaviour, reflecting both historical legacies and current socio-political circumstances. Ekeh's (1975) notion of the "two publics" provides a valuable framework for understanding how primordial loyalties and civic obligations coexist, with ethnic solidarity frequently taking precedence over national considerations. Several studies show that ethnic identity continues to affect voting trends, candidate selection, and party alignment (Posner, 2005; Chandra, 2004). However, attributing election behaviour entirely to ethnicity risks oversimplification. Resnick (2014) contends that voter behaviour in Africa is increasingly influenced by a combination of identification, performance evaluations, and policy expectations, particularly in urban and politically competitive areas. Patronage and clientelism further complicate electoral motives by embedding political competition within networks of material exchange.

Scholars like Bratton and van de Walle (1997) and Erdmann and Engel (2007) contend that African politics are defined

by the combination of formal bureaucratic structures with informal patron-client relationships, drawing on the idea of neopatrimonialism. Voters frequently participate in “instrumental voting” in these situations, exchanging political support for material advantages like money, products, appointments or access to public facilities (Lindberg, 2010). This can be seen as a reasonable reaction to economic instability and inadequate state capability, even though it violates democratic standards. Voters are more inclined to accept clientelist appeals when programmatic alternatives are either non-existent or untrustworthy (Lindberg, 2010).

The material infrastructure supporting these election dynamics is campaign financing. Understanding election competitiveness and governance results in SSA requires an understanding of the distribution, sources, and regulation of political funding. According to existing research, incumbent parties and powerful elites have disproportionate access to funding, resulting in extremely unequal campaign financing (Austin & Tjernström, 2003; Ohman, 2014). The distinction between public and private fundraising is sometimes blurred when state resources are secretly used to assist ruling parties (van de Walle, 2007). This results in systemic advantages that limit the opportunities for real political competition and undercut the idea of a level playing field.

Furthermore, the likelihood of corruption, illegal fundraising, and policy capture is increased by the opaqueness of political finance systems. Scholars from Africa, like Kunle Ajayi (2007) and Aiyede (2015), have pointed out that substantial amounts of campaign finance can evade examination because of lax enforcement and poor regulatory frameworks. The pervasiveness of “godfatherism” in most countries in Africa serves as an example of how financial backers have a disproportionate amount of influence over the choice of candidates and the formulation of public policies (Albert, 2005). In addition to distorting election results, this dynamic perpetuates a cycle of accountability deficiencies in which elected officials put the interests of financiers ahead of those of the electorate.

Campaign finance has significant ramifications for government. Elite dominance of policy processes and regulatory capture are made possible by an over-reliance on private donations, especially from concentrated economic interests. Gyimah-Boadi (2009) contends that by turning public office into an investment to be recovered through rent-seeking, the monetisation of parliament in Africa threatens the principles of democratic accountability. This is in line

with more general criticisms of African political economics that emphasise how important resource distribution and control are in influencing political behaviour (Bayart, 2009). Campaign finance is, therefore, a structural factor that determines the quality of governance and the relationship between the state and society, rather than just an electoral issue.

Several SSA nations have implemented institutional and legislative systems to control political finance in response to these issues. These include spending caps, disclosure regulations, and public funding programmes intended to advance equity and openness. However, insufficient enforcement, political meddling, and a lack of institutional capacity frequently compromise the efficacy of these frameworks, as emphasised by Aiyede (2015) and International IDEA (2019). Sanctions for infractions are either insufficient or handled inconsistently, and electoral administration bodies often lack the independence and resources required to keep an eye on compliance. This supports the claim that more extensive initiatives to improve political will and governance competence must go hand in hand with formal institutional improvements.

The political financing environment in SSA is made more complex by the involvement of outside parties. Foreign governments, development organisations, and international donors all contribute significantly to electoral processes by frequently offering financial support, technical aid, and capacity-building programmes. Such interventions create important issues of sovereignty and outside influence, even though they can improve electoral integrity. Donor participation in African politics is often influenced by geopolitical and strategic goals, which may not coincide with domestic priorities, as Mkandawire (2010) and Whitfield (2009) contend. As a result, political actors may start to respond more to outside sponsors than to local populations, creating an extra layer of accountability issues.

Emerging innovations and changes targeted at resolving these systemic issues are shown by recent advances in campaign finance. By increasing involvement and lowering dependency on big donors, the use of digital technologies, such as online fundraising and mobile money platforms, has the potential to democratise political financing. The usage of these technologies has increased in nations like Kenya and Nigeria, which reflects broader trends in financial inclusion and digital governance (Cheeseman *et al.*, 2021). Concerns

over new types of opacity and unregulated financial flows are raised by the legislative frameworks controlling these technologies, which are still in their infancy.

There are still large analytical gaps in spite of the expanding corpus of knowledge. A large portion of current research obscures the interconnectedness of political parties, electoral motivations, and campaign funding by treating them as distinct variables. However, this study argues that these components are mutually constitutive. Identity-based and clientelist voting is reinforced by weak party institutionalisation, which is further supported by opaque and uneven funding sources. In a similar vein, party behaviour, election tactics, and governance results are influenced by the type of campaign funding. Therefore, an integrated analytical framework that takes into account these intricate interrelationships is necessary to address the difficulties of democratic consolidation in SSA.

This book places itself in this integrative framework by examining the relationship between political parties, electoral motivations, and campaign funding using insights from African political economy, institutional theory, and behavioural analysis. It acknowledges that larger socioeconomic and historical circumstances, such as colonial legacies, state formation patterns, and international political dynamics, are interwoven with SSA's election processes. The study aims to go beyond descriptive narratives and towards a deeper explanatory comprehension of electoral politics in the area by taking a comprehensive approach.

The contextual study also emphasises how important it is to reform voting processes towards increased accountability, openness, and inclusivity. Enhancing democratic quality requires strengthening political parties as programmatic and ideologically cohesive organisations, encouraging issue-based political rivalry, and guaranteeing fair access to campaign resources. According to Gyimah-Boadi (2015) and Cheeseman (2015), political norms and public expectations must change in addition to institutional reforms if democracy is to survive in Africa. In conclusion, a key component of democratic government in sub-Saharan Africa is the interaction between political parties, electoral motivations, and campaign funding. While the region has made notable strides in institutionalising electoral democracy, persistent challenges ranging from identity politics and clientelism to financial opacity and external influence continue to undermine democratic consolidation. Addressing these challenges

requires a multidimensional strategy that integrates institutional reform, political education, economic transformation, and regional cooperation. Only through such a comprehensive approach can SSA move towards a more substantive and resilient form of democracy.

The body of literature reviewed in this book presents a coherent yet multidimensional understanding of political parties, electoral motives, and campaign financing in SSA. By integrating the contributions of each chapter author, a clear analytical narrative emerges; one that situates electoral processes within a broader political economy shaped by historical legacies, identity dynamics, financial structures, regulatory frameworks, and external influences.

Nyarhi's contribution offers a historically informed account of the development of political parties in sub-Saharan Africa, tracking their history from anti-colonial liberation movements to modern actors within multiparty democratic regimes. The chapter emphasises that although nationalism, freedom, and restorative justice served as the intellectual foundations of early political parties, their modern incarnations often lack commitment to transformative governance and exhibit reduced ideological coherence. The paradox that once represented emancipation is now linked to government flaws like nepotism, corruption, and populism, which Nyarhi critically examines. This historical evolution is essential for understanding current electoral dynamics, as it reveals a shift from programmatic politics to power retention strategies, raising fundamental questions about representation, legitimacy, and democratic accountability.

Building on the institutional foundation of political parties, Oyebamiji advances the discourse by examining voter behaviour and electoral motivations. The chapter illustrates how a complex interaction amongst ethnicity, patronage, and policy considerations shapes political decisions in SSA, using Rational Choice Theory and Social Identity Theory. While patronage networks support transactional voting patterns, ethnicity becomes a prominent organising component that shapes political loyalties and influences candidate selection. The study modifies this viewpoint, though, by recognising the conditional importance of policy pledges, especially when they deal with pressing socioeconomic issues. Oyebamiji's insight is crucial in demonstrating that electoral behaviour in SSA is a combination of utility-maximising and identity-driven factors rather than being entirely programmed or illogical.

The contribution of Khumalo and Kariuki on Campaign Financing Patterns and Sources shifts the focus to the material dimension of electoral politics by examining the structure and sources of campaign financing. According to the chapter, there are clear disparities in resource distribution: smaller political parties rely on grassroots donations and limited government financing, whereas dominant parties rely mainly on large-scale contributions from corporate entities and high-net-worth individuals. This disparity increases the power of rich fundraising networks and solidifies unfair electoral competitiveness. Crucially, they draw attention to the opaqueness of finance systems, pointing out that a sizeable amount of campaign funds, roughly eighteen per cent to twenty-five per cent, remain hidden because of lax reporting requirements and the involvement of middlemen. To improve transparency and accountability, the chapter promotes standardised, real-time disclosure tools and regulatory reforms, while establishing a clear link between financial opacity, political inequality, and the risk of policy capture.

Tshishonga's work on Legal and Policy Frameworks Governing Campaign Financing complements the analysis of financing patterns by interrogating the regulatory environment governing campaign finance, with a specific focus on South Africa. The chapter offers a thorough analysis of the Political Funding Act (PFA), emphasising its rules on contribution caps, disclosure, and public funding sources such as the Multi-Party Democracy Fund. Tshishonga notes ongoing issues with enforcement capability, underutilisation of public funding sources, and ongoing public mistrust over donor influence, while noting the advancements made in institutionalising transparency. The chapter makes the case that strong enforcement, institutional independence, and public trust are necessary for formal regulatory frameworks to be effective. It does this by drawing on Institutional Theory, Regulatory Capture Theory, and Principal-Agent Theory. This contribution highlights the discrepancy between campaign money governance laws and real-world results.

The Chapter on Impact of Campaign Financing on Electoral Integrity and Governance, written by Ofusori, extends the discussion by examining the implications of campaign financing for electoral integrity and post-election governance. The chapter shows how unregulated or opaque finance techniques erode voter confidence and distort electoral competition, undermining democratic legitimacy

through a methodical examination of empirical and theoretical research. In addition to marginalising smaller political players, the disproportionate power of affluent donors influences policy choices in ways that prioritise private interests above the general good. Ofusori goes on to show that the effects of poor campaign funding continue beyond elections and have an impact on governance outcomes through decreased service delivery, policy bias, and corruption. The chapter highlights that maintaining electoral integrity and advancing responsible governance require strong legal frameworks, open disclosure procedures, and independent oversight organisations.

Mngomezulu's chapter on External Influence and International Donors introduces an important external dimension to the discourse by analysing the role of international actors in shaping electoral processes in SSA. The chapter makes the case that foreign participation in elections—whether through financial aid, technical support, or political influence—is primarily motivated by strategic objectives rather than altruistic concerns. It is based on realism and aid allocation theory. The chapter emphasises how outside parties, such as foreign governments, non-governmental organisations, and donor organisations, can affect internal political dynamics and election results, frequently with consequences for regional stability and national sovereignty. Mngomezulu's study highlights the interdependence of internal and international political economies and emphasises the need for caution when handling external interference by placing electoral processes within a global geopolitical context.

Goyayi and Ehiane's contribution, *Reforms and Innovations in Campaign Financing*, provides a forward-looking perspective by examining recent reforms and emerging innovations in campaign financing across SSA. The chapter details initiatives taken by governments, electoral commissions, and civil society organisations to address issues such as uneven competitiveness, illegal fundraising, and electoral corruption. Spending caps, public financing sources, and stricter disclosure regulations are some of the major adjustments. The chapter also emphasises the increasing use of digital fundraising tools, such as online micro-donation systems and mobile money platforms, which have the potential to democratise political financing via increasing participation. They note that a large portion of the available material is dispersed and often limited to grey literature, but they also point out important gaps in empirical documentation and assessment. The chapter concludes that although innovations and

reforms have potential, their success depends on solid institutional frameworks and thorough empirical evaluation.

Synthesising these contributions reveals several overall themes. First, although SSA political parties have experienced substantial change, their ability to operate as representative and programmatic organisations remains limited. Second, identity, material incentives, and policy considerations interact dynamically to shape electoral behaviour, reflecting both structural limitations and rational voter adjustments. Third, given current systems marked by inequality, opacity, and regulatory flaws, campaign finance becomes a crucial factor in determining political competition and governance results. Fourth, despite the evolution of legal and regulatory frameworks, institutional constraints and enforcement deficiencies impair their efficacy. Fifth, external factors have a significant influence on how elections are conducted, presenting both opportunities and dangers for the advancement of democracy. Finally, ongoing reforms and innovations offer pathways for improving transparency and inclusivity but require stronger empirical grounding and institutional support.

The literature, as a whole, emphasises how intricately linked and structurally rooted the relationship is in SSA between political parties, electoral motivations, and campaign funding. To improve democratic accountability, bolster election integrity, and advance sustainable government throughout the region, the issues within this nexus must be addressed. The literature undoubtedly produces a more sophisticated and empirically supported analytical claim: the enduring dysfunctions of electoral politics in SSA are rooted in deeply ingrained structural constraints on the political economy rather than institutional design flaws. Colonial legacies, neopatrimonial state structures, and persistent socioeconomic disparities have produced historically sedimented systems that comprise political parties, voter behaviour, and campaign financing. This position is consistent with the foundational critique advanced by Claude Ake, who argues that the crisis of democracy in Africa is fundamentally material and structural rather than procedural. It is further reinforced by Thandika Mkandawire, whose notion of “choiceless democracies” highlights how structural inequalities constrain both institutional performance and citizen agency (Mkandawire, 2015).

Recent empirical research on governance and campaign funding supports this structural perspective. Election integrity and democratic

accountability are consistently undermined by poor regulatory frameworks, opaque funding channels, and the disproportionate influence of private money, according to comparative assessments across African nations (Ohman, 2022; Walecki, 2023). Similarly, studies on political party funding in Nigeria show that although legislative restrictions may be sufficient in theory, their efficacy is severely limited by enforcement deficiencies, which permit financial abuses to continue (Oni, 2021). These results support the more general argument that structural limitations in African democracies limit both institutional efficacy and electoral competitiveness. This perspective makes it impossible to think of election reform as a technocratic endeavour. Instead, it necessitates a fundamental restructuring of the incentive systems that support political rivalry. The interlocking dynamics of weak party institutionalisation, identity-based mobilisation, and unequal access to financial resources reflect what Richard Joseph conceptualises as prebendal politics—where state power is instrumentalised for distributive and personal gain (Joseph, 1987). Importantly, this system persists not merely because of elite manipulation but because it is rationally reproduced within contexts of economic scarcity and limited state capacity.

Three analytically grounded implications follow from this structural diagnosis. First, the institutional strengthening of political parties must move beyond formalistic reforms towards substantive organisational transformation. This includes fostering programmatic party competition, enhancing internal democracy, and reducing the dominance of patron-client hierarchies. Without such reforms, parties will continue to function as vehicles for elite bargaining rather than as platforms for policy articulation, a pattern widely observed in African party systems (Cheeseman, 2015; Resnick, 2013).

Second, transforming electoral motives requires addressing the socio-economic conditions that make patronage both attractive and rational. Persistent poverty, unemployment, and weak service delivery incentivise voters to engage in short-term material exchanges rather than to evaluate programmes. As broader governance studies indicate, the failure of post-colonial states to deliver public goods has entrenched a political culture in which access to state resources is mediated through informal networks rather than institutional channels (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997; van de Walle, 2007). Consequently, electoral reform must be integrated with developmental strategies that enhance state capacity and socio-economic inclusion.

Third, reforming campaign financing must be approached as a governance and accountability challenge rather than solely a legal one. While regulatory frameworks are necessary, their impact depends on enforcement capacity, institutional independence, and transparency mechanisms. The persistence of undisclosed funding and illicit financial flows across SSA emphasises the need for real-time disclosure systems, independent oversight bodies, and active civil society engagement. Without these, regulatory reforms risk remaining nominal while systemic inequalities persist (Nassmacher, 2009; Ohman, 2022).

It is critical to note that the trajectory of democratic consolidation in SSA will be determined by how effectively and contextually these interconnected structural restrictions are handled. According to Achille Mbembe (2021), contemporary African politics exhibits a paradox in which conventional democratic institutions coexist with entrenched inequities and governance inadequacies. This emphasises an important point: the long-term viability of democracy in SSA is dependent on the reform of the underlying sociopolitical order rather than the proliferation of elections themselves.

In this context, the relationship between political parties, electoral motivations, and campaign financing remains an important analytical and policy frontier. Addressing it necessitates a shift from institutional mimicry to a political economy strategy that incorporates structural reform, socioeconomic transformation, and normative reorientation. Only through such an integrated framework will SSA election systems progress from instruments of elite reproduction to vehicles of genuine democratic accountability, representation, and developmental government.

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Chapter Two

Evolution and Role of Political Parties in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

Following World War II, Africa, amongst other former colonies, achieved independence. As emerging independent states between 1945 and 1960, questions concerning democratic readiness attracted the attention of sociopolitical analysts. Some countries, particularly former British colonies, adopted democratic institutions (Handelman, 2000). According to Oluman (2011), by the mid-1960s, single-party dominance had spread across Africa, significantly limiting the existence of multiple political parties. With the onset of the third wave of democratisation, several countries, including Uganda, embraced democratisation and multipartyism (Ngwome & Focham, 2014).

Today, sub-Saharan Africa is characterised by a range of party systems, including one-party, dominant-party, multiparty, fragmented multiparty, and electoral authoritarian systems. In Uganda, for example, the political evolution that saw a shift from a one-party system under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) (Oluman, 2011) to multiparty politics in 2005 has been characterised by a fragmented multiparty system (Kiwanuka & Twaddle, 2022). This political trajectory is not exceptional, as most sub-Saharan African states have experienced shifts in their political evolution. This raises some important questions: what functions do political parties perform within these political spaces? Do political shifts affect society?

Although political parties often emerge from societal cleavages, the political systems in which they operate shape their ideological orientations. The party systems dictate their allowances or limitations within the state. Consequently, the political parties emerge or reshape in response to the political landscape. Political parties in sub-Saharan Africa are frequently marked by fragmentation,

weak institutionalisation, centralisation, personalisation, and an overreliance on patronage and ethnic-based mobilisation. These features are the direct result of historical legacies, uneven democratic development, and authoritarian experiences that continue to shape political life. While political parties are essential components of democracy, their formation and development are closely tied to the party systems operating within specific states.

Party systems are often assumed to be fixed political landscapes, yet their evolution is rarely questioned. As analytical concepts, both *political parties* and *party systems* are “utilised in comparative political analysis” (McKown & Kauffman, 1973:47). The role of party systems, thus, extends beyond elections, as the structure, organisation, and political outcomes of any society are deeply dependent on them. It is, therefore, essential to understand how historical processes have contributed to the emergence of different party systems, as this enables tracing the spatiotemporal inheritance that remains prevalent within each sub-region. Such understanding is particularly important given the distinctive characteristics that mark political parties across sub-Saharan Africa.

Political party systems in the region have evolved in response to major economic, social, and political shifts. Changes in regime types, leadership patterns, state structures, and governance models have consistently reshaped party formation, competitiveness, and organisation. Across time, space, and context, political shifts such as colonisation, independence, democratisation, and recurring political crises have played a significant role in shaping party systems. Democracy, understood as a political system in which citizens elect leaders through competitive elections, fundamentally relies on political parties to provide meaningful political choice.

Although the region exists in a post-independence era, political traditions, functions, and identities inherited from earlier periods continue to influence contemporary politics. While some literature suggests continuity, particularly in relation to liberation parties, their impact, function, political ideology, and organisational structures have evolved. The colonial era, marked by violence, suppressed indigenous voices and gave rise to nationalist and revolutionary leaders. During this period, freedom and restorative justice were central in shaping the political ideologies of emerging liberation movements. In the early post-colonial period, diverse political realities contributed to the emergence of multiparty systems intended to facilitate the transition of power from colonial administrations to nationalist elites.

The contemporary era has witnessed a resurgence of multiparty politics. While this has encouraged broader ideological diversity and political representation, it has also attracted multiple overlapping interests, each driven by different motivations. For political analysts, citizens, and voters alike, the roles played by different political parties, therefore, matter greatly. Party ideologies, institutional roles, and political histories reveal both the sociopolitical and socioeconomic progress achieved and the challenges facing contemporary democracies. Given the complex features that characterise sub-Saharan African party systems, such as fragmentation, reduced electoral competitiveness, ruling-party dominance, and coalition government formation, it remains essential to understand political party dynamics in the region. As the liberation parties continue to remain dominant party rulers in the region, it is imperative to trace their evolution from the eras in which they were born and examine their roles and subsequent contributions to democracy.

This chapter, therefore, explores how liberation political parties have formed and functioned within sub-Saharan Africa and traces their evolution within their respective party systems. While liberation political parties have shaped democratic processes, institutions, and policies, their interaction with other parties through competition, cooperation, and governance is conditioned by the party system operating within the state. Are the intra-party relationships necessary? What role do they play in modern-day Africa?

This chapter is organised into five sections: the introduction to the topic; the literature review, which traces the evolution of party systems across political shifts on the continent; the methodology, outlining data collection and the theoretical framework; the findings and discussion focused on Nigeria and South Africa which have had long-standing multiparty systems and/or dominant party systems since independence; and the conclusion, which offers recommendations.

Literature Review

Sub-Saharan Africa is a region encompassing forty-nine countries located south of the Sahara Desert. It is commonly divided into four subregions: West Africa, including Nigeria and Ghana; East Africa, including Kenya and Uganda; Central Africa, including Gabon and Equatorial Guinea; and southern Africa, including

South Africa and Namibia. The colonisation of this region was complex, involving several European powers, notably Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, and Italy. As a result, diverse historical trajectories have produced varying patterns of party system institutionalisation across the region. Furthermore, political parties have emerged and manifested in varying degrees in response to the historical era. While Europe has had varying party systems as a result of its peculiar historical factors, Africa's party systems, on the other hand, have been informed by colonial histories. Additionally, the political culture and subsequent political parties have been shaped by colonial history.

Political party and Party System functions

The literature has debated the impact of party systems on political party formations (Abedi, 2002; Mudde, 2014) and on party functions (Jones, 2005). Wordu (2011) defines a political party as an organisation comprising agents who actively compete against another group of agents with diverse views for popular support. Although they manifest in varying degrees (Chizea, 2004), they are at the core of representative democracy (Schattschneider, 1952; Diamond & Gunther, 2001; Dalton, 2018). Their primary objective is to organise like-minded individuals, dominate and control spaces within government. Additionally, they serve as "channels of expression... an instrument, or an agency, for representing the people by expressing their demands" (Sartori, 2005:24). Members also share the same ideology about how a country should be governed (Ekundayo, 2016). Despite the dominant or existing party in any society, parties share similar features in their roles and responsibilities within it. As the main pillars of any democracy, some of the things that they are responsible for include carrying out political education and raising awareness around citizen rights and obligations informed by the constitution (Nurafiat *et al.*, 2022); policymaking through relaying and converting citizen interests and concerns into policy (Morehouse, 1973), and mobilisation and coordination of individuals who share ideological orientations (Herrnson, 2009).

Amidst their several roles, policymaking is essential as it carries the voice of citizens and sometimes silences them. Policy carries ideological will that has societal impact. This, however, is dependent on the organisation and structure of party systems and political parties (Jones, 2005). Sartori (1976) describes the party system as

“the system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition”. It involves how political parties interact with one another in competitive electoral processes. There are variations which, according to Aiyede (2022), include:

- One-party system – ruled by a single party; this could include contemporary communist states such as China and North Korea. All aspects of life are controlled by a single party.
- Two-party system – two parties dominate the political arena. Although other parties may exist, they are of no importance. Parties need to win a majority vote and govern without assistance from the other party. Government rotation is expected. The system risks reversal of policy by the incumbent party, thereby working against state development.
- Multiparty system – involves more than two parties and has a high likelihood of coalition government formations.
- Dominant-party system – which is different from a one-party system in that a party overcomes competition to the extent that elections appear to be a formality. Elections should be held or proclaimed fair.

In terms of policy implementation, dominant-party and one-party systems often ensure policy continuity that aligns with the ruling party’s ideology, whereas for the other party, system policy changes are likely to occur. As principal factors for social reality, it is important to understand how they are shaped.

Sartori (1997) argues that party systems are shaped by factors such as social cleavages, electoral competitiveness, and previously existing party developments. This highlights the need to understand political and socioeconomic histories. According to Lipset and Rokkan’s (1967) research on Europe, class, rural–urban, and religious cleavages were essential to the establishment of European party systems. In the African context, however, ethnicity, class, and rural–urban cleavages are particularly significant. The literature has emphasised the importance of ethnicity (Fridy, 2007; Lindberg & Morrison, 2005). Birnir (2007) also supports this view, documenting ethnic diversity as being paramount to the stabilisation of party systems, particularly in post-communist European regions. Within Africa, ethnicity frequently emerges in discussions of nationalism and identity-based politics. As a social cleavage, it affects the democratisation process and economic performance and has potential for conflict.

Historical Evolution of Party System Dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa

According to Thomson (2010), to understand the present, one must draw insights from the past. The world is less likely to reinvent itself; instead, it evolves. This suggests that traditions, customs, relationships, and institutions are more likely to adapt across temporal periods. What factors have shaped the African politics that we see today? To better understand this, it is necessary to trace democratic formations and the subsequent party systems within the region.

Colonial Authorities and Decolonisation (1945 – 1960)

Decolonisation, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come because of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. Decolonisation, as we know, is a historical process: that it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible, nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content.

Frantz Fanon (1963:36)

Political parties are a consequence of the modernising political systems. In the region, having emerged as “instruments of mobilisation” (Mozaffar & Scarritt, 2005:400) and decolonisation during the 20th century, following the wave of mass suffrage and elections after 1945, they serve as tools of representation and voice. In response to the colonial project, the emergence of liberation political parties marked the onset of the decolonial project.

In Nigeria, for example, the period “saw increased agitation for self-governance, driven by various groups including ex-World War II soldiers and trade union leaders” (Ogbonna, 2025:2). The Nigerian soldiers who had fought alongside British forces had returned enlightened and aware of the global attitudes towards decolonisation. With dissatisfaction over the disproportionate political and socioeconomic conditions (Nair, 1989:202) back home, the post-war era saw a rise in nationalist movements aimed at challenging colonial rule. This was seen through protests, trade unionism, media publications, amongst others. This push led to the rise of radical nationalism and subsequent sovereignty in 1960. As in other sub-Saharan African countries, the socioeconomic

pressures had sparked the rise of radical nationalism. As in Nigeria, political consciousness was more pronounced after World War II. The demands of labourers and returning soldiers were vital in mobilising for nationalism and subsequent sovereignty. Approaches to party formation independence were similar across the region in varying degrees. Their initial purpose was to facilitate anticolonial mobilisation and the gradual shift in political authority from the colonial governments to indigenous nationalist leaders. However, variations in colonial government institutions, the rate of introduction and spread of electioneering, and the introduction of mass suffrage consequently shaped the formation and subsequent performance of these political parties (Collier, 1982).

Post-independence – One-party and dominant-party system

According to Cowen, (1961), in Sub-Saharan Africa, the one-party system was a result of decolonisation. Following the liberation movement's struggles, the associated parties enjoyed uncontested landslide electoral victories and legitimacy amongst citizens. This was because of the dominant role in leading the independence struggle. In the fight for democracy, nationalist movements had given rise to and introduced one-party systems. At the heart of it, the need to transform multiple identities was essential to the national unity project. More importantly, the one-party system was seen as a democratic model that could allow African expression (Hinden, 1962:11; Cowen, 1961). President Julius Nyerere argued that democracy was fundamentally a communal discussion and consensus that did not require the presence of multiple political parties. He contends that the two-party system was a Western ideology that emerged as a result of class struggles, a reality not apparent in post-colonial Africa. Instead, Africans were united by the liberation struggle and the need for national development. He described this nationalist thinking soon after Tanganyika's independence in 1961 as:

a patriotic struggle that leaves no room for differences and unites all elements of the country; the nationalists who led them to freedom must inevitably form the first governments of the new States. Once the first free government is formed, its supreme task lies in building up the economy... This, no less than the struggle against colonialism, calls for the maximum united effort by the whole country if it is to succeed. *There can be no room for difference or division.*

Julius Nyerere, 1997, p. 158

Nyerere's argument emphasised the need for an "African democracy." Colonisation had produced deep social cleavages through the rigidification of ethnicity via the construction of "tribal" identities, economic cleavages through the formation of African elites who gained social mobility because of their proximity to colonial rulers, and spatial cleavages through the imposition of arbitrary boundaries that fostered ethnic competition by forcing rival groups to coexist or dividing unified communities. Some of these cleavages remain influential today and have contributed to the artificial state and political boundaries evident across the continent. For instance, despite shared linguistic roots, colonial rule fragmented African societies by separating them through state borders that have continued to persist.

Additionally, the African elite, who at the time included teachers, writers, and nurses, were at the forefront of liberation struggles and subsequently gained access to political leadership roles. These realities therefore, necessitated a different understanding of democracy. Nyerere's critique first called for the unification of dispersed groups and the erasure of sociopolitical cleavages. He traced democracy to the Greeks, who defined it as governance through decisions made by equals, simply put, the decision of the people. In articulating an African form of democracy, Nyerere cited Guy Brock, who defined it as a process whereby "the elders sit under the big tree and talk until they agree" (cited in Nyerere, 1997, p. 156). Democracy in this instance is treated as a communal project reliant on collective consensus.

Even before colonisation, democracy existed in African societies where people came together as equals and governed through discussion. As nations moved towards independence, it became paramount to cultivate patriotic unity and leave little space for difference. This political shift led many states to adopt one-party systems as an efficient model for social integration and socioeconomic development (Rivkin, 1969), often resulting in landslide electoral victories.

On the other hand, many scholars have since challenged this notion by examining whether one-party systems are beneficial or detrimental in contemporary contexts. This debate is particularly important given the enduring legacies of one-party systems, which over time have morphed into modified forms such as dominant-party systems that continue to shape contemporary sociopolitical life.

Countries such as Cameroon, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and South Africa remain characterised by the dominance of liberation parties within their political arenas. It is argued that the dominant party's ability to control media, manipulate party funding rules, place key supporters in government positions, providing partisans with favourable policy benefits all contribute to its stable dominance (Pempel, 2019).

Pempel (2019) posits that the one-party system is counterproductive to the right to development. In such systems, power is concentrated in the hands of a few, reinforcing "extractive economic institutions." This concentration of power runs contrary to the principles of participatory democracy, good governance, development, and the rule of law (Pempel, 2019:88). Instead, it promotes authoritarianism and marginalisation of some groups. States, by contrast, benefit from institutions that "unleash, empower and protect" every citizen's potential to "innovate, invest, and develop" (Pempel, 2019:88). Achieving this requires political and socioeconomic institutions that are less likely to mirror one-party systems, which often become extractive and maintain power over time.

Political parties within the region have been met with scepticism over their legitimacy and roles. While they emerged in response to socio-economic and sociopolitical crises, their mandate regarding society has shifted. Their role has gone beyond mobilising like-minded individuals to democracy stewardship. Political party presence under different party systems has been treated as a measure of democracy. The more the parties, the better the democracy, *vis-à-vis*. Humans tend to make meaning of their surroundings; this may entail defining or assigning concepts. This is no exception in the political world; however, these definitions at times add arbitrary boundaries and/or blur current realities. This review reveals histories that legitimise the existence of the two most common party systems: one-party system (mostly common just after colonialism) and dominant-party system (common post-independence). While literature advocates for neither and suggests a more inclusive approach, i.e., a multiparty system, is it truly a worthy feature of democracy? Multiparty systems may exist; however, they are rendered useless within the contemporary because of centralised power tendencies emerging under the guise of nationalism and nation-building mandates. Simultaneously, although political parties may have defined roles, it does not necessarily equate to roles being carried out.

Methodology

Increasing efforts have been devoted to discussing the different variables that influence policy. Broadly speaking, policy can be affected by social, economic, and political forces. The linkage between candidates, parties, and the policies implemented has also attracted the interest of both citizens and researchers. This chapter focuses on the political dimension, with particular attention to political party systems and ideologies. Simeon proposed that the study of public policy “needs to be comparative” (Steinmo, 2008: 550). Both party systems and political parties play a role in the policymaking process; however, this suggests the need to examine the historical ontology of their emergence. Their unique histories and proposed functionalities have attracted significant scholarly attention (Yang, 2019; Yang & Shi, 2020). This chapter, therefore, adopts a qualitative comparative methodology, drawing on historical-institutional analysis and the structural-functional approach to identify and examine how major political shifts have shaped the evolution and role of political parties within the sub-Saharan region.

Data for this investigation were sourced from both primary materials (political party documents and state documents) and secondary sources (scholarly literature). The findings will be presented in a case study format, focusing on the postcolonial periods of Nigeria and South Africa. Although these countries share a postcolonial experience marked by the adoption of multiparty systems, they offer different analytical vantage points that allow for examining the effects of liberation movements and military interventions on political party systems and the evolving roles of political parties.

Theoretical Framework

Historical Institutionalism

Sven Steinmo argues that Historical Institutionalism (HI) is “neither a particular theory nor a specific method,” but rather “an approach” to studying and understanding politics (2008:150). While HI is best understood from a comparative and historical perspective, it has its origins in institutional theory. According to Steinmo, (2008:111), “institutional theory is based on a core foundation of phenomenology, i.e., over time individuals create social structures out of shared assumptions about the nature of social reality.”

Theorists such as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, and Locke all recognised the importance of political institutions in shaping political behaviour (Steinmo, 2008). For example, Plato's comparative studies examined different forms of government and their effects on political behaviour, while Aristotle focused on how institutional structures shape political values and incentives.

Although the term was coined in the early 1990s, HI is not an entirely novel approach and has been applied in various studies (Thelen, 1999; Pierson & Skocpol, 2002; Lockwood *et al.*, 2017). Its primary characteristics include a "historical orientation," an emphasis on "which institutions structure and shape political behaviour and outcomes," and a focus on "real-world empirical questions" (Steinmo, 2008:150). The institutions in question may be either formal or informal and are widely understood as rules that govern social structures through legislation or norms, respectively.

This positions HI between two major schools of thought, where humans are seen as both rational, self-interested actors and norm-abiding rule followers (Steinmo, 2008:162). According to Steinmo (2008:159), these rules are important because they determine who participates in decision-making and shape their strategic behaviour. In both sociology and politics, institutions and history are intricately linked. Institutions are not abstract elements but historical remnants that shape future structured behaviour.

While HI is valuable in explaining real-world political behaviour, it fails to adequately address the institutionalisation of oppression, domination, and exploitation (Willmott, 2015). Furthermore, as a Eurocentric approach, it may obscure the realities within non-Western contexts. Its overemphasis on path dependence places past decisions as the primary drivers of future outcomes, thereby downplaying human agency. Although it traces structures over time and explains stability, it struggles to account for abrupt institutional change, particularly in contexts marked by sudden constitutional transformations. Its continued focus on organisational and power structures as stable entities may also neglect the reality that both formal and informal institutions can be remnants of domination and oppression (Willmott, 2015). This blind spot is particularly relevant to address, as the evolution of political parties in sub-Saharan Africa is closely tied to histories of dominance, oppression, cries for democracy, and revolution. I will, therefore, pair it with the structural functionalist theory.

Structural Functionalism

As noted earlier, political parties can be understood as pillars of democracy. Although they constitute a fraction of society (Steinmo, 2008), their location within the social polity places them between the government and the citizenry (Schonfeld, 1983), thereby shaping their structural position and subsequent function. From a functionalist perspective, society is understood as “a structure with interrelated parts” (Omoregie & Anathekhai, 2019:29). This understanding is also applicable to the political system, which consists of “sub-units or sub-systems with interdependent parts,” such as political parties that exist in a “democratic system... to perform some salient roles” (Omoregie & Anathekhai, 2019:30). The structural functionalist theory, therefore, functions to better understand the political party system, its interdependent units, in this case, political parties and their contributions within a democratic system.

A Complementary Approach

HI and structural functionalism are complementary approaches in this chapter, as each examines different yet complementary aspects of the political analysis of political parties in the region. HI provides the historical and explanatory foundation for each case presented, focusing on party systems and the emergence and evolution of political parties over time. Furthermore, it emphasises the role of institutions, historical processes, and subsequent behavioural outcomes. This is particularly relevant to understanding the development of political parties in developing nations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where institutional trajectories are closely linked to colonial legacies, domination, and political transitions. However, as highlighted above, HI has its limitations, particularly the difficulty in accounting for abrupt changes, overemphasis on stability, and limited attention to human agency. To address its limitations and expand the analysis, it is paired with structural functionalism.

Structural functionalism addresses this by shifting attention from history to processes and functions. By focusing on ongoing processes such as participation, representation and interaction, structural functionalism introduces a dynamic perspective that accounts for political changes and the active roles of political actors, including voters. Together, HI and structural functionalism explain historical trajectories and the present-day interactions and contributions of political parties within the political system.

Findings and Discussion: Democratic Transitioning and Multipartyism

Studies have focused on the importance of historical factors, such as social cleavages, in shaping the formation and structure of party systems and political parties. Additionally, literature has traced the typologies of party systems and subsequent political cultures. Party systems are presented as one thing or the other and utilised as a measure of democracy, but are they really? The history of party systems in the region is characterised by a shift from nationalist mobilisation against European colonial rule, to an era of centralised one-party dominance, and eventually to the low-fragmented yet highly volatile multiparty systems that exist today. These periodic transitions are not merely political developments but are deeply rooted in the structure and functioning of political parties themselves.

Between 1990 and 1993, one-party and authoritarian regimes faced much controversy and came under pressure to liberalise. In the quest for redemption and reform, some countries opted for the multiparty system. For some countries, this reality materialised after hard lessons.

Case of Nigeria (1960)

Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups which are subdivided into majority and minority structures with the Hausa-Fulani (North), Igbo (South East) and Yoruba (South West) forming the majority of structures responsible for two thirds of the state. Documented histories posit a peaceful constitutional negotiation between the British colonial government and nationalists led to its independence on 1 October 1960 (Obikaze *et al.*, 2023). The electoral system was classified into the First Republic, Second Republic, Third Republic, and Fourth Republic. Unassigned years relate to the military rule.

i) First Republic 1960–1966

Although the 1960 Constitution consolidated provisions for a Nigerian executive, judicial and legislative compositions, in reality “the British government still had reasonable influence” (Dudley, 1982). Although constitutional changes meant electing the first Nigerian Prime Minister, the Nigerian Governor-General, who represented the Queen of England, was also appointed by the British government. The first of October 1963 marked the day of constitutional reform, which saw the elimination of undesirable British legacies and prompted a democracy

for the Nigerian locals (Dudley, 1982). Furthermore, a presidential parliamentary system was adopted. Although the 1959 elections that led to the 1960 independence had revealed the ethnic cleavages apparent in the state, the 1964 elections were no exception. Political leaders leaned on ethnic symbols to appeal to their voter kin within their regions, probing fragmentation along ethno-region lines. Major parties that dominated included the Action Group (dominating the West), the Northern People's Congress (NPC) (dominating the North), and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) (dominating the East). The NPC won.

The years that followed were marred by corruption and nepotism, which prompted a military coup in 1966. The justification was framed as a need to address the class struggle envisaged by the previous political leaders. Military rule lasted until 1979.

ii) Second Republic 1979–1983

In the 1979 general elections, five parties were registered. Furthermore, changes were made to the 1979 Constitution. The general elections saw the extension of voting rights to women, a reduction in the voting age from 21 to 18, and the holding of parliamentary elections.

In 1983, another military rule interruption swept through the country. Both times, the military had argued that its engagement in politics was a matter of redressing unfair democratic rule. The military coup was led by Major General Muhammadu Buhari, and in 1985, General Ibrahim Babangida was appointed Head of State.

iii) Third Republic 1993–1999

There was an attempt to return to democratic rule under the Babangida administration. The 1989 Constitution was drafted and included features such as a state-appointed two-party system aimed at reducing fragmentation and a ban on social cleavage-related parties. Parties were required to be nationally spread to avoid ethno-regional tensions. The Constitution, however, was not fully implemented following the annulment of the presidential results that had given the Social Democratic Party (SDP) victory. According to the Electoral Hub Research Paper 2/2021, although SDP had won the majority of Senate and House seats, the National Republican Convention (NRC) had won more votes (Electoral Hub, 2021). An interim government came into power, and shortly after, another military coup occurred.

iv) Fourth Republic 1999+

In 1999, governance shifted to civilian rule under a multiparty system. One of the major constitutional reforms was the limitation of the National Congress's powers and roles in the making of laws. According to Section 4 sub-section 2 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), this was undertaken "for the peace, order and good government of the Federation or any part thereof with respect to any matter included in the Exclusive Legislative List set out in Part I of the Second Schedule of this Constitution". Furthermore, although the 1989 Constitution had been dissolved together with the Babangida regime, it informed the 1999 Constitution by requiring parties to have representation in at least 24 states before registration (INEC, 2022:13). This is seen in section 223 sub-section 2b of the 1999 Constitution, which allows the election of executive committee members to be representative of at least "two-thirds of all the states of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja". Although multiple elections have occurred since then, the party system still reveals class struggles as seen by the highly elite-driven rhetoric. Corruption rumours still plague the state. Additionally, despite the multiparty system, there are still trends towards a dominant-party system, as seen during the 1999-2015 period, when the People's Democratic Party (PDP) dominated the political arena. From 2015 onwards, the All-Progressives Congress (APC) has been in power.

Case of South Africa (1994)

In 1990, the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), amongst other organisations, were unbanned. The openness to inclusive negotiations by the then National Party (NP) ruling government and unbanned parties eventually led to the liberation of indigenous people in 1994. Since then, the ANC has seen victory in subsequent elections to date. Between 1994 and 2014, the ANC had managed to secure more than 60% of the votes, with 2004 recording the highest vote share of 69.69% (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2024). In 2019, however, votes began to drop, as witnessed by the 57.5% vote and recently, 40.18% vote share in 2024. Opposition, on the other hand, has fluctuated through the electoral years, with the Democratic Alliance (DA) and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) appearing as worthy opponents.

Regarding the party ideology, South Africa has a fluid ideological spectrum with some parties falling on the left

(characterised by socialist, redistributive state interventions and radical economic transformation), e.g. EFF, centre-left, characterised by mixed economy pragmatic approaches to welfare policy and constitutionalism, e.g. ANC, right (minority oriented, often conservative), e.g. African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) or centre-right (centred on liberalism and often market-oriented), e.g. DA. Because of the fluid nature of ideologies, parties sometimes converge on certain attributes, enabling the formation of coalition governance. Additionally, the fragmented opposition results in fragmented representation, prompting a multiparty system approach even at the local government level. This, too, contributes to the formation of coalitions.

The contemporary problem

There have been notable shifts away from the notion of South Africa as a pariah state, as evidenced by successive free and fair elections. Despite this, corruption has proven endemic in the political space, as illustrated by instances of state capture and the misuse of public funds. The dominant party, the ANC, as well as popular opposition parties such as the EFF and the DA, have been allegedly implicated in state capture and in benefiting from public projects, respectively. These allegations have weakened the party's credibility and eroded public trust in political institutions.

Furthermore, deficiencies in transparency and accountability in political party funding pose significant risks, including policy capture and the entrenchment of patronage networks. To mitigate these risks, the Political Party Funding Act (RSA, 2018) (PPFA) was enacted in 2021, requiring political parties to disclose all donations exceeding R100,000 and capping annual donations from a single donor at R15 million. However, these limits were subsequently removed through an amendment in 2024. While major parties may benefit from unlimited donations and the ability to finance extensive campaigns, thereby enhancing their visibility, smaller parties face diminished visibility attributable to limited donor support. This imbalance increases the risk of corruption at the policy level and threatens long-term socioeconomic outcomes.

Although the state is constitutionally committed to multipartyism, party financing plays a crucial role in shaping and constraining party roles within the political system. As Sule *et al.*, (2022:254) argue, “political party financing should be transparent and in accordance with the regulations provided by the laws of the land.

Refusal to adhere strictly to political party financing regulations can lead to violation of the electoral process, subversion of democracy, and the support of corrupt practices in the public domain.” While some countries impose strict financial caps and thresholds on party donations or state allocations, South Africa’s increasingly permissive funding environment risks undermining the very foundations of democratic governance.

Role of parties in a post-colonial era

In the postcolonial era, the multiparty system has been argued to be the most favourable signifier of democracy. However, though it might invite several party formations, they all have a role to play. In the postcolonial era, this may include representing citizens’ needs and concerns through party ideologies and policymaking. This, however, can be potentially affected by patronage, fragmented parties, weak institutions, and party financing. While Nigeria boasts a multiparty system, it remains weakly institutionalised, with parties lacking a strong political ideology to hold them to account. This disrupts voter perceptions and could result in party switching. Furthermore, voters are more likely to align with parties based on patronage, leader personalities, or ethno-regional ties. This has huge effects on voter turnout and overall electoral outcomes. Carroll and Kubo (2018) argue that political ideologies are important for party representation. As identifying markers for party position, they capture the information that can explain potential policy implications (Dalton *et al.*, 2011; Powell, 2013) as well as establish policy-based accountability and mandate (Adams *et al.*, 2004; Budge, 2012). An absent or weak ideology affects policymaking, accountability, and transparency initiatives.

Furthermore, despite the multiparty system, electoral results over the past two decades show a recurring trend of a dominant party. Although there are multiple states, only two parties have managed to maintain power beyond two presidential terms. The opposition is highly fragmented, posing less of a threat to the dominant party. The existence of multiple opposition parties with weak ideologies divides the opposition vote into multiple factions, dissolving the opposition’s function within the state.

Khan *et al.*, (2021) advocate for the inclusion of political opposition by demonstrating its role in democracy. Both ruling and opposition parties are detrimental to the working democracy.

They promote political pluralism, amplify the voices of marginalised or voiceless communities not captured by the ruling party, call for government accountability, oppose the government by exposing any corrupt behaviour, thereby prompting government transparency, and, lastly, offer voters an alternative option for power (Khan *et al.*, 2021). This, however, is only viable if they are strong institutions with clear political ideologies. Furthermore, the issue of party financing, as seen in the South African case, presents further issues. The political system, although multipartisan, reveals the need for donations to fund campaigns and other party activities necessary for the party's development and visibility. This is necessary for mobilising like-minded voters who identify with the party's ideology and potential future policies.

Conclusion

The cases discussed above illustrate the evolution of party systems and the political parties that emerged from them. While each case presents opportunities for multipartyism, persistent challenges to democracy remain. Military coups and corruption have become endemic in the region, disrupting democratic processes and undermining citizens' freedoms. Despite their impact on political party roles, citizens have demonstrated resilience, as reflected in their continued willingness to participate in elections amid realities of democratic backsliding.

Electoral outcomes over the past two decades further reveal a recurring pattern in which dominant-party systems coexist with multiparty systems. Within this context, the existence of opposition parties remains crucial. Whereas the colonial era prompted the emergence of nationalist parties that eventually led liberation struggles, the postcolonial era has fostered the presence of both ruling and opposition party factions. These dynamics serve to hold governing elites accountable and transparent, thereby contributing to the further consolidation of democracy.

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Chapter Three

Drivers of Electoral Choice: Ethnicity, Patronage, and Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

Electoral behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa has increasingly attracted empirical scrutiny, particularly as multiparty elections have become institutionalised across the region since the 1990s. While early democratisation scholarship often assumed a gradual transition towards programmatic, policy-driven voting, empirical evidence suggests a more complex reality in which identity, material incentives, and policy considerations coexist and interact in shaping voter choice. Large-N survey data and country-level studies consistently demonstrate that electoral participation and voting decisions are not reducible to a single explanatory variable, but rather reflect layered motivations embedded in socio-political contexts (Bratton, 2013; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2011).

Empirical patterns across Afrobarometer datasets and election studies reveal that voter turnout in sub-Saharan Africa varies significantly across countries but is often influenced by both structural and individual-level factors, including education, income, and political mobilisation networks (Kuenzi & Lambright, 2007; Tambe, 2017). However, beyond the question of *who votes* lies the more analytically demanding issue of *why voters choose particular candidates or parties*. Existing empirical studies suggest that three dominant drivers, ethnicity, patronage, and policy, shape electoral preferences, though their relative weight differs across contexts and electoral cycles (Bratton *et al.*, 2012; Oyebamiji & Kariuki, 2025).

Ethnicity has been widely documented as a salient determinant of voting behaviour in many African democracies. Quantitative analyses across multiple countries indicate that co-ethnic alignment

significantly increases the probability of supporting a candidate or ruling party, particularly in highly fragmented societies (Norris & Mattes, 2003; García-Rivero & Clari, 2023). For instance, longitudinal studies show that voters are more likely to express trust and political support for leaders perceived as belonging to their ethnic group, reinforcing patterns of bloc voting and ethnic party alignment. Nonetheless, this relationship is neither uniform nor deterministic. Survey-based evidence from countries such as Ghana demonstrates that while ethnicity matters, its influence can be moderated by other factors, including performance evaluations and economic conditions (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008; Conroy-Krutz, 2009).

Parallel to identity-based voting, patronage and clientelism constitute a critical empirical dimension of electoral politics in the region. Field experiments and observational studies reveal that vote-buying and the distribution of private or localised goods remain pervasive strategies for electoral mobilisation (Kramon, 2017). In many contexts, voters respond rationally to immediate material incentives, particularly in environments characterised by poverty and weak state capacity. Empirical findings indicate that access to patronage networks, often mediated by local brokers or political intermediaries, can significantly shape voting decisions, sometimes overriding ideological or policy-based considerations (van de Walle, 2007). This form of transactional politics reflects not only elite strategies but also voter calculations under conditions of economic uncertainty.

At the same time, there is growing empirical evidence that policy considerations are not absent from African electoral politics. Studies examining voter preferences across multiple countries show that citizens do evaluate government performance, particularly in relation to economic management, public service delivery, and employment (Adams & Agomor, 2015; Lieberman & McClendon, 2013). In competitive electoral environments, incumbents are rewarded or punished based on perceived policy outcomes, suggesting an emerging, albeit uneven, trend towards issue-based voting. For example, performance voting has been observed in contexts where governments have delivered tangible improvements in infrastructure, education, or healthcare, thereby influencing electoral outcomes beyond ethnic or clientelist ties.

Importantly, empirical research increasingly challenges the tendency to treat ethnicity, patronage, and policy as mutually exclusive explanations. Instead, evidence points to their interaction. Voters may simultaneously exhibit ethnic loyalty, respond to

patronage incentives, and consider policy promises, depending on contextual factors such as electoral competitiveness, institutional strength, and socio-economic conditions (Bratton *et al.*, 2012; Long, 2019; Oyebamiji & Kariuki, 2025). For instance, in closely contested elections, political elites often combine ethnic appeals with targeted material inducements and policy messaging, thereby engaging multiple voter motivations at once.

This chapter builds on these empirical insights by systematically examining how ethnicity, patronage, and policy jointly shape electoral behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa. The central research problem is to understand the relative and interactive effects of these drivers in influencing voter choice and participation. By adopting a qualitative, case-oriented approach grounded in existing empirical studies and electoral data, the chapter moves beyond purely descriptive accounts to provide an analytically integrated explanation of electoral motives.

The significance of this enquiry lies in its implications for democratic consolidation in the region. If ethnic or clientelist considerations primarily drive electoral outcomes, the prospects for programmatic politics and policy accountability may remain limited. Conversely, evidence of increasing policy-based voting suggests the potential for more substantive democratic engagement. By clarifying these dynamics, the chapter contributes to ongoing debates on the nature of political competition, voter rationality, and the trajectory of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa.

Conceptual Clarifications and Literature Review

Understanding voter behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa requires going beyond definitions to critically examine what the empirical literature actually shows, where it agrees, and where it falls short. This section interrogates existing studies on voter behaviour, focusing on ethnicity, patronage, and policy, while highlighting tensions, overlaps, and gaps in the scholarship.

Concept of Voter Behaviour

Voter behaviour generally refers to how and why individuals participate in elections, including whether they vote, who they vote for, and what influences their choices. In the African context, empirical studies show that voter behaviour is shaped by a mix of individual characteristics (such as education and income), political context, and social pressures (Kuenzi & Lambright, 2011; Tambe, 2017).

However, the literature is divided on how to interpret these influences. Some scholars argue that African voters behave similarly to voters elsewhere, making rational decisions based on available information and expected benefits (Bratton, 2013). Others suggest that voting decisions are more socially embedded, influenced by group identity and local networks rather than individual calculations alone (Long, 2019).

Empirical evidence complicates both views. For example, survey data show that voters often provide multiple reasons for their choices, such as ethnic loyalty, performance evaluation, and personal benefits, suggesting that voter behaviour cannot be explained by a single theory. This raises an important issue: much of the literature tends to isolate variables, while real-world voting behaviour reflects a combination of motives.

Electoral Motives in Comparative Perspective

Comparative studies of electoral behaviour often contrast African voting patterns with those in Western democracies, where policy and ideology are assumed to dominate. In contrast, African elections are frequently described as driven by identity or clientelism. This distinction, however, is increasingly questioned. Arzheimer *et al.*, (2016) argue that even in established democracies, voters are influenced by identity and short-term incentives. Similarly, Bratton *et al.*, (2012) find that African voters consider both economic conditions and ethnic ties, rather than relying solely on one factor.

The problem with much of the comparative literature is that it tends to treat African voting behaviour as exceptional or deficient. This risks oversimplifying complex realities. Empirical findings, instead, suggest that African voters, like others, operate under constraints, such as limited access to information, economic insecurity, and weak institutions, which shape how they prioritise different motives.

Ethnicity and Voting Patterns

Ethnicity is one of the most studied factors in African electoral politics. A large body of empirical work shows that voters often support candidates from their own ethnic group (Norris & Mattes, 2003; García-Rivero & Clari, 2023). This pattern is especially strong in countries with high ethnic fragmentation and where political parties are organised along ethnic lines. However, the literature is far from unanimous. Some studies challenge the idea that African voters are

primarily “ethnic voters.” For instance, Lindberg and Morrison (2008), using survey data from Ghana, found that while ethnicity influences voting, many voters also consider government performance. Similarly, Conroy-Krutz (2009) shows that the salience of ethnicity varies across contexts and is not always the dominant factor.

Another limitation in the literature is that ethnicity is often treated as fixed and uniform. In reality, ethnic identity can be fluid and strategically mobilised by political elites (Udogu, 2018). This means that ethnicity does not automatically determine voting behaviour; rather, it becomes politically relevant under certain conditions, such as elite mobilisation or perceived marginalisation. Overall, while ethnicity remains important, the empirical evidence suggests that its influence is conditional and interacts with other factors.

Patronage and Clientelism

Patronage politics, where politicians distribute material benefits in exchange for political support, is widely documented across sub-Saharan Africa. Empirical studies show that vote-buying and the provision of goods such as cash, food, or jobs are common during elections (Kramon, 2017). From one perspective, this is seen as evidence of weak democratic development, where voters prioritise short-term gains over long-term policy outcomes. However, this interpretation has been criticised for overlooking voters’ rationality. In contexts of poverty and limited state provision, accepting immediate benefits may be a logical response to uncertainty.

Van de Walle (2007) argues that clientelism persists not simply because of elite manipulation, but because it is embedded in broader political and economic structures. Similarly, empirical research shows that voters who expect little from government institutions may rely more on personal or localised exchanges. Yet, the literature also reveals important variations. Patronage is not equally effective everywhere. In more competitive political environments, its impact may be reduced, as voters have choices or demand broader benefits. This suggests that clientelism should not be seen as a uniform or static feature of African politics, but rather as evolving with institutional development.

Policy-Based Voting

Policy-based voting refers to the extent to which voters make decisions based on party programmes, government performance,

or issue-based campaigns. While earlier studies downplayed its importance in Africa, more recent empirical work provides a more nuanced picture. For example, Adams and Agomor (2015) find that Ghanaian voters consider policy issues, particularly economic performance and service delivery. Similarly, Lieberman and McClendon (2013) show that policy preferences can shape political attitudes, although often in combination with identity factors.

However, policy-based voting remains uneven across the region. In many cases, weak party institutionalisation and limited policy differentiation reduce the role of ideology. Moreover, voters may struggle to evaluate policy promises because of a lack of information or mistrust of political actors. This creates a key tension in the literature. While there is evidence of policy responsiveness, it is often secondary to other factors or activated only under certain conditions, such as economic crises or strong opposition campaigns.

Gaps and Emerging Debates

A major gap in the literature is the tendency to treat ethnicity, patronage, and policy as competing explanations rather than interconnected processes. Empirical studies increasingly show that these factors overlap. For instance, politicians may target co-ethnic groups with patronage while also framing their campaigns around policy promises. Another limitation is the heavy reliance on cross-sectional survey data, which may not fully capture how voter behaviour changes over time. Longitudinal studies, such as García-Rivero and Clari (2023), are still relatively few but show that voting patterns can evolve with changing political and economic conditions.

There is also a need to pay more attention to context. Factors such as electoral competitiveness, urbanisation, and access to information can significantly shape how voters prioritise different motives. For example, urban voters may be more responsive to policy issues, while rural voters may rely more on patronage networks. Finally, much of the literature focuses on what drives voting, but less attention is given to how voters themselves interpret their choices. Understanding voter perceptions and lived experiences remains an important area for future research.

The literature on voter behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa provides valuable insights but also reveals important disagreements and limitations. Ethnicity, patronage, and policy all matter, but

none of them alone can fully explain electoral outcomes. Empirical evidence suggests that voter behaviour is shaped by the interaction of these factors, influenced by context and changing over time. This chapter builds on these insights by examining how these drivers work together, rather than in isolation, to shape electoral choices in sub-Saharan Africa.

Theoretical Framework

This chapter is anchored on two complementary theoretical perspectives: Rational Choice Theory and Social Identity Theory. These frameworks are widely used in explaining voting behaviour, particularly in developing democracies where both material incentives and identity affiliations shape electoral outcomes (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997; Horowitz 1989). While Rational Choice Theory emphasises individual cost-benefit calculations, Social Identity Theory highlights the role of group belonging, especially ethnicity, in influencing political decisions.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory is most closely associated with Downs (1957), whose work, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, provides a foundation for understanding voting as a product of rational decision-making. The theory assumes that individuals act as utility maximisers, making political choices based on expected benefits and costs. In electoral contexts, voters are expected to support candidates or parties that offer the greatest personal or collective advantage.

Empirical applications of this theory in African politics show that voters often respond to material incentives, including patronage and economic performance (Bratton *et al.*, 2005). For instance, Bratton and van de Walle (1997) argue that voting behaviour in Africa can reflect rational evaluations of regime performance, particularly in relation to economic management and public service delivery. Similarly, Lindberg (2010) finds that repeated elections in Africa encourage voters to make more informed and strategic choices over time.

Within this study, Rational Choice Theory is particularly relevant in explaining the role of patronage networks and policy promises. Voters may support candidates who provide immediate benefits such as financial inducements, employment opportunities, or local

development projects. This aligns with the argument that in contexts of economic scarcity, voters prioritise short-term material gains over long-term policy considerations (Vicente & Wantchekon, 2009).

However, the theory has limitations. It assumes that voters have access to sufficient information and are capable of making fully rational calculations, which may not always be the case in many sub-Saharan African contexts (Posner, 2005). Additionally, it underestimates the influence of social and cultural factors such as ethnicity and historical loyalties. To address these limitations, this study complements Rational Choice Theory with Social Identity Theory, thereby incorporating non-material drivers of electoral behaviour.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel *et al.*, (2001), explains how individuals derive a sense of identity from their membership in social groups. The theory posits that people categorise themselves and others into groups (e.g., ethnic, religious, or regional groups), and this categorisation influences attitudes and behaviour, including political preferences.

The central assumption of the theory is that individuals exhibit in-group favouritism, meaning that they are more likely to support candidates who share their identity. In the context of African politics, this often manifests as ethnic voting, where voters align with candidates from their own ethnic group (Horowitz, 1989). Empirical studies support this claim. For example, Posner (2005) demonstrates how ethnic identities are politically activated in Zambia, while Chandra (2004) shows similar patterns in identity-based voting in multi-ethnic societies.

In sub-Saharan Africa, Social Identity Theory is particularly relevant in explaining the persistence of ethnicity as a key determinant of electoral outcomes. Ethnic affiliations often shape party systems, campaign strategies, and voter alignment (Eifert *et al.*, 2010). Politicians frequently mobilise ethnic identities to secure support, especially in competitive elections where institutional trust is weak. This makes ethnicity a powerful organising principle in electoral politics.

Despite its strengths, the theory has limitations. It tends to overemphasise identity at the expense of other factors such as economic interests and policy considerations. Not all voters behave strictly along ethnic lines; some demonstrate cross-ethnic voting

based on performance or policy preferences (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008). To address this limitation, this study integrates Social Identity Theory with Rational Choice Theory, allowing for a more balanced understanding of voter behaviour.

Integrating the Theories

The integration of Rational Choice Theory and Social Identity Theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing voter behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa. While Rational Choice Theory explains how voters respond to patronage and policy incentives, Social Identity Theory accounts for the enduring influence of ethnicity. Empirical evidence suggests that these factors often interact rather than operate independently. For example, Eifert *et al.*, (2010) show that ethnic identity becomes more politically salient during elections, while Vicente and Wantchekon (2009) demonstrate how clientelism can shape voter preferences even across ethnic lines. This indicates that voters simultaneously consider both identity and material benefits when making electoral decisions.

By combining these perspectives, the study acknowledges that voter behaviour is shaped by a dynamic interplay of identity, incentives, and expectations. This integrated framework is, therefore, well-suited to explaining the complexities of electoral choice in sub-Saharan Africa, where both ethnic loyalties and rational calculations influence political participation and outcomes.

The combined use of Rational Choice and Social Identity theories reflects the realities of electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa. Voters operate in environments shaped by economic uncertainty, social diversity, and evolving democratic institutions. As a result, their behaviour cannot be reduced to a single logic. Importantly, this framework also challenges common stereotypes that African voters are either purely ethnic or easily manipulated. Instead, the evidence shows that voters are strategic and adaptive, making decisions based on the options available to them. They may rely on identity when trust in institutions is low, respond to patronage when economic needs are urgent, and consider policy when credible alternatives exist.

Methodology

This chapter adopts a qualitative, empirically grounded approach to examine how ethnicity, patronage, and policy shape voter behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa. Rather than generating primary data, the

study draws on existing empirical research to provide a comparative, context-sensitive analysis of electoral behaviour across the region. This approach is particularly suitable given the complexity of voting motivations, which vary across countries and are deeply embedded in specific political and socio-economic contexts.

The research design is comparative in nature, focusing on identifying patterns and variations in voter behaviour across different African democracies. By engaging with multiple country cases, the chapter avoids the limitations of single-case analysis and, instead, develops broader insights into how electoral motives operate under varying institutional and social conditions. The emphasis is not merely on describing electoral outcomes, but on interpreting the underlying drivers of voter choice using evidence from established studies. In this sense, the methodology is both interpretive and empirically anchored.

The study primarily relies on secondary data from a wide range of credible sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and cross-national survey studies, particularly those based on Afrobarometer data, which provide systematic evidence on voter attitudes and behaviour (Bratton *et al.*, 2012; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2011). In addition, country-specific studies offer detailed insights into electoral dynamics in contexts such as Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa (Adams & Agomor, 2015; Habib & Naidu, 2006). Election reports and policy analyses further complement these sources by documenting patterns of turnout, campaign strategies, and voter mobilisation. The combination of these materials allows the chapter to integrate both quantitative findings and qualitative interpretations.

Case selection in this study is purposive rather than random. Countries are chosen based on their analytical relevance in illustrating different dimensions of electoral behaviour. For instance, Ghana provides a relatively stable democratic system in which policy considerations increasingly influence voting decisions. In contrast, Nigeria and Kenya highlight the continued importance of ethnic mobilisation and competitive electoral politics, while South Africa illustrates the intersection of race, class, and long-standing party loyalty. These cases are not intended to be statistically representative of the entire region but are selected to capture variation in how ethnicity, patronage, and policy interact in different contexts.

The method of analysis is based on thematic interpretation of the literature. This involves identifying recurring themes related to

electoral motives, comparing findings across different studies, and analysing how these factors shape voter decisions. The analysis pays particular attention to the interaction between variables, rather than treating ethnicity, patronage, and policy as separate or competing explanations. By comparing evidence across contexts, the chapter is able to highlight both common patterns and important differences in voter behaviour.

The analytical strategy is guided by the theoretical framework outlined earlier. Rational Choice Theory is used to interpret behaviour driven by material incentives and policy evaluation, while Social Identity Theory helps to explain the role of ethnicity and group affiliation. However, the analysis does not apply these theories in a rigid manner. Instead, it uses them as complementary tools to understand how different motivations combine in practice. This integrative approach reflects empirical findings that show that voters often respond simultaneously to identity, incentives, and policy considerations (Bratton *et al.*, 2012; Long, 2019).

Despite its strengths, this methodology has some limitations. The reliance on secondary data means that the analysis depends on the quality and scope of existing studies, which may vary across countries. Some regions are better researched than others, leading to uneven empirical coverage. In addition, the qualitative and comparative nature of the study limits the extent to which findings can be generalised across all sub-Saharan African countries. Context-specific dynamics, particularly at the local level, may not be fully captured in broader analyses.

Nevertheless, the use of diverse and well-established empirical sources enhances the credibility of the findings. By systematically engaging with existing research and applying a comparative analytical lens, the methodology provides a solid foundation for understanding the complex drivers of voter behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa.

Ethnicity as a Driver of Electoral Choice

Ethnicity remains one of the most empirically visible drivers of electoral behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa, but its role is often more complex than commonly assumed. While a large body of literature shows that voters frequently support co-ethnic candidates, closer examination reveals that ethnicity interacts with political competition, elite strategies, and socio-economic

conditions rather than serving as a fixed or automatic determinant of voter choice.

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that ethnic identity can shape political preferences, particularly in contexts where political parties are aligned along ethnic lines. Cross-national survey evidence indicates that voters are more likely to support candidates from their own ethnic group, largely because they associate such candidates with trust, shared interests, and better access to state resources (Norris & Mattes, 2003; García-Rivero & Clari, 2023). This pattern is especially pronounced in highly fragmented societies, where ethnicity provides a clear and accessible basis for political mobilisation.

However, the strength of ethnic voting varies across countries and electoral contexts. For example, Bratton *et al.*, (2012) show that while ethnicity is a significant predictor of voting intentions, it does not fully explain electoral outcomes. In many cases, voters combine ethnic considerations with evaluations of economic performance and candidate credibility. Similarly, Lindberg and Morrison (2008), using survey data from Ghana, find that a substantial proportion of voters do not vote strictly along ethnic lines, suggesting that ethnicity competes with other influences rather than dominating them completely.

The case of Ghana is particularly instructive. Although ethnic affiliations exist, political competition has increasingly centred on performance and policy delivery. Adams and Agomor (2015) show that Ghanaian voters often reward incumbents based on economic outcomes, even when ethnic ties might suggest choices. This indicates that where institutions are relatively strong and elections are competitive, the influence of ethnicity can be moderated.

In contrast, countries such as Nigeria and Kenya illustrate how ethnicity can become a central organising principle of electoral politics. In these contexts, political elites actively mobilise ethnic identities to build electoral coalitions. Ethnic voting is reinforced by historical patterns of resource distribution and perceptions of marginalisation, which make group-based support appear rational to voters (Udogu, 2018). Here, voting for a co-ethnic candidate is not merely symbolic but is often linked to expectations of material and political inclusion.

Importantly, ethnicity does not operate independently of political strategy. Political elites play a key role in activating and

shaping ethnic identities during elections. Campaigns often frame political competition in ethnic terms, presenting candidates as representatives of group interests. This process can intensify ethnic voting, even in contexts where identities might otherwise be less politically salient. As a result, ethnicity should be understood not only as a social characteristic but also as a political resource that can be mobilised or downplayed in line with strategic considerations.

At the same time, there is growing empirical evidence that challenges the assumption that African voters are primarily or exclusively ethnic voters. Conroy-Krutz (2009) shows that many voters do not prioritise ethnicity when other factors, such as performance or policy, are more relevant. Similarly, Lieberman and McClendon (2013) find that policy preferences can shape political attitudes, sometimes cutting across ethnic lines. These findings suggest that ethnicity is only one of several competing influences on voter behaviour.

Another important issue in the literature is the tendency to treat ethnic identity as fixed and homogeneous. In practice, ethnic identities can be fluid and context-dependent. Individuals may emphasise different aspects of their identity depending on the political situation, and alliances between ethnic groups can shift over time. This flexibility means that ethnic voting patterns are not static but can change in response to new political opportunities or constraints.

Furthermore, the relationship between ethnicity and electoral behaviour is closely linked to issues of trust and state performance. In contexts where state institutions are weak or perceived as biased, voters may rely more heavily on ethnic identity as a mechanism for ensuring representation and access to resources. Conversely, where institutions are stronger and more inclusive, the need for ethnic-based voting may decline.

Overall, the empirical literature suggests that ethnicity is a significant but conditional driver of electoral choice in sub-Saharan Africa. It shapes voting behaviour most strongly in contexts characterised by weak institutions, high levels of ethnic fragmentation, and elite mobilisation. However, its influence is moderated by factors such as political competition, economic performance, and the availability of credible policy alternatives. Ethnicity remains central to understanding electoral behaviour in the region, but it should not be viewed in isolation.

Rather than being a fixed determinant, it interacts with patronage networks and policy considerations to shape voter decisions. Recognising this complexity is essential for moving beyond simplistic explanations and for understanding the evolving nature of democratic politics in sub-Saharan Africa.

Patronage Networks and Electoral Behaviour

Patronage networks remain a central feature of electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa, shaping how voters engage with political actors and make electoral choices. Empirical research shows that the exchange of material benefits for political support, often described as clientelism or vote-buying, is not only widespread but also embedded in the broader political and economic structures of many African states. However, rather than viewing patronage as simply a distortion of democratic practice, recent literature increasingly interprets it as a rational and context-driven response by both political elites and voters.

At its core, patronage refers to the distribution of targeted benefits, such as cash, food, employment opportunities, or local development projects, by politicians in exchange for electoral support. Kramon (2017), drawing on extensive fieldwork and experimental evidence, demonstrates that vote-buying is a common and strategically deployed tool in many African elections. Politicians use these incentives to mobilise voters, particularly in competitive electoral environments where small margins can determine outcomes. Importantly, these exchanges are often mediated through local brokers, such as community leaders or party agents, who help to identify and mobilise voters at the grassroots level.

From the voter's perspective, participation in patronage networks can be understood through a rational lens. In contexts characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment, and limited access to public services, immediate material benefits may carry more weight than uncertain future policy promises. Empirical studies show that voters are more likely to respond to tangible, short-term incentives when they lack confidence in the state's ability to deliver long-term development (Van de Walle, 2007). In this sense, accepting patronage is not necessarily a sign of political ignorance, but rather a pragmatic strategy in an environment of economic insecurity.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of patronage is not uniform across all contexts. While it can significantly influence voter behaviour, its impact depends on several factors, including the level of electoral competition, the credibility of political actors, and the strength of institutions. In highly competitive elections, patronage may become more pronounced as candidates seek to secure marginal votes. However, where voters have access to alternative sources of information or where opposition parties are strong, the influence of patronage may be reduced. This suggests that clientelism is not a static or universal feature, but one that varies across political settings.

Empirical evidence also highlights the conditional nature of voter responses to patronage. Bratton *et al.*, (2012) find that while some voters are influenced by material inducements, others prioritise factors such as performance or party affiliation. This indicates that patronage does not automatically determine voting behaviour, but interacts with other motivations. For instance, a voter may accept gifts from multiple candidates but still vote based on ethnic affiliation or policy preferences. This challenges the assumption that vote-buying guarantees electoral support, pointing to a more complex relationship between incentives and behaviour.

The role of local intermediaries is particularly important in understanding how patronage networks function. These actors serve as a link between political elites and voters, facilitating the distribution of resources and ensuring compliance. In many cases, they rely on existing social structures, such as kinship ties or community associations, to mobilise support. This means that patronage is often embedded within broader social networks, making it more effective and harder to disentangle from everyday social relations. At the same time, this reliance on intermediaries can create opportunities for leakage and inefficiency, as resources may not always reach intended recipients.

Another key dimension of patronage politics is its impact on democratic accountability. Critics argue that clientelism undermines programmatic politics by shifting attention away from policy and towards personal or localised benefits. When voters base their decisions on immediate rewards, politicians may have fewer incentives to invest in long-term development or public goods provision. This can weaken the link between elections and governance outcomes, limiting the potential for democratic consolidation.

However, this perspective has been challenged by scholars who argue that patronage and accountability are not always mutually exclusive. In some cases, voters use patronage as a way of extracting resources from political elites, particularly in contexts where formal institutions are weak. Rather than being passive recipients, voters may actively negotiate with politicians, demanding benefits in exchange for their support. This suggests that patronage can function as an alternative, informal mechanism of accountability, even if it does not align with conventional democratic ideals.

There is also evidence that the nature of patronage is evolving in response to changing political and economic conditions. As electoral competition increases and voters become more informed, politicians may combine clientelist strategies with broader policy appeals. For example, instead of distributing individual benefits, candidates may promise community-level projects or targeted development programmes. This shift reflects an attempt to balance short-term incentives with longer-term policy considerations, indicating a gradual transition towards more programmatic forms of politics.

Despite these changes, significant challenges remain. Patronage networks often reinforce existing inequalities by privileging those with access to political connections while excluding marginalised groups. They can also contribute to electoral malpractice, including coercion and vote manipulation, particularly in contexts where electoral institutions are weak (Bekoe, 2012). Furthermore, the reliance on patronage can entrench elite dominance, limiting political competition and reducing opportunities for new actors to emerge.

Importantly, the relationship between patronage and other drivers of voter behaviour, such as ethnicity and policy, is highly interconnected. In many cases, patronage is distributed along ethnic lines, reinforcing group-based political loyalties. Similarly, policy promises may be framed in ways that complement clientelist strategies, such as targeting specific communities with development projects. This overlap makes it difficult to isolate the effects of patronage and emphasises the need for an integrated analytical approach.

Policy Promises and Issue-Based Voting

Policy promises and issue-based voting have often been treated as secondary in analyses of electoral behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa.

Earlier scholarship tended to emphasise ethnicity and patronage, portraying African elections as lacking strong programmatic foundations. However, empirical evidence over the past two decades presents a more nuanced picture, showing that policy considerations do influence voter behaviour, although their impact varies across contexts and is often intertwined with other motivations.

At its core, issue-based voting refers to situations where voters make electoral decisions based on policy proposals, government performance, or expectations of future public goods provision. Empirical studies suggest that many African voters are attentive to economic conditions, service delivery, and governance outcomes. For instance, Bratton *et al.*, (2012) find that voters across several African countries evaluate incumbents based on economic performance, indicating the presence of retrospective voting. Similarly, Adams and Agomor (2015) show that in Ghana, voters consider issues such as employment, inflation, and infrastructure when deciding how to vote. These findings challenge the assumption that policy plays little or no role in African elections.

A key factor shaping the relevance of policy-based voting is the level of electoral competitiveness. In more competitive political systems, where opposition parties present credible alternatives, voters are more likely to evaluate policy differences and hold incumbents accountable. Ghana provides a useful example, as its relatively stable two-party system has encouraged programmatic competition, with parties articulating distinct policy platforms to attract voters. In such contexts, policy promises can become a decisive factor, particularly amongst urban and more educated voters.

However, the influence of policy is uneven across the region. In many countries, weak party institutionalisation and limited ideological differentiation reduce the clarity and credibility of policy platforms. When political parties do not present clear or consistent policy alternatives, voters may find it difficult to base their decisions on issues alone. This is compounded by limited access to information, which constrains voters' ability to evaluate competing policy claims. As a result, even when policy matters, it may not be the primary driver of electoral choice.

Empirical research also highlights the importance of socio-economic conditions in shaping issue-based voting. In contexts of economic hardship, voters are particularly sensitive to policies that address immediate needs such as employment, food security,

and access to basic services. Lieberman and McClendon (2013) show that policy preferences can influence political attitudes, especially when policies are directly linked to material well-being. This suggests that policy-based voting is more likely to emerge when voters perceive a clear connection between government actions and their everyday lives.

At the same time, the credibility of policy promises remains a significant challenge. In many sub-Saharan African countries, there is widespread scepticism about politicians' ability or willingness to deliver on campaign pledges. This lack of trust can weaken the impact of policy-based appeals, as voters may discount promises that they perceive as unrealistic or insincere. Consequently, voters may prioritise more immediate or reliable sources of benefit, such as patronage, or rely on familiar identity cues such as ethnicity.

Despite these challenges, there is growing evidence that policy considerations are becoming more prominent over time. Longitudinal studies suggest that as democratic institutions mature and electoral competition intensifies, voters increasingly demand performance and accountability (García-Rivero & Clari, 2023). This trend is particularly evident in urban areas, where higher levels of education and access to media enhance political awareness. In such contexts, voters are more likely to engage with policy debates and to reward or punish governments based on their performance.

Another important dimension of issue-based voting is the role of campaign strategies. Political parties and candidates often combine policy messages with other forms of mobilisation, including ethnic appeals and patronage distribution. For example, candidates may frame policy promises in ways that identify with specific communities, linking development projects to local needs or group identities. This blending of strategies reflects the reality that policy does not operate in isolation but is part of a broader set of electoral tools.

Empirical evidence also suggests that voters do not necessarily view policy, patronage, and ethnicity as mutually exclusive. A voter may support a candidate who offers credible policy proposals while also belonging to the same ethnic group or providing targeted benefits. This overlap reinforces the argument that voter behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa is multi-dimensional and context-dependent. Long (2019) notes that voting decisions often reflect a combination of retrospective evaluations, group loyalties, and expectations of future benefits.

Importantly, issue-based voting has significant implications for democratic consolidation. When voters prioritise policy and performance, elections are more likely to promote accountability and effective governance. Governments that fail to deliver on key issues risk losing support, creating incentives for better policymaking. However, where policy considerations remain weak, elections may do little to improve governance outcomes, as political competition centres on identity or material exchange rather than substantive issues.

Nevertheless, it is important not to overstate the extent of policy-based voting in the region. While evidence of its presence is clear, it often operates alongside, rather than replacing, other forms of electoral motivation. In many cases, policy considerations become decisive only when other factors are less dominant or when voters perceive clear differences between candidates. This conditional nature emphasises the need to analyse policy within the broader context of electoral behaviour.

Interplay of Ethnicity, Patronage, and Policy

Understanding electoral behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa requires moving beyond single-factor explanations towards an integrated perspective that captures how ethnicity, patronage, and policy interact in practice. Empirical evidence consistently shows that these drivers do not operate independently; rather, they reinforce, compete with, and sometimes substitute for one another depending on context. Voters are, therefore, not exclusively “ethnic,” “clientelist,” or “policy-oriented.” Instead, they navigate multiple considerations simultaneously, making decisions that reflect both constraints and opportunities within their political environments.

One of the clearest insights from the literature is that ethnicity often serves as the foundation for other electoral strategies. Political elites frequently mobilise ethnic identities as a means of constructing electoral coalitions, but this mobilisation is rarely limited to symbolic appeals alone. Instead, it is often combined with targeted distribution of resources and policy promises. For instance, candidates may direct patronage towards co-ethnic communities while framing policy proposals as benefiting specific groups. This creates a layered form of mobilisation in which identity, material incentives, and policy messaging are mutually reinforcing (Udogu, 2018; Bratton *et al.*, 2012).

Empirical studies suggest that patronage is often distributed along ethnic lines, strengthening group-based political loyalty. In such cases, ethnicity acts as a mechanism for identifying and targeting beneficiaries, while patronage provides the tangible incentive that secures support. This interaction helps to explain why ethnic voting can persist even in contexts where voters are aware of policy issues. Rather than choosing between ethnicity and material benefits, voters may experience them as part of the same political exchange. As van de Walle (2007) argues, clientelist networks are embedded in broader social structures, including ethnic and community ties, making it difficult to separate these factors analytically.

At the same time, policy considerations can intersect with both ethnicity and patronage in important ways. In competitive electoral environments, political actors often incorporate policy promises into their strategies to broaden their appeal beyond core ethnic constituencies. For example, development projects may be framed as benefiting particular regions or communities, thereby linking policy to identity. Similarly, the provision of local public goods, such as roads, schools, or clinics, can function as both a policy outcome and a form of patronage, blurring the distinction between programmatic and clientelist politics.

This overlap is particularly evident in empirical findings showing voters responding to multiple incentives simultaneously. Bratton *et al.*, (2012) demonstrate that voters frequently consider economic performance, ethnic affiliation, and material inducements when forming voting intentions. Likewise, Long (2019) notes that electoral decisions often reflect a combination of retrospective evaluations (based on past performance) and prospective expectations (based on future promises), filtered through social identities. These patterns suggest that voter behaviour is best understood as a process of weighing different factors rather than selecting a single dominant motive.

The relative importance of ethnicity, patronage, and policy is also shaped by contextual factors. Electoral competitiveness plays a key role in determining how these drivers interact. In highly competitive elections, candidates are more likely to employ a mix of strategies, combining ethnic appeals with patronage and policy messaging to maximise support. This can lead to more complex voter behaviour, as individuals are exposed to multiple forms of mobilisation. In contrast, in less competitive or dominant-party

systems, reliance on ethnicity or patronage may be more pronounced, as there is less incentive to develop detailed policy platforms.

Socio-economic conditions further influence this interplay. In contexts of widespread poverty, the appeal of patronage may be stronger, as voters prioritise immediate material benefits. However, even in such settings, ethnicity can shape the distribution and reception of these benefits, while policy promises may still play a role when they address urgent needs. Conversely, in more urbanised or economically stable environments, voters may place greater emphasis on policy and performance, though identity and patronage do not disappear entirely. This highlights the adaptive nature of voter behaviour across different contexts.

Another important dimension is the role of political trust and institutional performance. Where state institutions are perceived as weak or biased, voters may rely more heavily on ethnicity and patronage as alternative mechanisms for securing representation and resources. In such cases, policy promises may carry less weight because of scepticism about their implementation. On the other hand, where institutions are stronger and more credible, voters may be more willing to base their decisions on policy considerations, reducing the relative influence of identity and clientelism.

Importantly, the interaction between these factors also helps to explain both stability and volatility in electoral outcomes. Ethnic and patronage-based voting can produce stable patterns of support, as voters remain loyal to particular groups or networks over time. However, shifts in economic conditions, changes in political alliances, or the emergence of credible policy alternatives can disrupt these patterns, leading to more volatile electoral outcomes. For example, voters may switch allegiance if they perceive that another candidate offers better economic prospects, even if that candidate does not share their ethnic identity.

The literature also points to the strategic role of political elites in shaping this interplay. Politicians do not rely on a single strategy but adapt their approaches based on the electoral environment. They may emphasise ethnicity in one context, patronage in another, and policy in yet another, or combine all three simultaneously. This strategic flexibility emphasises the need to analyse voter behaviour as part of a broader political process involving both voters and elites.

Implications for Democratic Consolidation

The interaction of ethnicity, patronage, and policy in shaping voter behaviour has important implications for democratic consolidation in sub-Saharan Africa. While the regular conduct of elections across the region reflects significant progress since the 1990s, the quality and depth of democracy depend not only on electoral procedures but also on the nature of political competition and voter decision-making.

One key implication is that the continued salience of ethnicity can both stabilise and constrain democratic development. On one hand, ethnic-based voting can provide predictable patterns of political support, contributing to electoral participation and mobilisation. On the other hand, when political competition is organised primarily along ethnic lines, it can deepen social divisions and undermine national cohesion. Empirical studies show that strong ethnic alignment may limit cross-cutting political alliances and reduce the incentives for political actors to appeal to broader national interests (Norris & Mattes, 2003; Udogu, 2018). This can weaken the development of inclusive and programmatic party systems.

Patronage politics presents another major challenge to democratic consolidation. While it can facilitate political participation by linking voters to political actors, it often undermines accountability. When voters prioritise immediate material benefits over long-term policy outcomes, politicians may have fewer incentives to deliver public goods or pursue sustainable development policies. As Kramon (2017) argues, clientelism can distort electoral competition by shifting focus from performance to resource distribution. This weakens the capacity of elections to serve as mechanisms of accountability and governance improvement.

However, the implications of patronage are not entirely negative. In contexts where formal institutions are weak, patronage networks can function as informal channels through which citizens access resources and influence political actors (Van de Walle, 2007). This suggests that clientelism may coexist with, rather than completely undermine, democratic processes. Nevertheless, its long-term effects remain problematic, particularly when it entrenches inequality and limits opportunities for broader political participation.

The growing role of policy-based voting offers more positive prospects for democratic consolidation. Evidence that voters evaluate government performance and respond to policy outcomes suggests

the emergence of more programmatic politics in some countries (Adams & Agomor, 2015; Bratton *et al.*, 2012). When voters reward or punish incumbents based on performance, elections are more likely to promote accountability and effective governance. This creates incentives for political actors to focus on delivering public goods and addressing socio-economic challenges.

Yet, the influence of policy remains uneven and often conditional. Weak party institutionalisation, limited policy differentiation, and low levels of trust in political actors can reduce the effectiveness of issue-based voting. In such contexts, the potential for democratic consolidation is constrained, as elections may not translate into meaningful policy change or improved governance outcomes.

Importantly, the interplay of ethnicity, patronage, and policy suggests that democratic consolidation in sub-Saharan Africa is not a linear process. Instead, it involves ongoing negotiation between different forms of political behaviour. In some contexts, identity and clientelism may dominate, while in others, policy considerations may gain greater prominence. This variation reflects differences in institutional development, socio-economic conditions, and levels of political competition.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the drivers of electoral choice in sub-Saharan Africa by focusing on the roles of ethnicity, patronage, and policy in shaping voter behaviour. Moving beyond simplistic explanations, the analysis has shown that electoral decisions in the region are best understood as the outcome of multiple, interacting motivations rather than a single dominant factor. Empirical evidence drawn from across the literature demonstrates that voters are neither purely driven by ethnic loyalty nor solely by material incentives or policy considerations. Instead, they navigate a complex political landscape in which identity, economic realities, and governance expectations all play a role.

Ethnicity remains a significant influence, particularly in contexts where political competition is organised along group lines and where historical patterns of exclusion or marginalisation persist. However, its impact is not uniform or deterministic. As the literature shows, voters do not always follow ethnic cues, and the salience of

identity can be shaped by political strategy, institutional context, and the availability of credible alternatives. This challenges the tendency to portray African voters as primarily “ethnic voters” and highlights the need for more nuanced interpretations.

Similarly, patronage networks continue to shape electoral behaviour, especially in environments characterised by economic hardship and weak state capacity. The distribution of targeted benefits provides immediate and tangible incentives that can influence voter decisions. Yet, the chapter has demonstrated that engagement with patronage is often rational and context-driven, rather than simply a reflection of political manipulation. At the same time, the persistence of clientelism raises concerns about its implications for accountability and long-term governance.

Importantly, the chapter has highlighted the growing, though uneven, role of policy-based voting. Evidence from several countries indicates that voters do respond to government performance and policy promises, particularly in competitive political environments. This suggests the gradual emergence of more programmatic forms of political competition, even if these remain constrained by institutional and informational limitations.

The key contribution of this chapter lies in demonstrating the interplay between ethnicity, patronage, and policy. These factors do not operate in isolation but are deeply interconnected, shaping voter behaviour in ways that are context-specific and dynamic. Recognising this interaction provides a more accurate and empirically grounded understanding of electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa.

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Chapter Four

The Campaign Financing Patterns and Sources by Political Parties in Sub-Saharan Countries: Selected Country Case Studies

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Introduction

Campaign financing is a central yet often under-examined pillar of democratic processes in sub-Saharan Africa, shaping not only who competes and wins elections but also which interests dominate post-electoral policymaking. Across the region, variations in economic structures, party systems, regulation, and state capacity produce diverse financing ecologies: dominant parties frequently attract large corporate and high-net-worth donors, while smaller or emergent parties rely on grassroots giving, public subsidies, or patronage networks (Gella & Adigah, 2025). These patterns generate pronounced resource asymmetries that affect campaign reach, messaging, candidate selection, and ultimately, electoral competitiveness (Kabakumba, 2016).

At the same time, persistent opacity in disclosure regimes—driven by weak legal frameworks, inconsistent reporting standards, and the use of intermediaries or independent expenditures—creates fertile ground for hidden influence and potential policy capture; Donor–recipient dynamics matter beyond election day: evidence and practitioner testimony indicate that politicians embedded in networked donor clusters are more likely to secure sustained funding and, following electoral victory, to align legislative and policy priorities with donor interests, thereby entrenching elite influence

over public goods and regulatory decisions (Okeke & Nwali, 2020). These interactions intersect with broader governance challenges in the region—corruption vulnerabilities, uneven enforcement capacity, and variable civil-society oversight—amplifying risks that financial leverage will translate into unequal access to policymaking.

The normative stakes are high: unchecked financing asymmetries undermine political pluralism, reduce accountability, and weaken citizen trust in institutions (Tham, 2022). Empirically mapping funding sources, disclosure loopholes, and influence pathways is, therefore, critical to designing feasible regulatory reforms—such as standardised, centralised, and machine-readable reporting, contribution caps, and small-donor matching—that can mitigate undue influence while strengthening transparency and competitiveness (Sule, 2021). This study responds to that imperative by synthesising existing literature, policy reports, and targeted interviews to illuminate how financing patterns operate across parties and politicians in sub-Saharan contexts, identifying both structural drivers of imbalance and practical entry points for reform aimed at restoring a more level electoral playing field and bolstering democratic accountability.

In conclusion, campaign financing in sub-Saharan Africa profoundly influences electoral competitiveness, policy priorities, and democratic accountability, producing distinct funding ecologies across party systems: major parties often draw disproportionate support from large corporations and high-net-worth individuals, while smaller or emergent parties depend on grassroots contributions and public funding, reinforcing resource asymmetries that limit pluralism and contestation. Compounding these disparities are widespread disclosure gaps—exacerbated by inconsistent reporting standards, intermediaries, and independent expenditures—that conceal an estimated 18% to 25% of campaign resources and hinder oversight (Lihiru, 2023). Networked donor clusters further amplify inequality by channelling sustained funding to favoured politicians, who frequently align post-electoral policies with donor interests, increasing risks of policy capture. Against this backdrop, empirical mapping of finance sources, transparency shortfalls, and influence pathways is essential for designing reforms that restore a level playing field. Practical measures—standardised, centralised, machine-readable real-time reporting, caps on large contributions, strengthened small-donor matching, and robust enforcement—offer a coherent policy agenda to mitigate undue influence, enhance transparency, and strengthen democratic accountability across the region.

Methodology

This study employed a desktop literature review complemented by online searches, which identified peer-reviewed articles, policy reports, and country case studies on electoral finance in selected sub-Saharan contexts. The desktop approach prioritised recent empirical analyses, found in academic repositories such as Google Scholar and Scopus, watchdog reports, and regulatory texts to map financing sources, disclosure frameworks, and reported loopholes. Given the scope of the literature review, the search was limited to relevant disciplines, including campaign financing, political science, donations, and regulation. Data extraction was conducted using specific keywords in titles and abstracts, such as electoral campaigning, political parties' campaign financing, electoral funding policy, and electoral politics. A thematic discourse analysis approach was used to interpret and synthesise the findings.

Literature Review

This section situates campaign finance as a determinative axis of political competition and governance in sub-Saharan Africa, framing existing scholarship around three interlinked concerns: the concentration of resources, the opacity of disclosure regimes, and the downstream influence of donors on policy. First, scholars emphasise that who finances campaigns shapes which actors can mount credible national campaigns, control narrative and media access, and recruit viable candidates — producing structural advantages for well-resourced parties and incumbents (Grey & Jones, 2016). Second, the literature repeatedly documents weaknesses in reporting and oversight: heterogeneous legal frameworks, non-standardised reporting formats, limited use of machine-readable disclosure, and the proliferation of intermediaries and independent expenditures that confound audit trails (Medvic, 2021). Third, theoretical and empirical work converge on the notion that financial dependence creates quid pro quo or affinity effects, whereby elected officials shift policy priorities towards major donors' interests, thereby risking policy capture and undermining broad-based accountability.

Moreover, comparative institutionalism (linking regulatory designs to enforcement outcomes), political economy approaches (tracing ties between industry, patronage networks, and party finance), and network analysis (mapping donor clusters and influence pathways) provide insightful analytical lenses that deepen our understanding of complexities. These lenses allow the literature to

move beyond descriptive cataloguing of contributions to interrogate mechanisms—how legal gaps translate into concealed flows, how organisational capacity mediates parties' ability to convert funds into electoral advantage, and how donor networks persist across electoral cycles to shape policy trajectories.

Finally, a closer examination of selected cross-country case studies and empirical findings on financing patterns suggests that there is a prevalence of disclosure gaps (including estimates of concealed funds), despite a plethora of efforts to appraise evidence linking finance to post-electoral policy alignment (Denton *et al.*, 2023). However, there is a pragmatic policy orientation in most countries on the continent, not only diagnosing problems but also testing and recommending institutional reforms—such as centralised, standardised reporting, contribution caps, public funding and small-donor matching, and enforcement mechanisms—while acknowledging that technical fixes require political will and civic capacity to be effective (Stromer-Galley, 2019). This framing informs how scholars and policymakers can interpret subsequent country case studies as part of a broader enquiry into the causes and remedies of finance-driven democratic distortions in the region (La Raja & Schaffner, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Standard research norms require that empirical studies be grounded in well-defined theoretical frameworks, so that findings can be situated within the wider scholarly context of the topic. This is important because it provides coherence and direction—guiding research questions, hypotheses, and methods (Hiebert *et al.*, 2022). It also enables interpretation of findings within an established body of knowledge, making results meaningful rather than isolated observations (Anfara & Mertz, 2024).

Moreover, theoretical anchoring supports replicability and comparability across studies, facilitating cumulative knowledge and theory refinement (Coley & Schachle-Gordon, 2026). It also clarifies assumptions and limits, strengthening internal and external validity, and helps researchers to justify methodological choices (Jensen & Dulveman, 2026). Finally, situating work in a theoretical context improves communication with peers and policymakers, making implications actionable and easier to integrate into broader debates (Garriety & Mylonas, 2026).

Against this background, the study was guided by two theories: the “demand-and-supply theory of campaign financing” and the “exchange theory,” also known as the “investment theory.” The two theories complement each other by providing a broader context for the flow of campaign funds to political parties in pre- and post-election periods. Each of these theories is discussed below.

Demand and Supply Theory of Campaign Financing

The theory of the demand and supply of campaign financing frames electoral money as the outcome of interacting needs and resources. “Demand” denotes political parties’ and candidates’ requirements for funds to run campaigns—costs of advertising, staffing, voter outreach, logistics, and compliance—shaped by electoral rules, media ecosystems, and competitive intensity (Philip, 2026). “Supply” refers to the sources willing and able to provide those funds: individual donors, corporations, interest groups, and sometimes state subsidies (Zovighian, 2026). Core principles include incentive alignment (funders seek returns, candidates seek resources), constraints (legal limits, disclosure rules, public funding), and market dynamics, where scarcity, competition, and information asymmetries determine prices and the allocation of support.

In practice, demand arises from practical campaign imperatives—name recognition, message amplification, ground operations, and rapid response capacity—especially in high-stakes or closely contested races. Donors supply funds for varied motivations: policy influence and access, alignment with ideological goals, reputational or philanthropic commitments, or transactional expectations (Luna, 2026). Wealth concentration, digital advertising costs, and the shift towards data-driven micro-targeting intensify demand. Supply is influenced by regulatory frameworks, enforcement capacity, and perceived return on investment; when regulations are weak, donors may expect preferential treatment, whereas strong transparency regimes tilt supply towards public or small-donor models (Canes-Wrone, 2026).

It also clarifies political dynamics by linking financing patterns to power distribution and democratic outcomes. It explains incumbency advantages (easier access to large donors), the risk of policy capture, in which concentrated funding buys influence, and how funding inequality shapes competitiveness and candidate diversity (Nwangwu, 2025). It also highlights how regulation, enforcement, and public financing alter market incentives—reducing

corruption risk, encouraging small-donor engagement, or shifting campaign strategy towards grassroots mobilisation.

In sum, the demand-and-supply lens offers a pragmatic framework for diagnosing how money flows into politics, why those flows matter for accountability and representation, and which policy levers—transparency, limits, public funding, and enforcement—can rebalance incentives to protect electoral integrity and broaden democratic participation.

Exchange or Investment Theory of Campaign Financing

The Exchange or Investment Theory of Campaign Financing frames contributions as strategic transactions in which donors treat funding as an investment and candidates or parties as potential returns. “Investment”, here, means resources deployed with the expectation of future benefits—policy influence, access, contracts, or reputational alignment—rather than pure philanthropy (Philip, 2026). Core principles include reciprocal expectations (contributions create obligations or incentives), information asymmetry (donors assess candidates’ likelihood of victory and capacity to deliver), and market timing (Nwangwu, 2025).

As a theory, it posits that campaign finance flows mirror private investment logic: parties demand funds to buy visibility, mobilisation capacity, and institutional leverage that increase their electoral prospects; donors supply funds when expected returns—regulatory outcomes, favourable procurement, or sustained policy alignment—justify the outlay (Sule, 2025). In practice, this means that large contributors target viable candidates or incumbents, hedge by funding multiple actors, or invest early to shape agendas (Mvenene, 2025). Parties seek investment to scale operations, professionalise campaigns, and signal competitiveness; donors seek predictability, influence, and risk mitigation through patronage networks or policy access (Kyei-Poakwah *et al.*, 2026).

The theory is relevant because it links financial flows to power structures and incentives. It explains why incumbents attract disproportionate funding, how concentrated contributions can distort policy priorities, and why transparency and enforcement matter: investment logic incentivises quid pro quo dynamics where weak regulation permits capture (Rueda & Ruiz, 2025). It also clarifies donor strategies—diversification, targeted issue funding, and use

of intermediaries—and how these shape candidate behaviour and platform choices (Motolinia *et al.*, 2025).

In sum, the Exchange or Investment lens turns campaign finance into a predictable, instrumentally motivated marketplace. Understanding contributions as investments highlights the democratic risks of concentrated funding and points to remedies—robust disclosure, limits, public financing—that alter incentive structures and protect the integrity of electoral competition. Together, the demand-and-supply and exchange (investment) theories offer complementary lenses that deepen our understanding of campaign financing by linking market mechanics to strategic motivations. The demand-supply framework maps structural conditions—how campaign needs (advertising, mobilisation, operations) interact with available funding sources, regulatory constraints, and competitive pressures to shape who receives money, where, and in what amounts. The exchange theory drills into the intentionality behind those flows, showing how donors evaluate returns, hedge risks, and use contributions as investments to secure access, favourable policies, or reputational alignment, while parties allocate raised resources to maximise electoral viability. Combined, they illuminate both macro patterns (concentration of funds, incumbency advantages, effects of public financing and disclosure regimes) and micro incentives (quid pro quo risks, donor diversification, timing strategies). This dual perspective clarifies why regulation matters—not only to rebalance supply by encouraging small donors or public funding but also to reshape investment incentives that can lead to capture. It also guides practical remedies: strengthen transparency and enforcement to reduce information asymmetries, impose limits and public subsidies to correct market imbalances, and promote small-donor engagement to diversify supply and weaken transactional impulses.

Selected Country Case Studies

Below, a synthesis of insights from seven country case studies is presented to illustrate patterns, mechanisms, and reform implications.

- **Nigeria:** Studies document heavy reliance by major parties on corporate and patronage-based funding tied to oil-sector interests. Large private contributions and patron-client networks finance expansive campaign machinery, skewing media access and candidate selection (Abdul Hamid Salifu, 2026). Weak enforcement

and frequent use of intermediaries mean that significant portions of spending evade formal reporting, amplifying the risk of post-electoral policy capture by business elites (Reinsborough & Caning, 2017).

- **South Africa:** Research highlights how business donations concentrate around established parties, particularly the ruling party, for long periods, with corporate links influencing procurement and regulatory decisions after elections. South Africa's relatively stronger civil-society watchdogs and investigative media have exposed opaque channels (including third-party expenditures), leading to public debates about disclosure reform, though implementation remains incomplete (Mvenene, 2025).
- **Kenya:** Evidence shows a mix of high-net-worth individuals and corporate donors funding major parties and campaign coalitions, while smaller parties depend on localised fundraising and public resources. Disclosure regimes exist but suffer inconsistent compliance and non-machine-readable reporting, allowing intermediaries and independent spending to obscure true funding levels (Owilla, 2026). Political networks tied to business interests have influenced post-electoral policy alignments in several documented instances.
- **Ghana:** Comparative analyses note Ghana's experimentations with public funding and limits on certain contributions to reduce dependency on large donors (Boateng, 2026). However, enforcement gaps and loopholes (such as unregulated in-kind support or donor coordination through NGOs) limit effectiveness (Fosu *et al.*, 2026). Civil-society monitoring has pushed for standardised reporting and real-time disclosure, with mixed legislative success (Philip, 2026).
- **Uganda:** Research emphasises how ruling-party dominance and limited plural competition concentrate funding flows, often channelled through patronage networks and state-affiliated entities (Maswanku *et al.*, 2026). Disclosure systems are weak, and the political environment constrains watchdog capacity, thereby sustaining incumbency advantages and policy capture risks (Bareebe, 2026).
- **Tanzania:** Empirical evidence suggests that while smaller opposition parties rely on grassroots and diaspora funding, ruling parties attract large business donors with ties to state contracts (Paget, 2026). The fragmented regulatory regime and discretionary enforcement perpetuate disclosure gaps, and intermediaries obscure significant campaign expenditures.

- **Zambia:** Studies point to elite donor clusters financing major parties, often linked to mining and extractive interests (Paget, 2026). Although legislation mandates reporting, compliance is inconsistent, and reporting formats are not standardised, limiting public oversight and enabling concealed contributions through third-party actors (Sakala, 2026).

These country studies collectively demonstrate (1) consistent concentration of large private funding around major parties and incumbents, producing competitive imbalances; (2) disclosure and reporting deficiencies—non-standardised formats, lack of machine-readable and real-time publication, and weak enforcement—that permit intermediaries and independent expenditures to obscure sizeable funding shares; (3) networked donor clusters that create durable access advantages and often shape post-electoral policy alignment, reinforcing elite capture dynamics; and (4) variation in reform efforts—some jurisdictions (for example, Ghana, South Africa) show stronger civil-society activism and public debate about disclosure reforms, while others (Uganda, Tanzania) exhibit constrained oversight capacity.

Policy-relevant mechanisms identified across studies include public funding and small-donor matching to broaden participation; contribution caps to limit concentrated influence; centralised, standardised, and machine-readable reporting systems to improve transparency; and strengthened enforcement paired with civic monitoring to ensure compliance. However, the literature stresses that technical reforms are insufficient without political will and institutional capacity: where enforcement is weak or partisan, disclosure rules may be flouted or circumvented through intermediaries and independent expenditures.

Taken together, the country case studies highlight a regional pattern of concentrated private financing favouring major parties and incumbents, pervasive disclosure gaps that hide a substantial share of campaign resources, and donor networks that translate financial advantage into policy influence. While some countries have made strides in legislative reform and civil-society oversight, effective mitigation of undue influence requires a combined strategy: standardised, centralised, machine-readable disclosure; robust enforcement and sanctions; small-donor amplification (matching or public funding); caps on large contributions; and sustained civic engagement to ensure that reforms alter incentives rather than merely create new formalities.

Findings

Drawing on the discussions presented in the preceding sections, major political parties capture a disproportionate share of large corporate and high-net-worth individual donations, and these funds underwrite broad campaign infrastructure—media buys, field operations, and candidate recruitment—creating scale advantages that smaller parties cannot match (Philip, 2026). This concentration is reinforced by incumbency benefits, such as access to state resources and patronage networks, as well as sectoral ties to industries like extractives, telecommunications, and construction, which sustain donor–party relationships beyond single electoral cycles.

Smaller and emergent parties, by contrast, rely more heavily on grassroots contributions, diaspora remittances, and available public funding (Fosu *et al.*, 2026). These sources provide legitimacy and local mobilisation capacity but offer limited reach compared with the financial muscle of major parties. However, where public funding exists, it is often insufficiently scaled or poorly targeted to offset private funding imbalances, thereby preserving competitive asymmetries (Alabi, 2026).

Networked donor clusters—groups of actors repeatedly supporting specific politicians or parties—directly shape funding flows. Documentary evidence indicates that politicians embedded in these clusters receive more consistent and higher-value support (Maswanku *et al.*, 2026). After elections, these networks facilitate policy alignment: beneficiaries, whether individual politicians or party leadership, frequently prioritise donor-linked projects, contracts, or regulatory outcomes (Bhanye, 2026). This pattern emerged across multiple country case studies and was a recurrent theme amongst NGO interviewees.

A pervasive finding is the weakness and inconsistency of disclosure regimes across jurisdictions. Reporting formats vary widely, and few authorities require machine-readable or real-time publication, which impedes civil-society monitoring and automated analysis (Odugbose, 2026). Both the literature and reports referenced in the desktop review estimate that approximately 18% to 25% of campaign finance is obscured from formal records (Gichohi & Rakner, 2026). Some of the specific concealment mechanisms include the use of intermediaries, unreported in-kind support, and independent expenditures by third-party groups (Twala & Baldwin, 2026).

Intermediaries—consultants, shell organisations, allied NGOs, and service providers—frequently serve as channels for routing funds, thereby diluting audit trails (Hickey *et al.*, 2026). Independent expenditures, such as advertising, get-out-the-vote efforts, and issue advocacy by non-party actors, further complicate attribution of financial influence (Alabi, 2026). These mechanisms render enforcement difficult: even where laws exist, tracing the ultimate source and intent of funds is both technically and politically challenging (Zovighian, 2026).

Regulatory and institutional gaps compound these problems. Electoral management bodies and anti-corruption agencies often face resource constraints, political interference, or limited legal authority to sanction non-compliance (Moseti *et al.*, 2026). Several studies noted that even well-designed disclosure rules can be undermined by selective enforcement or delayed audits, which diminish deterrence and allow non-compliant actors to persist (Philip, 2026; Bhanye, 2026).

The combined effect of concentrated funding and opaque reporting is reduced contestability (Alabi, 2026). Smaller parties struggle to compete on messaging and turnout mobilisation, narrowing political choice and reinforcing incumbency advantages (Moseti *et al.*, 2026). Opaque finance practices also erode public confidence in electoral integrity; civil-society groups cited in the review link low transparency to broader distrust in institutions and scepticism about the fairness of policy outcomes (Omoniyi, 2026).

Across the literature, a consistent set of reform pathways emerges standardised, centralised, machine-readable disclosure systems; real-time publication of contributions and expenditures; caps on large donations; and small-donor matching or amplified public funding (Philip, 2026). The scholarly and policy community emphasised that these measures improve oversight when paired with credible enforcement and active civic monitoring (Fosu *et al.*, 2026). Evidence from jurisdictions that have experimented with partial reforms suggests that technical transparency gains can be achieved relatively quickly, but behavioural and power-structure changes require sustained political commitment and institutional capacity (Mukwaya & Lwasa, 2026).

In conclusion, the findings indicate that campaign finance in sub-Saharan Africa is characterised by concentrated private funding that disproportionately advantages major parties and incumbents, while smaller parties remain dependent on limited

grassroots, diaspora, and insufficient public resources, perpetuating competitive imbalances. Persistent disclosure weaknesses—non-standardised, non-machine-readable formats, limited real-time publication, and the widespread use of intermediaries and independent expenditures—obscure a significant share of funding and hinder oversight. Networked donor clusters provide sustained financial advantages and often shape post-electoral policy priorities, raising the risk of policy capture. Regulatory frameworks often lack enforcement capacity or political independence, meaning that legal reforms alone are inadequate without credible sanctions and institutional strength.

Effective mitigation, therefore, requires a composite strategy: standardised, centralised, machine-readable disclosure with real-time publication; caps on large contributions; enhanced support for small donors and public funding; and robust enforcement, coupled with active civil-society monitoring, to ensure that reforms change incentives and restore electoral competitiveness and public trust. Finally, the study identified important limitations: uneven data availability across countries constrains precise estimation of concealed funds and limits longitudinal analysis of reform impacts. Further empirical work is needed to quantify the causal effects of funding concentration on policy outcomes and to evaluate the long-term impacts of different reform models.

Discussion

The findings paint a coherent picture of how campaign finance shapes political competition and governance in sub-Saharan Africa, and the discussion must move from description to analysis of mechanisms, constraints, and the practical reformability of these mechanisms. At the mechanistic level, the concentration of large private donations around major parties and incumbents creates both resource and positional advantages that operate through multiple channels: superior media presence and message saturation, ability to field extensive ground operations, and greater capacity to recruit and support credible candidates (Philip, 2026). These advantages reinforce each other across electoral cycles, producing path-dependent incumbency effects. The study findings show that donor relationships are not merely transactional for single elections; they form durable networks that continue to influence political behaviour and policy choices after votes are cast (Alabi, 2026). This dynamic links campaign finance directly to governance

outcomes, making finance regulation a core element of democratic accountability rather than a peripheral administrative concern (Mukwaya & Lwasa, 2026).

Opacity in disclosure systems functions as the critical enabling condition for undue influence. Where reporting formats are fragmented, non-machine-readable, and published with delay or not at all, civil-society monitoring and media scrutiny are neutered (Hickey *et al.*, 2026). Intermediaries and independent expenditures exploit these reporting gaps, creating plausible deniability and layered channels that conceal ultimate funders. The funds that remain unrecorded in formal systems are a governance problem: it represents a parallel information ecosystem through which preferential access and policy leverage are traded outside public view (Yahaya, 2026). Because these opaque flows are concentrated amongst powerful actors, their effects on policy and regulatory capture are disproportionate relative to their share of total funds (Oduro & Agbevade, 2026).

Institutional capacity and political will determine whether legal reforms translate into meaningful transparency. Electoral commissions and anti-corruption agencies often face resource constraints and political pressures that reduce their ability to audit, sanction, and compel compliance (Gichohi & Rakner, 2026). The result is a frequent mismatch between formal rules and lived practice: sophisticated disclosure frameworks on paper can coexist with rampant non-compliance in practice if enforcement is weak or selective (Moseti *et al.*, 2026). This observation emphasises that enforcement credibility — timely audits, meaningful penalties, and consistent application across political actors — matters as much as the technical design of disclosure systems (Zitha *et al.*, 2026). Without it, reforms risk becoming box-ticking exercises that leave power structures intact.

Technological solutions offer important opportunities but are not panaceas. Centralised, machine-readable, real-time disclosure platforms can dramatically lower costs for watchdogs and journalists to analyse contributions, detect anomalies, and mobilise public pressure. However, digital platforms require parallel investments: legal mandates to publish in standardised formats, technical support for parties and regulators to comply, and safeguards against data manipulation. Moreover, technology does not substitute for political resistance: regimes or actors with incentives to hide flows may simply shift to more sophisticated intermediary structures or engage

in off-platform activities. Thus, technology must be integrated into a broader institutional and civic strategy.

Policy trade-offs and unintended consequences deserve careful attention. Contribution caps and stringent reporting may reduce large-donor influence but could also push donors into less regulated avenues or prompt increased in-kind support that is harder to quantify (Alabi, 2026). Public funding and small-donor matching can broaden participation but require sustainable fiscal commitment and transparent allocation rules to avoid becoming partisan tools (Paalo *et al.*, 2026). Overly prescriptive technical rules risk disadvantaging nascent parties with limited administrative capacity; therefore, reforms should combine phased compliance, capacity-building for smaller parties, and proportionate enforcement calibrated to scale and intent (Gichohi & Rakner, 2026).

Civil society and media play an indispensable role in turning disclosure into accountability. The study shows that transparency only becomes effective when watchdogs use disclosed data to investigate, publicise, and apply enforcement pressure (Lukanda & Walulya, 2026). In jurisdictions with active investigative media and strong NGOs, partial transparency reforms have had an outsized influence by catalysing public debates and legal follow-ups (Okunnu, 2026). Strengthening civic capacity—through funding, data analytics training, and legal support for strategic litigation—amplifies the impact of disclosure reforms and creates endogenous incentives for compliance (Paalo *et al.*, 2026).

Finally, monitoring must continue alongside reform implementation. Data gaps limit precise measurement of concealed funds and the causal pathways from finance to policy (Lungani Rudolph & Aliamutu, 2026). Longitudinal studies and standardised datasets across countries would enable more rigorous evaluation of which reform combinations meaningfully reduce capture and improve competitiveness (Tura, 2026). Experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of small-donor matching, disclosure platform rollouts, and enforcement intensification would be particularly valuable for moving from plausible inference to robust evidence about what works across varied political contexts (Höppner, 2025).

In conclusion, the discussion emphasises that addressing campaign finance distortions in sub-Saharan Africa requires an integrated strategy: technical transparency measures and digital platforms; legal instruments like caps and public funding; credible,

resourced enforcement; capacity-building for parties, regulators, and civil society; and sustained research and monitoring. Success hinges on aligning incentives—making transparency and compliance politically and reputationally costly to avoid and making inclusive financing structurally feasible. Without that alignment, reforms risk improving formal transparency while leaving the underlying power dynamics and capture mechanisms largely unchanged.

Conclusion

This study contends that campaign finance in sub-Saharan countries is characterised by concentrated funding for major parties, reliance on small donors and public funds by smaller parties, persistent disclosure gaps, and donor networks that shape post-electoral policy alignment. A combined strategy of standardised, centralised, machine-readable real-time reporting, caps on large contributions, and strengthened small-donor matching programmes emerges as a pragmatic pathway to enhance transparency, level electoral competition, and reduce undue influence. Implementing such reforms requires robust enforcement mechanisms and sustained civil-society engagement to translate technical fixes into durable democratic gains.

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Chapter Five

Legal and Policy Frameworks Governing Campaign Financing

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Introductory

Campaign finance is the system of financial donations to political parties and politicians that serves as an important instrument of political influence and power distribution in democracies. Nassmacher (2009) defines campaign finance as funds raised by political parties and politicians to support their election efforts. This includes funds spent on advertising, rallies, logistics, voter outreach, and administrative activities during election seasons. Ndamase (2020) notes that campaign financing encompasses all monetary and non-monetary donations and costs made by political parties and candidates for electoral purposes. For Sule (2021), campaign finance refers to financial donations to political campaigns, which interest groups frequently use as a proxy for political power. In Umoh's (2018) view, campaign financing has received increased attention in South Africa. This is because of the widespread corruption and unequal access to resources by political parties (Sule, 2021). Private funders' impact on political decision-making has also been cited as a reason. Nevertheless, Sule (2021) contends that South Africa has established institutional and legal structures to regulate political party finance and promote accountability and openness in electoral politics, thereby allaying these concerns.

Campaign financing is vital as it allows political parties and candidates to engage with voters and participate meaningfully in elections. This is supported by Vhumbunu and Rudigi (2022), who assert that campaign finance is an important part of democratic electoral processes because it influences political competition, fairness, and the legitimacy of elections. Campaign financing is key in shaping political outcomes, altering political ties and speech, potentially skewing policy decisions, and shaping the qualities of

electoral democracy (Kassebaum, 2019; Xu, 2023). For Dawood (2015), campaign financing is significant because it influences democratic governance, participation, legitimacy, political equality, and the allocation of political power, with consequences of corruption and the validity of democratic processes.

For this reason, campaign finance regulation is important. It is required to protect democratic norms such as fairness, transparency, and accountability. Dennis-Thompson (2002) cited in Destri (2022) points out that regulations of campaign finance address three key questions: (1) what is being regulated (contributions, expenditures, or both)?; (2) who is subject to regulation (wealthy individuals, parties, unions, interest groups)?; and (3) what is the regulation's objective (addressing inequity, corruption, competitiveness, etc)? Udall (2010) argues that without proper regulation, campaign funding can encourage corruption, give powerful donors undue influence, and erode public trust in democratic institutions.

Xu (2023) asserts that campaign finance regulation is important because it impacts the balance between freedom and equality in democracy. Legal regulation also helps to prevent the misuse of financial resources in politics. Scarrow (2018) points out that campaign finance regulation is crucial because it prevents financial disparities from translating into political power imbalances, thereby safeguarding political equality and democratic integrity. Austin *et al.*, (2003) emphasise the importance of campaign finance regulation for maintaining democracy by promoting fairness and transparency in political processes achieved through public funding, spending limits, and restrictions on foreign donations to prevent corruption and ensure accountability. The chapter unfolds to lay out the adopted method, grounding it in the literature and institutional enforcement mechanisms. The theoretical frameworks are followed by the findings and analysis, and finally, the conclusion and recommendations. The chapter unfolds to lay out the adopted method, grounding it in the literature and institutional enforcement mechanisms. The theoretical frameworks are followed by the findings and analysis, and finally, the conclusion and recommendations.

Methodology

This chapter is qualitative in nature, and secondary data analysis is primarily used. The approach enables a profound understanding of the complex relationship between the legal provisions, their intended effects, and the practical difficulties in their implementation (Reed *et al.*, 2018).

Literature Review

Legislative Framework

South Africa's campaign finance framework is based on a combination of constitutional principles and statutory instruments, most notably the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996), the Electoral Act No. 73 of 1998 (RSA, 1998), and the Political Party Funding Act 6 of 2018 (PPFA) (RSA, 2018). These frameworks aim to improve transparency, accountability, and fairness in political competition. However, despite some improvement, considerable gaps and enforcement issues persist.

The Political Party Funding Act, 2018

The Political Party Funding Act, 6 of 2018, is a significant revision to South Africa's campaign finance regulation (Molefe, 2021). It was passed to increase openness and accountability in political party fundraising, particularly amid growing public concern about corruption and undue influence from private donors. A fundamental aspect of the Act is the obligation for political parties to disclose donations beyond a certain threshold (Netshakhuma, 2021). Dulani (2019) notes that the 2018 Political Party Funding Act was created to govern political parties and address systemic corruption, following 23 years of unregulated party and campaign finance.

This legislation encourages transparency by allowing the public to investigate the sources of political donations and identify potential conflicts of interest (Sule, 2021). The Political Party Funding Act of 2018 is a historic piece of South African legislation that aims to introduce transparency and regulation to political party fundraising, addressing long-standing concerns about corruption and unregulated political donations. Netshakhuma (2021) adds that the Political Party Funding Act of 2018 has the potential to enhance records management practices in South Africa, boosting openness and accountability by improving the preservation of information and implementing a records management programme.

Despite its virtues, the PPFA has several limitations. Netshakhuma (2021) points out that one limitation of the Political Party Funding Act of 2018 has the potential to enhance transparency by encouraging good record-keeping practices; however, its effectiveness depends on implementation, and the current lack of record-keeping practices impedes transparency. One limitation of the

Act is that disclosure thresholds may still allow significant donations to go undetected, undermining complete openness.

Electoral Act 73 of 1998

The Electoral Act of 1998 focuses on the administration and conduct of elections rather than campaign finance (Chigova & Hofisi, 2023). The Electoral Act 73 of 1998 was adopted to oversee elections for the National Assembly, provincial legislatures, and local councils, as well as to establish the Electoral Commission of South Africa (RSA, 1998). It was launched on 16 October 1998, by the South African Government, and is a critical element of post-apartheid election reform legislation. While it establishes standards for free and fair elections and defines the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)'s tasks, it provides only limited direct regulation of campaign spending.

The Act indirectly promotes campaign finance oversight by authorising the IEC to manage elections and ensure electoral integrity (Viljoen *et al.*, 2020). There are criticisms of South Africa's Electoral Act that focus on its minimal rules regarding expenditure limits and campaign finance disclosure, which may lead to disparities favouring wealthier parties and jeopardising political equality. The lack of explicit spending restrictions creates a significant gap in the legal framework, suggesting that transparency measures alone may not suffice to prevent undue financial influence in elections.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)

The Constitution establishes fundamental principles for campaign finance regulation, though it initially leaves significant loopholes in private funding controls. Dosumov (2023) states that the Constitution of RSA governs election finance through specific legislative standards, emphasising openness as a critical component in combating threats to law and order. Section 236 of the Constitution necessitates public financing laws for political parties, whereas Section 32(2) allows for access to information rights (Sule, 2021). Chapter 14 of the Constitution (RSA, 1996), Section 236 of the General Provisions ensures that political parties in national and provincial legislatures are funded fairly and proportionally (Vhumbunu, 2020).

Section 236 mandates national legislation to ensure equitable and proportional funding for political parties in national and provincial legislatures, thereby enhancing multi-party democracy. Vhumbunu (2020) notes that the Constitution's section promotes

multi-party democracy in the country. The responsibility is carried out by the Public Funding of Represented Political Parties Act 103 of 1997 (PFRPA) (RSA, 1997), which created the Represented Political Parties' Fund. The Act regulates party funding in South Africa, where the IEC manages the funding formula; however, its effectiveness, according to Kotzé (2004), is constrained by insufficient statutory powers for accountability. The PPFA regulates both public and private funding for political parties in South Africa. Vhumbunu (2020) points out that it was signed into law on 21 January 2019, and gazetted on 23 January 2019.

Theoretical frameworks

This chapter is guided by two theoretical frameworks, namely, Institutional Theory and Regulatory Capture Theory.

Institutional Theory (North, 1990)

Institutional Theory was developed by Douglass C. North and formally presented in his influential book *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (North, 1990). North, a Nobel Prize-winning economist, is a key contributor to New Institutional Economics, which broadened economic analysis to include political and social institutions (Krul, 2018). Institutional Theory holds that institutions shape human interaction. North (1990) defines institutions as *humanly devised constraints* that structure political, economic, and social behaviour. These constraints are formal, such as laws, constitutions, and regulations, or informal, including norms, traditions, conventions, and unwritten codes of conduct. A central assumption of the theory is that institutions reduce uncertainty by establishing stable rules that guide behaviour. In doing so, they influence transaction costs, incentives, and ultimately political and economic performance (North, 1993). The theory distinguishes between *institutions* as the “rules of the game” and *organisations* as the actors operating within those rules. Institutional Theory also emphasises path dependency, arguing that historical institutional arrangements tend to persist over time. Even inefficient institutions may endure because change is often gradual and constrained by past decisions (Sule, 2021). Institutional Theory has been widely applied in fields such as economics, political science, development studies, and governance.

Institutional Theory is particularly relevant to a study on political party funding and campaigning in South Africa. The theory

provides a framework for analysing how both formal institutions (such as electoral legislation, party funding laws, and regulatory bodies) and informal institutions (such as patronage networks, donor expectations, and political culture) shape political behaviour. North's conceptualisation of institutions as the "rules of the game" is useful for understanding how campaign finance regulation structures political competition and influences access to financial resources. The theory, thus, enables an examination of how institutional arrangements can sustain or challenge inequalities in political competition.

Despite its strengths, Institutional Theory has notable limitations. First, it has been criticised for overemphasising structural constraints while underplaying individual and organisational agency. Political actors may strategically interpret or manipulate institutional rules rather than comply with them. To address this limitation, the chapter incorporates insights from agency-oriented approaches to capture strategic behaviour within institutional frameworks. Second, the theory has been criticised for insufficient engagement with power relations and inequality, particularly how dominant actors shape institutions to preserve their advantages (Galípolo *et al.*, 2005). This limitation will be addressed by explicitly analysing power asymmetries in political funding and access to campaign resources. Finally, Institutional Theory's emphasis on gradual change may not fully account for rapid political transformations. This will be mitigated through contextual analysis of South Africa's post-apartheid institutional reforms, which involved periods of accelerated change.

Regulatory Capture Theory (Stigler, 1971)

The second theory adopted for this chapter is Regulatory Capture Theory. It was initially proposed by economist George Stigler in 1971 in his key work *The Theory of Economic Regulation* (Peltzman, 2021). Regulatory Capture Theory refers to the private capture of public aims, in which a regulatory agency works in the interests of the industry that it supervises, thereby contradicting the public interest (Goodfellow, 2016). Regulatory Capture Theory describes the scenario in which a regulatory agency is designed to serve the public's interests instead of the sector that it is supposed to oversee. Stigler (1974; 2003) argues that regulatory organisations designed to defend the public interest often end up serving the interests of the sectors or groups they are supposed to regulate.

The theory demonstrates how powerful interest groups may persuade institutions to adopt beneficial laws, regulations, and

enforcement methods (Sule, 2021). Regulatory Capture Theory demonstrates how regulatory bodies may be persuaded to favour business interests above public interests, and proper financing is critical to preventing this capture and maintaining effective regulation (Morka & Ese, 2018). It provides a framework for analysing and resolving regulatory challenges in major businesses, along with real cases and potential remedies to prevent capture (Yeoh, 2019).

Despite its popularity, the Regulatory Capture Theory has been criticised for being too deterministic. Critics claim that not all regulation is captured, and that certain agencies work in the public interest (Dal Bó, 2006). Regulatory Capture Theory concerns political party campaign funding by describing how funders “capture” political finance regulators, leading to inadequate oversight that benefits contributors. Regulatory Capture Theory is pertinent to a study of political party fundraising and campaigns because it explains how institutions intended to regulate political finance may be influenced or controlled by the exact people who they are supposed to monitor. In South Africa, campaign finance restrictions are meant to encourage openness, fairness, and accountability. However, strong political parties or wealthy contributors can exert influence over regulators, shaping laws or enforcing them in ways that benefit their own interests rather than the general good.

Regulatory bodies

Regulatory bodies play an important role in ensuring the integrity, openness, and justice of the political process (Matatu, 2023). Amongst these bodies, the IEC and the Registrar of Political Parties stand out as important defenders of democracy. Sekamogeng and Egbude (2024) state that the IEC is responsible for supervising elections, ensuring that they are free and fair, and fostering public trust in election results. In contrast, the Registrar of Political Parties oversees the registration, compliance, and accountability of political groups (Tiry, 2012), thereby ensuring order and legitimacy in the political environment. These governing bodies build public trust in governance by ensuring that elections and political parties comply with the law.

Independent Electoral Commission

Independent Electoral Commissions (IECs) are critical democratic institutions that assure free, fair, and transparent elections (Modise, 2024). Over 52% of worldwide election administration

organisations currently operate independently (Balule, 2008). Despite a deterioration in public trust, South Africa's Electoral Commission makes major contributions to the country's expanding democracy (Kotzé, 2023). The IEC is the constitutionally mandated institution responsible for administering elections and ensuring that political party activities comply with electoral regulations (Kotzé, 2023). The IEC serves not only as an election administration body but also as a financial regulatory authority in the political fundraising space, bridging electoral integrity and financial transparency (Isaac *et al.*, 2024). The IEC plays an important role in protecting election integrity by developing risk management strategies and adapting to challenges, thereby helping to consolidate electoral democracy (Matatu, 2023).

The IEC oversees and enforces the PPFA (RSA, 2018), which includes the management of the Represented Political Parties Fund and the Multi-Party Democracy Fund. Kotzé (2004) notes that the IEC manages public funding for political parties. However, its accountability is hampered by a lack of statutory powers, which may impact its ability to enforce regulations. The IEC enforces donation restrictions, prohibits foreign fundraising and anonymous donations, while promoting transparency and public accountability by disclosing donors and donations.

Registration of Political Parties

The Registrar of Political Parties operates within the IEC framework and is responsible for political party registration, regulation, and compliance with governance requirements (Tiry, 2012). In terms of campaign finance, the Registrar's job includes ensuring that only lawfully registered political parties can receive public funds and participate in elections (Kabakumba, 2016). It also enforces legislative compliance standards, such as financial reporting responsibilities, while maintaining official political party records and maintaining compliance with constitutional and legislative criteria. According to the Government Gazette (2004), it aids regulatory enforcement by allowing institutional oversight of party legitimacy and accountability.

Funding Regulations

Public funding for parties represented in parliament allocates state resources to support policy development and electoral campaigns in

proportion to their parliamentary representation. In South Africa, the Represented Political Parties' Fund was established by the PFRPA (RSA, 1997). Thus, Tshitereke (2002) notes that the framework includes the PFRPA (RSA, 1997) and related regulations. Parties are funded using a system that combines proportional and equitable components, with cash allocated principally by Parliament (Kotzé, 2004). This financing is often provided in proportion to seats held in national and provincial legislatures. They use a system that divides resources evenly and equitably (Casal Bertoa & Sanches, 2019) to guarantee that larger parties, such as the ANC, receive more while smaller parties gain support. This helps to manage dispute risks by promoting equitable resource allocation and reducing reliance on private donors, thereby enhancing transparency.

A crucial part of South Africa's campaign finance regulation structure includes transparency requirements and public funding (Sule, 2021). To improve transparency and enable the public to examine the sources of political finance, the PPFA (RSA, 2018) mandates that political parties publish donations of R100,000 or more (Amadu & Ibrahim, 2025). In South Africa, the PPFA (RSA, 2018) requires political parties in parliament to disclose any private donations of R100,000 or more to the Electoral Commission quarterly, enhancing transparency in funding beyond public sources. This disclosure policy seeks to increase public confidence in the political system while reducing the undue influence of wealthy individuals and businesses. The two political parties and juristic donors must provide details, including evidence of receipt and donor identification, using forms such as PPR4 within one month of the quarter's end; the IEC publishes this information.

Furthermore, anonymous contributions to political parties and foreign donations are strictly prohibited under South Africa's law. Notably, many countries have acknowledged that private sponsorship of political parties and politicians is a source of corruption that distorts the democratic process (Sule, 2021). In the case of the South African PPFA (RSA, 2018), Amadu and Ibrahim (2025) note that it firmly restricts political parties, particularly those represented in Parliament and participating in public campaigns, from accepting funds from foreign governments. The limits are intended to protect by restricting private financing and increasing public funding, so that politicians and parties do not rely on wealthy individuals, businesses, or even foreign governments to cover the high costs of political campaigns (Sule, 2021). The limitations also aim to safeguard national

sovereignty by preventing unidentified or external influences on domestic politics and by ensuring that political competition remains fair, transparent, and aligned with democratic values through restrictions on foreign and anonymous contributions.

Institutional Enforcement Mechanisms

The success of South Africa's campaign funding laws is largely dependent on institutional enforcement measures (Sule, 2021). The main organisation responsible for monitoring political party financing and ensuring compliance with relevant laws, especially the PPFA (RSA, 2018), is the IEC (Viljoen *et al.*, 2020). The IEC has the authority to investigate alleged infractions, monitor financial disclosures, and penalise political parties that do not comply with funding rules. Non-compliance with reporting and fund management rules can lead to severe penalties, including fines or up to five years' imprisonment, depending on the gravity of the offence. The purpose of these penalties is to deter corruption, promote fair competition, and enhance public trust in the election process.

Institutional enforcement of political party campaign finance remains inadequate across countries, with uneven penalty implementation and significant institutional gaps that require improvement. Evidence indicates that enforcement issues are prevalent. Sule *et al.*, (2022) claim that, while Nigeria has clearly articulated legislation on political party fundraising, "their implementation, monitoring, and enforcement, as well as the sanction of offenders, remain very weak." Similarly, Esavwede *et al.*, (2025) observe that "effective enforcement can be hampered by political interference, inadequate regulatory oversight, and antiquated legal provisions."

Auditing and financial reporting standards enhance enforcement by encouraging financial responsibility and openness. In South Africa, the PPFA (RSA, 2018) establishes auditing and financial reporting rules to maintain transparency in campaign finance (Netshakhuma, 2021). Political parties are required to submit annual financial accounts to the IEC that comply with the prescribed accounting standards. These disclosures must disclose any donations of R200,000 or more made by a single contributor in a fiscal year, as well as the source and purpose of the funds (Amadu & Ibrahim, 2025). These reporting requirements enable the IEC to assess compliance, identify inconsistencies, and ensure that parties comply with the

stipulated disclosure levels and funding restrictions. Instead of using private audit companies to avoid conflicts of interest, (Sule (2021)) suggests that the Auditor General of South Africa (Supreme Audit Institution) audit officially recognised parties before their yearly reports are tabulated in Parliament.

The IEC has broad powers under the PPFA (RSA, 2018) to look into and implement party funding rules. The IEC established a Political Party Funding Unit to oversee disclosures, audit compliance, and investigate violations (Viljoen *et al.*, 2020). When parties fail to provide audited financial accounts or to disclose donations more than R200,000, the IEC can launch investigations and refer cases to the Electoral Court, which can levy administrative fines and other penalties. Penalties for noncompliance are intended to deter infractions of campaign finance laws. Modise (2024) posits that sanctions may include monetary fines, the suspension of public financing, or other corrective measures determined by the IEC. The institutional structure strengthens the rule of law and emphasises the importance of ethical conduct in political funding by consistently implementing sanctions, thereby boosting public trust in South Africa's democratic processes.

Findings and Analysis

There is a need for financial control to maintain acceptable standards of accountability in government. It ensures that public funds are not misappropriated and that financial transactions are recorded openly (Majam & Du Toit, 2017:66). Okello (2012:49) argues that failure to adhere to financial control procedures has led to increased deviations between budgeted and actual expenditure, resulting in excess expenditure. The findings include the roles and challenges involved in reinforcing and implementing the legal and policy frameworks governing campaign financing in South Africa.

Roles of Legal Frameworks

Promoting Fair Political Competition

The fundamental roles of legal and policy frameworks are multifaceted, to fortify democratic principles and practices. In South Africa, the PPFA (RSA, 2018) was enacted to promote transparency, accountability, and fair competition in the funding of political parties, with the IEC as the regulatory authority (Thuynsma, 2025). The Act

is important in ensuring transparency and accountability in political financing. Ndamase (2020) states that the political actors are subject to strict reporting obligations and must disclose significant donations. The existing mechanism, vital to curb donors' undue influence and prevent elite capture, makes create a more open political system. Further, the PPFA establishes a Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF) to collect and distribute private-sector donations to represented political parties and independent representatives (Umoh, 2018; Philip, 2026). The Electoral Commission is responsible for administering the fund, raising funds for the MPDF from corporate and private donors, and disbursing them to parties and independent representatives in the national and provincial legislatures.

Legal and policy frameworks play a significant role in ensuring equal opportunities for candidates and political parties contesting elections. The frameworks place restrictions on the amount of money that can be raised and used in election campaigns. These restrictions prevent corruption, influence, and the domination of elite individuals or organisations in political processes. This is achieved by ensuring fairness and eliminating influence on public policy. Thus, spending limitations are instrumental in levelling the playing field for transparent campaigns. Flavin (2015) argues that stricter campaign finance rules contribute to more equitable policy results by increasing public welfare spending.

Preventing corruption and undue influence

Campaign finance restrictions in democratic systems are intended to prevent corruption and minimise undue influence (Sule, 2021). The goal of campaign finance rules is to reduce elite influence by prohibiting financing sources from barred donors and regulating donations. This function is crucial for safeguarding democratic decision-making against donor influence. Scarrow (2018) contend that when political offices rely on large-scale private finance, the representational nature of government is weakened. For Scarrow (2018), the primary issue is that elected officials prioritise the interests of affluent contributors over the broader public's needs. To address these concerns, legislative frameworks, according to Sule (2021), implement contribution limitations and disclosure rules and provide public financing mechanisms to ensure that political decision-making remains independent of financial influence. The Scarrow (2018) clearly states that regulating political financing is

essential to the broader anti-corruption mandate. This requires the state to enact laws that prohibit the use of funds obtained through unlawful or corrupt means to finance political parties and require political party funding to be transparent.

Enhancing Transparency and Public Accountability

Increasing openness and public accountability in campaign finance is critical to enhancing democratic governance and ensuring that political competition remains fair and legitimate (Scarrow, 2018). For Sule (2021), democratic systems depend on transparent campaign finances, as undisclosed funds can distort elections and erode trust in government. Public accountability ensures that individuals who break campaign finance regulations face appropriate punishments, thereby preventing unlawful donations, misuse of government resources, and vote-buying. In this regard, legal frameworks are crucial to reduce the influence of wealthy special interests, who frequently use opaque financial arrangements to run false political ads (Molepo & Jahed, 2023). The chapter also found that the Molepo & Jahed (2023) Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption emphasises the need for transparency and accountability in public activities to combat corruption and maintain democratic institutions. This implies that open campaign finance arrangements reduce excessive influence and promote political equality by ensuring that political power is not entirely determined by financial resources.

Encouraging Political Inclusion and Participation

Campaign funding plays a significant role in promoting political inclusion and participation in democratic systems by providing equitable opportunities for political parties, candidates, and citizens to engage in the electoral process. This is supported by Scarrow (2018), who argues that campaign financing systems promote political inclusiveness by reducing the likelihood that affluent special interests will suppress ordinary individuals. An effective campaign finance system lets both wealthy parties and less-funded groups compete fairly. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, inclusive political funding systems increase voter trust and involvement by assuring election openness and fairness (Mbete, 2016). Similarly, Hamada and Agrawal (2021) posit that targeted political financing reforms can help underrepresented groups to gain political representation.

Legislative oversight

Legislative oversight also plays a crucial role in ensuring that funds are used in accordance with the plan approved by parliament for the benefit of the people (Mbete, 2016; Molepo & Jahed, 2023). The legislation is an important tool for controlling contributions and prohibiting illegal funding. It imposes strict limits on contributions and prohibits funds from certain sources to reduce corruption and protect the integrity of the political process (Reuter & Reuter, 2017). They are subject to administrative penalties to reinforce compliance with these provisions. Finally, the PPFA actively reinforces democratic processes by meticulously regulating the flow of financial resources in politics (Sambo & Sadiki, 2024). This ensures that electoral results and policymaking are not unduly influenced by financial power.

Challenges in reinforcing and implementing legal challenges

The enforcement of political party funding in South Africa faces several obstacles that impede its effectiveness. This indicates that despite an exhaustive legal and institutional framework, South Africa continues to face significant enforcement challenges in campaign financing regulation (HSRC, 2026). Beaumont (2024), for instance, highlights limited institutional capacity, enquiry delays, and political parties' reliance on self-reporting as reasons that hamper successful compliance. Furthermore, loopholes in disclosure thresholds and the use of indirect funding sources make it difficult to uncover violations, reducing the overall efficacy of regulatory agencies like the IEC. One key concern is the IEC's inadequate ability to monitor compliance and adequately examine anomalies because of a lack of resources (Modise, 2024). This makes it difficult to regularly carry out punishments.

Financial

There are many changes to regulate political fundraising, which include numerous legal, constitutional, and practical challenges (Kadir *et al.*, 2025). South Africa's PFRPA (RSA, 1997) offers proportional national funding but does not limit private fundraising or transparency requirements. Sule (2021) argues that this hybrid approach has resulted in a "virtual one-party state dominated by private funding," thereby undermining electoral fairness. In addition to problems with the legal and policy frameworks for campaign financing, Hamada and Agrawal (2021) contend that fair political

competition faces significant challenges, including foreign and anonymous donations, uncontrolled third-party spending, and illegal funding. Since 2021, the main funders of South African political parties have come from the Oppenheimer family, Capitec founder Fynbos, Michèle le Roux, Martin Morshuis, Batho Batho Trust and Patrice Motsepe. Collectively, these funders have donated more than R2,000 million from 2022 to 2024. For instance, ANC received the largest funding of R137 million, DA R125.3 million, Action SA R65.9 million, and EFF R3.5 million. In 2023, the EFF was accused of failing to disclose private funding. Additional challenges to guaranteeing fair political competition in campaign financing include adapting regulations to evolving societal norms, enhancing transparency through digital technologies, and fostering diversity, according to Hamada and Agrawal (2021). To address some of the challenges, the IEC requires disclosure and compliance, including the declaration of donations of R200,000 or more, whether in cash, goods, or services. The party must also open a separate bank account for all their donations, keep financial records, and submit annual audited statements. They may also not accept donations above R30 million from any one donor, from foreign governments or agencies (except for training or policy), or from government departments or state-owned entities.

For Hamada and Agrawal (2021), however, campaign finance creates obstacles to political engagement. Women, youth, and underprivileged groups lack financial means and experience prejudice from political donors. Hence, Cagé (2020) points out that wealthy parties and candidates frequently win elections with greater financial resources, while underprivileged groups face obstacles caused by inadequate resources. For example, high nomination fees from political parties limit women's participation in Kenyan politics, and financiers tend to support male candidates over female ones. In Nigeria, Sule (2021) found that Nigerian youths were barred from participating in the 2019 General Election because of high campaign spending. This implies that the underprivileged and smaller parties lack access to financial resources to compete in elections.

Implementation

Another challenge entails implementing policies. One notable challenge pertains to the underutilisation of the MPDF. The absence of Consequent Management has led some parties to violate the

PPFA enacted in April 2021. Research indicates that while disclosure requirements have indeed enhanced transparency, the MPDF remains underutilised (HSRC, 2026). This suggests that the fund's potential to foster fair political competition is not being fully realised, possibly because of insufficient awareness, accessibility barriers, or a lack of compelling incentives for political entities to engage with it. Hence, the Achilles' heel of the framework remains public perception and the trust deficit (Chen *et al.*, 2024). Public sentiment is always concerned about undue donor influence and elite capture. This shows that public faith remains low and that people doubt the effectiveness of current regulations in keeping powerful interests from taking over the political arena (Dinham, 2016). This is worsened by legislative bodies such as the National Assembly, which vote to increase secrecy around party funding.

Corruption

The most difficult and persistent issues facing modern democratic administration in Africa are preventing corruption and undue influence in the legal and legislative frameworks controlling campaign finance (Amadu & Ibrahim, 2025). According to Kadir *et al.*, (2025), campaign finance laws, by regulating the sources and use of political funds, are intended to promote accountability, transparency, and fairness. Nevertheless, legal loopholes allow wealthy individuals, private companies, and interest groups to exert disproportionate influence over political parties and candidates. The prevalence of corruption within the campaign financing led to the prioritisation of corporate elites at the expense of ordinary people. Furthermore, another difficulty in limiting undue influence primarily stems from information asymmetry. Gaskins *et al.*, (2019) maintain that the vote box's accountability mechanism is seriously undermined when the public is unable to identify the source of a candidate's financial backing. In the South African context, failure to declare sources of funding, such as CR17, is corruption. Hence, the absence of transparency in funding leads to corruption by both individuals and political parties.

Transparency and Accountability

This chapter found that improving transparency and public accountability in campaign finance remains a fundamental problem in many democratic systems (Sule, 2021), particularly in those with weak political institutions and poor enforcement mechanisms.

Amadu and Ibrahim (2025) add that the legal and legislative frameworks governing campaign finance pose significant challenges to maintaining openness and accountability, because of the inherent conflict between protected political expression and the prevention of corruption. The passage of the PPFA (RSA, 2018) in South Africa was a watershed moment, but the framework's implementation remains challenging, particularly in enforcing openness amid private donor influence (Ndamase, 2020). South African politics faces a challenge: private funding is vital to democracy, but it also risks allowing corporate interests to unduly shape public policy and procurement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, effective campaign finance regulation is critical to the survival of South African democracy (Scarrow, 2018). While legislative frameworks such as the Political Parties Funding Act and institutional enforcement measures are in place, enforcement and transparency persist. Addressing these flaws requires stronger oversight, improved accountability measures, and ongoing political determination to ensure fair political competition and public trust in the democratic process.

To address these issues, there is a growing demand to increase transparency and accountability measures within the campaign financing system (Sule, 2021). Enhancing the IEC's investigative powers and resources, lowering disclosure standards, and improving the timeliness of public reporting would all increase supervision and public scrutiny. Furthermore, implementing digital reporting systems and enhancing inter-agency collaboration may improve monitoring and reduce the risk of noncompliance. In addition to addressing these problems, other recommendations have been made. It is critical to strengthen the IEC's capabilities, notably by increasing funding, technical competence, and investigative authority. Lowering the disclosure threshold will address loopholes and ensure that smaller donations are recorded, thereby boosting openness. Penalties should be strengthened to make them more significant and effective in discouraging noncompliance.

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Chapter Six

Impact of Campaign Financing on Electoral Integrity and Governance

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Introduction

Since the third wave of democratisation, sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has witnessed significant political liberalisation (Nur, 2015). Multiparty elections have become routine, yet the quality of these elections varies considerably. Electoral integrity, defined as adherence to democratic norms of transparency, fairness, and competitiveness, remains fragile in many states (González *et al.*, 2024). Amongst the most underexamined yet powerful influences on electoral integrity is campaign financing (Norris, 2017a). Campaign financing affects who can compete, how campaigns are conducted, and whose interests prevail after elections (González *et al.*, 2024). In SSA, high campaign costs, weak enforcement of finance laws, and opaque funding networks have contributed to corruption, vote buying, clientelism, and elite capture (Philip, 2026). The central argument is that poorly regulated or unregulated campaign finance systems distort democratic competition, weaken public accountability, and promote governance corruption, whereas transparent and enforceable systems can enhance institutional legitimacy and policy responsiveness.

Despite the growth of multiparty democracy in sub-Saharan Africa, there remains a significant gap in understanding how weak or ineffective campaign finance regulations undermine electoral integrity, diminish public trust in democratic institutions, and negatively influence governance outcomes after elections. This article, therefore, examines the impact of campaign financing on electoral integrity.

Literature Review

Campaign Finance and Democratic Competition

Political finance plays a central role in shaping electoral competitiveness by influencing how resources are distributed amongst political parties. As Philip (2026) argues, financial resources enable communication, voter mobilisation, and long-term organisational sustainability. However, when funding is excessive or lacks transparency, it can distort competition by creating uneven playing fields, entrenching incumbents, and constraining opposition parties. Across sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), campaign expenditures have increased significantly, intensifying concerns about fairness and accountability.

In Nigeria, campaign financing is widely regarded as amongst the most expensive on the continent. Nwozor *et al.*, (2021) note that elections are frequently financed through illicit or opaque sources, while legal spending limits under the Electoral Act are routinely exceeded. High campaign costs function as a gatekeeping mechanism: aspirants must secure backing from wealthy patrons, business elites, or entrenched political networks to mount credible campaigns. This restricts participation to established elites and marginalises reform-oriented or grassroots candidates. Financial pressures are also evident during party primaries, where inducements to delegates have been reported, thereby distorting intra-party democracy even before general elections occur. Although Nigeria's elections are highly competitive, they are often transactional rather than programmatic, with vote-buying and material inducements playing prominent roles (Thuynsma, 2025).

In contrast, South Africa presents a distinct model shaped by long-term dominant party rule. Since 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) has maintained electoral dominance. While elections are procedurally free and fair, financial asymmetries have historically favoured the ruling party (Anciano & Piper, 2018). For many years, party donations were not subject to mandatory disclosure (Thuynsma, 2025), enabling opacity that advantaged the ANC through established donor networks linked to business elites and state contracts. Opposition parties such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) faced structural disadvantages in fundraising capacity (Mattes *et al.*, 2024). Although public funding is provided through the Represented Political Parties Fund, state resources have not fully equalised competition. In dominant party systems, access to state resources, donor networks, and business

relationships often creates a self-reinforcing cycle that consolidates incumbency advantage (Langfield, 2014).

Ghana is frequently cited as a model of democratic stability in West Africa, characterised by peaceful alternation of power between the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) (Asekere, 2019). Electoral competition is genuine and often closely contested. However, heightened competition has also driven up campaign expenditures, with parties investing heavily in media outreach, grassroots mobilisation, and constituency engagement. Fundraising pressures have consequently intensified (Asekere, 2019). Although vote buying is less systemic than in Nigeria, political patronage remains influential, particularly at local levels (Paalo *et al.*, 2025). Campaign finance, therefore, shapes alliance formation, mobilisation strategies, and patterns of political support.

In Kenya, democratic competition is closely intertwined with ethnic coalition-building (Oyugi, 2024). Campaign financing frequently flows through elite networks aligned with ethnic constituencies, where financial contributions are used to consolidate alliances and mobilise regional support bases. Presidential elections, in particular, involve substantial expenditures, as coalitions require coordinated financing across multiple ethnic blocs (Fjelde & Höglund, 2018). The Election Campaign Financing Act (Republic of Kenya, 2013) sought to regulate spending and enhance transparency, but repeated delays in implementation have limited its effectiveness (Opongo, 2022). This regulatory gap has allowed campaign expenditures to escalate with minimal oversight.

It is essential to note that, while electoral systems across SSA differ in structure and competitiveness, campaign finance consistently shapes the quality and fairness of democratic contestation. Whether through dominant party advantages, elite gatekeeping, transactional politics, or coalition financing, financial dynamics remain central to understanding electoral competition in the region.

Clientelism and Vote Buying

Clientelism refers to a system of contingent exchange in which political support is traded for material benefits (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2022). Unlike programmatic politics, where citizens vote based on policy platforms and ideological preferences, clientelist politics is transactional, personalised, and typically short-term in orientation (Kusche, 2020). Hicken *et al.*, (2022) conceptualise

clientelism as a dyadic relationship in which politicians distribute targeted goods, services, or favours in exchange for electoral backing.

Clientelism remains central to understanding political finance dynamics across Africa. Thuynsma, (2025) shows that increased electoral competition in Ghana strengthened vertical accountability but simultaneously intensified expectations of patronage (Appiah & Abdulai, 2017). In Kenya and Nigeria, practices such as vote-buying and direct cash transfers during campaigns have become normalised features of electoral politics (Odugbose, 2026). Rather than encouraging policy-based competition, these practices substitute deliberation with transactional exchanges, weakening democratic integrity and increasing incentives for corruption once candidates assume office (Odugbose, 2026).

Vote-buying is a specific and visible manifestation of clientelism, in which voters receive cash or material goods in return for electoral support (Erasmus, 2020). Across many sub-Saharan African democracies, vote-buying operates alongside patronage networks, identity-based mobilisation, and informal redistributive arrangements (Primus, 2021).

Nigeria provides one of the clearest examples of entrenched clientelistic politics on the continent (Adefisoye & Braimah, 2023). Vote-buying is widely reported in both national and subnational elections. Electoral observers have documented the distribution of cash at polling stations in practices colloquially described as “see and buy,” where voters are expected to reveal their ballot choice before receiving payment (Nwagwu *et al.*, 2022). Thuynsma (2025) notes that many Nigerian voters anticipate material inducements during election cycles, reflecting the deep institutionalisation of transactional politics (Shehu *et al.*, 2025). Political parties often allocate substantial portions of campaign resources to direct voter payments, food distribution, and goods such as clothing or agricultural inputs. In Kenya, although ethnic bloc voting remains a dominant organising principle of competition, direct vote buying also occurs (Otele, 2026). Candidates distribute cash, household items, and foodstuffs during campaign periods. The scale and intensity of these practices tend to vary depending on the competitiveness of constituencies.

In Ghana, vote-buying is present, especially at the constituency level, where candidates may offer small cash payments, gifts, or transportation reimbursements to voters (Appiah, 2023). However, large-scale and systematic vote buying appears less deeply entrenched than in Nigeria (Achel, 2023). Active civil society

engagement and media scrutiny have contributed to exposing electoral malpractice, thereby limiting the normalisation of such practices at the national level.

South Africa presents a somewhat different pattern. Large-scale vote-buying at polling stations is relatively uncommon compared to Nigeria or Kenya (Jensen & Justesen, 2014). Instead, clientelism tends to operate through party-centred patronage networks, where access to state resources, public employment, or procurement opportunities reinforces political loyalty. In this context, clientelism is more embedded in institutionalised party structures than in direct cash exchanges at the voter level.

Governance Consequences

The governance implications of campaign financing in sub-Saharan Africa are profound and systemic (Isser *et al.*, 2024). When electoral competition becomes financially intensive and heavily dependent on private donors, wealthy elites, or illicit networks, political accountability shifts away from citizens and towards financiers (Sule, 2021). Instead of public office serving as a platform for policy delivery and public goods provision, it becomes a mechanism for recouping campaign investments. This dynamic produces a self-reinforcing cycle: high campaign costs generate corruption incentives, corruption finances future campaigns, and governance institutions gradually erode.

While the manifestations differ across South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, the structural consequences follow similar patterns: policy capture, procurement corruption, elite cartelisation, weakened public institutions, and declining public trust (Ferraz & Finan, 2025). Financialised electoral competition distorts public policy priorities, weakens institutions, entrenches elites, and undermines democratic legitimacy. Where campaign financing depends heavily on private donors or illicit networks, elected officials may prioritise financiers' interests over public goods provision (Samaratunge & Alam, 2021). This dynamic generates a self-reinforcing cycle: high campaign costs incentivise corruption, corruption finances future campaigns, and governance institutions gradually erode.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the impact of campaign financing on electoral integrity and governance in sub-Saharan Africa requires a multi-theoretical approach. Campaign finance does not operate in

isolation; it interacts with institutional capacity, political culture, and accountability structures. Three complementary theoretical lenses are particularly useful: Institutional Theory, Clientelism Theory, and Accountability Theory. Together, they explain how regulatory weaknesses, patronage politics, and transparency deficits shape democratic outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya.

Institutional Theory, as discussed by Lammers *et al.*, (2014) and Kauppi (2022), emphasises the role of formal structures and rules in shaping organisational and political behaviour. Institutional Theory emphasises the role of formal rules, regulatory bodies, and enforcement mechanisms in shaping political behaviour (Lammers *et al.*, 2014). Laws governing campaign finance, such as spending limits, disclosure requirements, and donation caps, are only effective when supported by strong enforcement institutions (Kauppi, 2022). Many sub-Saharan African states have adopted formal campaign finance regulations (Sule, 2021). However, the existence of legislation does not guarantee compliance.

Furthermore, it suggests that regulatory failure occurs when oversight bodies lack independence (Lammers *et al.*, 2014). Enforcement agencies lack resources, sanctions are weak or inconsistently applied, and political elites interfere with regulatory processes (Iván, 2025). Institutional Theory has been widely used in governance and regulatory studies, including by Kauppi (2022) in analysing campaign finance reforms in Africa, and Risi *et al.*, (2023) in examining regulatory failures in developing democracies. This theory is directly relevant to this study as it explains how institutional capacity (independent oversight bodies, enforcement mechanisms) influences campaign finance compliance, which in turn, affects electoral integrity and governance outcomes. Weak institutions in sub-Saharan Africa often result in poor enforcement of campaign finance laws, thereby enabling corruption and electoral malpractice. A key limitation of Institutional Theory is that it tends to overemphasise formal rules while underestimating informal practices such as patronage and political culture. To address this limitation, this study integrates Clientelism Theory to capture informal political dynamics that institutions alone cannot explain.

Clientelism Theory, articulated by Hicken (2011), examines the exchange-based relationships between politicians and voters. Clientelism theory provides insight into how campaign financing reinforces patronage networks and transactional politics

(Hicken 2011). In clientelist systems, political competition revolves around personalised exchanges rather than policy-based debate (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2022). Financial resources are used to mobilise support through targeted benefits. In Nigeria and Kenya, campaign financing frequently funds direct vote buying or community-level inducements (Touchton & Wampler, 2025). Financial resources are converted into short-term material benefits in exchange for electoral support. In Ghana, clientelism operates more subtly but remains influential. Competitive elections increase incentives for targeted spending in swing constituencies (Appiah & Abdulai, 2017).

Politicians distribute goods, sponsor local events, or promise development projects tied to electoral support. South Africa presents a distinct form of clientelism (De Kadt & Larreguy, 2015). Rather than widespread polling-station vote buying, patronage often operates through party-centred networks involving procurement contracts, appointments, and internal party loyalty systems (Weiss, 2020). Clientelism Theory explains why financial resources are strategically deployed to secure loyalty rather than promote policy persuasion. Campaign finance, thus, becomes embedded in broader patronage structures (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2022). Clientelism has been extensively studied in comparative politics. Berenschot and Aspinall (2022) explored patronage politics in Asia and Africa, while Touchton and Wampler (2025) examined vote-buying practices in Nigeria and Kenya. Similarly, Appiah and Abdulai (2017) analysed electoral inducements in Ghana, while De Kadt and Larreguy (2015) examined patronage networks in South Africa. A limitation of Clientelism Theory is that it may overgeneralise voter behavior as purely transactional and overlook ideological or policy-driven voting. This study addresses this weakness by combining it with Institutional and Accountability theories to provide a more balanced explanation that includes both formal structures and citizen oversight mechanisms.

Accountability Theory, as conceptualised by Papadopoulos (2023) and Bergsteiner (2012), focuses on mechanisms that ensure that public officials are answerable for their actions. Accountability Theory focuses on mechanisms through which citizens hold political leaders responsible for their actions (Bergsteiner, 2012). Papadopoulos (2023) conceptualises accountability as comprising two dimensions: answerability (the obligation of officials to explain and justify actions) and enforcement (the capacity to sanction misconduct). Campaign finance transparency plays a critical role in enabling accountability. This theory is crucial in explaining how campaign finance transparency (e.g., disclosure of donations and expenditures)

enables citizens, civil society, and institutions to hold political actors accountable. It directly links transparency mechanisms to electoral integrity and governance quality, making it central to this study. Accountability Theory has been widely applied in governance and public administration studies, particularly in analysing transparency, anti-corruption efforts, and democratic accountability mechanisms across developing regions (Rachmad, 2022; Bergsteiner, 2012). A key limitation is that Accountability Theory assumes the existence of active citizens and effective enforcement systems, which may be weak in many sub-Saharan African contexts (Papadopoulos, 2023). This study addresses this limitation by integrating Institutional Theory (to assess enforcement capacity) and Clientelism Theory (to account for voter behaviour in low-accountability environments)

Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review based on secondary data to analyse the impact of campaign financing on electoral integrity and governance. This approach was selected because it enabled the researchers to gather, synthesise, and summarise existing evidence related to the relationship between campaign financing, electoral processes, and governance outcomes, which was subsequently analysed.

The review incorporated both national and international sources, drawing from peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, books, online sources, and other published materials. Relevant data were collected from several academic databases, including Google Scholar and Scopus. Given the scope of the literature review, the search was limited to relevant disciplines, including public policy and administration, political science, public governance, and other multidisciplinary fields. Data extraction was conducted using specific keywords in titles and abstracts, including *electoral*, *financing*, *campaign*, *democratic*, *policy*, and *integrity*. A thematic discourse analysis approach was applied to interpret and synthesise the findings. To enhance validity and reliability, the researchers minimised bias in the selection of secondary sources and used multiple keywords and search strategies to identify relevant literature.

Regulatory Framework for Campaign Financing in Sub-Saharan Africa

The regulatory framework governing campaign financing in sub-Saharan Africa refers to the legal and institutional systems

established to regulate how political parties and candidates raise, spend, and disclose funds during electoral campaigns (Isser *et al.*, 2024). These frameworks are intended to ensure transparency, fairness, and accountability in the electoral process. By establishing rules regarding donation limits, spending caps, disclosure requirements, and public funding, regulatory systems seek to prevent undue influence by wealthy individuals or organisations and to protect the integrity of democratic competition (Akinola, 2025). Across sub-Saharan Africa, most countries have adopted formal laws governing political finance, often incorporated into electoral legislation, anti-corruption statutes, or political party acts. However, the effectiveness of these frameworks varies significantly depending on institutional capacity, enforcement mechanisms, and political commitment to transparency (Thakkar, 2025).

Legal Foundations of Campaign Finance Regulation

Campaign finance regulation in sub-Saharan Africa typically rests on several key legal instruments (Abdulai & Issahaku, 2024). These include constitutions, electoral laws, political party acts, and anti-corruption legislation. Many countries have introduced rules governing campaign financing as part of broader democratic reforms following the wave of political liberalisation in the early 1990s (del Rio & Higashijima, 2025). The primary objectives of these laws are to promote transparency in political funding, prevent corruption and undue influence in politics, ensure equitable competition amongst political parties and protect the integrity of elections (Abdulai & Issahaku, 2024). For instance, countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya have enacted laws requiring political parties to disclose certain funding sources and to regulate campaign expenditures (Sule, 2021). These laws are designed to prevent political actors from using illicit or undisclosed funds to gain unfair advantages during elections.

Institutional Oversight Mechanisms

Regulatory frameworks are implemented through institutions responsible for monitoring compliance and enforcing campaign finance laws (Esavwede *et al.*, 2025). In most sub-Saharan African countries, electoral management bodies (EMBs) play a central role in regulating political financing (Nwebo & Ihejirika, 2022). These institutions are responsible for overseeing election processes, registering political parties, and ensuring adherence to campaign finance regulations.

Examples include: the Independent Electoral Commission in South Africa, the Independent National Electoral Commission in Nigeria, the Electoral Commission of Ghana and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission in Kenya. These bodies typically require political parties and candidates to submit financial reports detailing their funding sources and campaign expenditures. In theory, such reporting mechanisms enhance transparency and enable public scrutiny of political finance practices (Olayode *et al.*, 2026). However, the effectiveness of oversight institutions often depends on their independence, financial resources, and legal authority to sanction violations (Akinola, 2025). In many cases, electoral commissions face political pressure, limited investigative powers, and inadequate resources, which constrain their ability to enforce regulations effectively.

Disclosure and Transparency Requirements

Transparency is a central pillar of campaign finance regulation. Disclosure requirements obligate political parties and candidates to report the sources and amounts of campaign donations as well as expenditures incurred during election campaigns (Van Biezen, 2003). The purpose of these requirements is to allow voters, civil society organisations, and the media to monitor financial flows in politics. Some countries have introduced thresholds that require disclosure only when donations exceed a specified amount (Briffault, 2010). Others require periodic reporting of all financial contributions. Public access to these reports can strengthen democratic accountability by enabling citizens to identify potential conflicts of interest between political leaders and their financial supporters (Papadopoulos, 2023). Despite these provisions, compliance levels vary across sub-Saharan Africa (Mbago *et al.*, 2016). In many cases, political parties either fail to submit detailed financial reports or they submit incomplete disclosures.

Limited transparency undermines the objective of ensuring fair political competition and reduces public trust in electoral processes (Norris, 2017b).

Campaign Spending Limits and Public Funding of Political Parties

Another important regulatory tool used in many African electoral systems is the imposition of campaign spending limits (Sule, 2021). Spending caps are designed to reduce the influence of wealth in politics and to ensure that elections remain accessible to candidates

with limited financial resources. Countries such as Nigeria have established spending limits for different political offices, including presidential, gubernatorial, and legislative races (Adetula, 2024; Okeke & Nwali, 2020). Kenya has also attempted to introduce spending ceilings through its campaign finance legislation (Opongo, 2022). These measures are intended to prevent excessive financial competition that could distort electoral fairness.

However, enforcement of spending limits remains one of the most significant challenges in the region. In practice, campaign expenditures often exceed legal thresholds because of weak monitoring systems and the use of informal funding channels (Avis *et al.*, 2022). Political actors may also rely on third-party spending or undisclosed contributions to circumvent regulatory limits (Avis *et al.*, 2022).

To reduce reliance on private donors and promote more equitable competition, several sub-Saharan African countries have introduced public funding systems for political parties (Philip, 2026). Public funding typically provides financial support to parties represented in parliament or those meeting specific electoral performance thresholds. The rationale for public funding is to reduce the influence of wealthy donors in politics, support smaller parties, enhance political pluralism and promote transparency in campaign financing (La Raja, 2025). For example, South Africa provides public funding to represented political parties through a statutory funding mechanism (Mampane, 2025). Ghana also allocates state resources to support certain electoral activities (Felitse & Owusu-Mensah, 2024). These funding systems aim to create a more balanced electoral environment. However, public funding alone cannot fully address campaign finance challenges. Political parties often supplement public funds with private donations, which may still introduce risks of corruption or undue influence (Philip, 2026).

Enforcement Challenges

Despite the presence of legal frameworks, enforcement remains a major weakness in campaign finance regulation across sub-Saharan Africa. Several factors contribute to regulatory challenges (Gottschalk, 2016). First, oversight institutions often lack adequate resources and technical capacity to monitor financial transactions effectively (Akuche & Akindoyin, 2025). Campaign finance oversight requires specialised auditing expertise, digital monitoring systems, and investigative powers that many regulatory bodies do not possess

(Briffault, 2010). Second, political interference can undermine enforcement efforts. Regulatory institutions may be reluctant to sanction powerful political actors because of concerns about political retaliation or institutional instability (Peksen, 2021). Third, the prevalence of informal economic systems makes it difficult to track financial flows in political campaigns (Meagher, 2013). Cash transactions, unregistered donations, and informal fundraising activities often escape regulatory scrutiny (Avis *et al.*, 2022). As a result, many campaign finance laws function more as normative guidelines than as strictly enforced rules (Avis *et al.*, 2022).

Recommendations for Improving Campaign Finance Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa

Improving campaign finance regulation is critical to strengthening electoral integrity and democratic governance in sub-Saharan Africa (Fundisi & Atanga, 2023). While many countries in the region have enacted laws regulating political financing, implementation gaps remain because of weak institutions, lack of transparency, and limited citizen oversight (Islam, 2025). Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms that combine institutional strengthening, technological modernisation, regional coordination, and civic engagement (Fundisi & Atanga, 2023). The following policy recommendations outline key approaches that can improve transparency, accountability, and fairness in political financing systems.

Strengthening the Enforcement Autonomy of Electoral Commissions

Electoral commissions are the primary institutions responsible for administering elections and enforcing campaign finance regulations (Isaac *et al.*, 2024). Their responsibilities typically include monitoring political party finances, verifying compliance with campaign spending limits, reviewing financial disclosure reports, and investigating violations of electoral laws (Sule & Sambo, 2024). However, in many sub-Saharan African countries, electoral commissions face serious limitations that undermine their ability to regulate campaign finance effectively (Fundisi & Atanga, 2023). These limitations include political interference, inadequate financial resources, weak investigative authority, and limited legal powers to sanction offenders. When regulatory agencies lack institutional independence, enforcement becomes selective or ineffective, allowing

political actors to circumvent campaign finance rules with minimal consequences (Isser *et al.*, 2024).

Strengthening the autonomy of electoral commissions is, therefore, essential for improving campaign finance governance. Institutional autonomy can be enhanced through several mechanisms (Norris, 2017a). First, transparent and merit-based procedures for appointing electoral commissioners can reduce political influence. Second, electoral commissioners should be granted independent budgetary authority to prevent financial dependence on the executive branch. Third, legal frameworks should empower these institutions to conduct financial audits of political parties and impose meaningful penalties for violations.

In countries such as Nigeria and Kenya, electoral commissions have legal mandates to regulate campaign finance but often struggle to enforce these regulations because of political pressure and insufficient monitoring capacity (Odugbose, 2026). Strengthening institutional independence would allow these bodies to perform their oversight functions more effectively and contribute to greater electoral accountability. Research suggests that independent electoral management bodies are essential for credible elections because they help to prevent political manipulation and ensure consistent application of electoral laws (Nwebo & Ihejirika, 2022). When electoral commissions are empowered to enforce campaign finance regulations impartially, they can reduce the influence of illicit funds and enhance public trust in democratic processes.

Introducing Real-Time Digital Disclosure Systems

Transparency in political financing is one of the most effective tools for preventing corruption and ensuring accountability in electoral systems (Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010). Traditional campaign finance disclosure systems often rely on post-election reporting, where political parties submit financial statements after electoral campaigns have concluded (Briffault, 2010). While such systems provide some transparency, they are often insufficient for detecting irregularities during the campaign period. Real-time digital disclosure systems offer a more effective alternative by requiring political parties and candidates to report donations and campaign expenditures through online platforms as they occur (VanGetson, 2003). These systems enable immediate public access to campaign finance data, allowing voters, journalists, civil society organisations, and regulators to monitor financial flows throughout the electoral cycle.

Digital reporting platforms also improve administrative efficiency and data accuracy. Automated systems can standardise reporting formats, reduce human errors, and facilitate data analysis (Cruz, 2025). Regulatory agencies can use digital tools to identify suspicious financial patterns, such as unusually large donations or excessive campaign expenditures. In sub-Saharan Africa, adopting digital disclosure platforms could significantly improve transparency and reduce opportunities for illicit political financing (VanGetson, 2003).

Public access to campaign finance data would enable independent researchers and civil society organisations to scrutinise political funding sources more effectively (Krah & Mertens, 2020). International organisations have emphasised that digital transparency mechanisms strengthen electoral accountability by enabling continuous monitoring of political finance. According to Fundisi and Atanga (2023), transparent reporting systems play a critical role in preventing corruption and ensuring fair political competition. However, implementing digital disclosure systems also requires investment in technological infrastructure, cybersecurity safeguards, and training for electoral officials (Briffault, 2010). Governments must also ensure that digital platforms remain accessible to the public and that data is published in user-friendly formats.

Expanding Public Funding to Reduce Private Dependency

The high cost of electoral campaigns in many democratic systems often forces political candidates to rely heavily on private donors (Birch, 2022). When political parties depend on wealthy individuals, corporations, or interest groups for campaign funding, this can create conflicts of interest that undermine democratic governance (La Raja, 2025). Expanding public funding for political parties is widely regarded as an effective strategy for reducing the influence of private money in politics. Public funding systems provide financial support to political parties based on criteria such as electoral performance, parliamentary representation, or compliance with regulatory standards (Lipcean, 2022). In South Africa, for example, represented political parties receive public funding through a statutory political party fund designed to support their administrative and electoral activities (Mampane, 2025). Similar systems exist in several other democratic systems worldwide, where public funding helps to ensure that smaller parties and independent candidates

can compete more effectively. Public funding can enhance electoral fairness by reducing disparities in campaign resources amongst competing political actors (Sule, 2023). It can also decrease the likelihood that political leaders will become dependent on private donors whose financial contributions may influence policy decisions after elections (Casas-Zamora, 2024).

Scholars have argued that public funding mechanisms can strengthen democratic competition by levelling the playing field and reducing corruption risks associated with private campaign contributions (Birch, 2022; Casas-Zamora, 2024). However, public funding must be accompanied by strict transparency and accountability mechanisms to prevent misuse of public resources (Islam, 2025). Effective public funding systems typically include mandatory financial reporting, independent audits, and clear penalties for mismanagement of funds (Furmanchuk, 2023). When implemented properly, these safeguards can ensure that public funding contributes to electoral integrity rather than creating new opportunities for corruption.

Harmonise Regional Standards Under the African Union

Campaign finance regulations vary significantly across sub-Saharan African countries. While some states have relatively comprehensive political finance laws, others have weak or incomplete regulatory frameworks (Okeke & Nwali, 2020). These differences create inconsistencies in electoral governance across the region and can undermine collective efforts to promote democratic standards. Harmonising campaign finance regulations under regional institutions such as the African Union could help to address these disparities (Masumbe, 2025). The African Union has already adopted several governance frameworks aimed at promoting democratic principles, including the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (Abebe & Fombad, 2021). Expanding these frameworks to include clearer guidelines on political finance regulation could strengthen electoral accountability across the continent.

Regional standards might include minimum disclosure requirements for political donations, limits on campaign spending, and guidelines for public funding systems (Gupta *et al.*, 2024). By establishing common regulatory principles, African states could reduce the risk of regulatory loopholes that allow illicit financial flows to influence electoral processes.

Regional cooperation also facilitates peer review and monitoring amongst member states (Stretea, 2024). Election observation missions conducted by regional organisations often evaluate political finance practices as part of broader electoral assessments (Diepreye, 2024). These evaluations can encourage governments to adopt best practices and improve compliance with democratic standards. Furthermore, harmonised regulations can help to address cross-border political financing challenges, including foreign donations or transnational campaign networks (Masumbe, 2025). Establishing regional standards would, therefore, strengthen both national and continental approaches to protecting electoral integrity.

Empower Civil Society Watchdogs

Civil society organisations play a vital role in promoting transparency and accountability in political finance (Mohyeddin, 2024). Independent watchdog groups, investigative journalists, and advocacy organisations often act as informal regulators by monitoring campaign finance practices and exposing irregularities that may otherwise go unnoticed (Scott, 2024; Nguyen & Nhan, 2024). In many sub-Saharan African countries, civil society groups have been instrumental in advocating for political finance reforms and promoting public awareness about electoral integrity (Fundisi & Atanga, 2023). Their activities include analysing financial disclosure reports, conducting election monitoring, and publishing investigative reports on political funding practices (Habib *et al.*, 2018).

Empowering civil society watchdogs requires creating an enabling environment that supports freedom of expression, access to information, and independent monitoring of electoral processes (Minko, 2023). Governments can strengthen civil society oversight by ensuring that campaign finance data is publicly accessible and by protecting the legal rights of organisations engaged in election monitoring (Mohyeddin, 2024). Access to open data is particularly important for effective civil society oversight (Liambomba, 2023). When financial disclosures are published in accessible formats, researchers and journalists can analyse political finance patterns and identify potential conflicts of interest between political actors and their financial supporters (Scherf, 2024).

Studies show that strong civil society engagement enhances democratic accountability by increasing public scrutiny of political actors and reducing opportunities for corruption (Agu *et al.*, 2024; Grimes, 2013). In countries such as Ghana and South Africa, civil

society organisations have played significant roles in advocating for greater transparency in political financing and exposing governance scandals (Asomah, 2020). By strengthening partnerships between regulatory institutions and civil society actors, governments can create a more comprehensive oversight ecosystem that promotes electoral integrity and democratic governance (Mohyeddin, 2024).

Conclusion

The regulatory framework governing campaign financing in sub-Saharan Africa represents an essential component of democratic governance (Isser *et al.*, 2024). Through legal provisions on disclosure, spending limits, public funding, and institutional oversight, these frameworks seek to promote transparency, fairness, and accountability in electoral competition. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these regulations is often constrained by weak enforcement institutions, political interference, and informal financial practices (Walker, 2023). As a result, the gap between legal provisions and practical implementation remains a significant challenge. Strengthening campaign finance regulation in sub-Saharan Africa requires improving institutional capacity, enhancing transparency mechanisms, and ensuring the independence of oversight bodies (Mohyeddin, 2024). Without effective enforcement, regulatory frameworks cannot fully prevent the influence of money in politics or safeguard the integrity of democratic processes (Ramadhan & Azhari, 2023).

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Chapter Six

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Chapter Seven

External Influence and International Donors

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Introduction

It is generally accepted that the African continent is the largest beneficiary of foreign aid, which is understood as the voluntary transfer of financial and material resources from one country to another (Hydara, 2023). (Sule 2018:88) define foreign aid to mean “all forms of assistance that a country derives from other governments or multilateral agencies and financial institutions to fulfil noticeable gaps.... It takes diverse forms such as grants, loans, foreign direct investment (FDI), joint ventures, and technical assistance.” If the identified gap is a lack of financial resources to ensure free, fair, and credible elections, donors lend a helping hand accordingly.

As a rule, the primary aim of foreign aid is to address crisis situations and promote development. However, in Africa, it appears that foreign aid has failed in both respects (Okeke-Uzofike, 2003). The advent of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa (especially in the 1990s) was a welcome development which set this region on a new political path. This phase saw many countries in the region relinquishing one-party state systems and authoritarian regimes to embrace democratic practices. This positive change also triggered certain challenges that sub-Saharan countries had to contend with. Firstly, some of these African countries had never experienced electoral politics, so they had to start from scratch. Secondly, they lacked the requisite skills and knowledge to run democratic elections. Electoral bodies had to be established and capacitated. Thirdly, they did not have enough funds to run these democratic elections, so they had to raise funding from elsewhere. Fourthly, most of them still had strong ties with their erstwhile colonisers, who were reluctant to totally disengage and allow African countries to govern themselves independently. Fifthly and lastly, in many African countries in the sub-Saharan African region, it was taken for granted that former

liberation movements deserved to lead these democratic countries, which was the nemesis of democratic principles and values.

Amid all these complications, sub-Saharan African countries were vulnerable to foreign influence in the form of donations or foreign financial aid, skills training, observer missions, and other forms of external influence disguised as “advice” to countries holding democratic elections. This should not be misconstrued to mean that sub-Saharan African countries are the only ones that have been receiving foreign aid before, during, and after elections. It is an irrefutable fact that “foreign aid has a well-established and significant role in international relations” (Cherkaoui, 2002:2). Corroborating this view, Brett (2020:22) avers that “the unity and stability of the global economic system has always depended on aid relationships that sustain the concessional transfers from rich donor countries to poor countries.” This statement immediately invokes power dynamics. Those countries with money and material resources have an edge over recipient countries or countries that are beneficiaries of donor funds and other forms of assistance. The primary objective of donor funds is to promote both human and economic development. During elections, the usual stated reason is to ensure democratic consolidation in the country, thereby ensuring a fair outcome. The hidden reasons are never stated upfront.

Within this context, the purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it examines how foreign influence has affected sub-Saharan African countries. Secondly, the chapter discusses the impact of such influence on the political sovereignty of sub-Saharan African countries, their economic independence, and regional stability.

Structurally, the chapter begins by discussing the two theories on which it is grounded – realism and Aid Allocation Theory. It then discusses the impact of donor aid on the political sovereignty of sub-Saharan African countries. This section is followed by a discussion of the resurgence of multi-party democracy in the 1990s and how this phase exposed sub-Saharan African countries to greater donor aid, which came in various forms because of internal weaknesses within Africa. Drawing lessons from these experiences, the next section proposes a way forward before concluding.

Theoretical Framework

Conventional practice within the research community dictates that researchers should anchor their research projects on clearly defined

theoretical frameworks. This is undertaken to ensure that the study can be easily located within the broader context. De Vos *et al.*, (2005:36) hold the view that generally, theory entails propositions that present a “systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations between variables to explain and predict phenomena.” This addresses the utilitarian role of theory in research. According to Abend (2008), theories can be perceived as fundamental building blocks used to develop a coherent and structured understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of human interactions and societies. This reiterates the point made earlier that theories provide the broader context within which phenomena can be interpreted and understood. Writing in the context of social sciences, Van der Walt (2024) espouses the view that theoretical frameworks generally serve as the intellectual scaffolding that guides research processes. Implicit in this statement is the argument that any research project that does not include theory – directly or indirectly – misses out on the potential to receive more credibility within the research community. It is for this reason that Lederman and Lederman (2017:593) state that “the lack of a theoretical framework is the most frequently cited reason for our editorial decision not to publish a manuscript in the *Journal of Science Teacher Education*.” This is so because theory provides a guiding framework for any study across academic disciplines.

Flowing from the above, this chapter is anchored on two theories: realism and Aid Allocation Theory. Each of these two theories helps to explain why funding agencies and governments decide to fund sub-Saharan African governments during elections. An explanation of these theories will help to look beyond the stated reasons for funding African elections. Specific case studies used in this chapter will illuminate our understanding. At a macro level, the two theories complement each other by providing a broader context for the flow of funds from outside to sub-Saharan African governments during elections. At a micro level, each theory helps to explain certain activities. Each of these theories is explained below.

Realism

Realism aims to explain the realities of international politics so that they can be easily understood. One of the defining features of realism is its state-centricity, meaning that everything revolves around the state. Put differently, this theory is predicated on the understanding that the state has absolute authority. Thus, the theory’s first assumption is that the state is the principal actor in international

relations. Its second assumption is that the state is the unitary actor. The third assumption is that “decision-makers are rational actors in the sense that rational decision-making leads to the pursuit of the national interest” (Antunes & Camisã, 2013:1). Phrases such as anarchy, authority, mistrust, self-help, and survival are amongst the key concepts associated with realism (Waltz, 1990). Under this theory, states are determined to amass power even at the expense of other states. Such power derives from various sources, including diplomatic, financial, and military power. Within this context, there is a view that realism is a theory that focuses on the competitive and conflict-driven nature of global interactions (Antunes & Camisã, 2013; Afiq & Rasid, 2024). This view assumes that no one is responsible for bringing about order. Instead, there is constant competition in which each state strives to prevail over others, using any means necessary. This includes using donor aid to achieve national interests.

Flowing from the tenets of this theory, when countries provide aid (financial or material) to other states, such action is primarily driven by national interests, even if these are not spelt out at the outset. This justifies the relevance of this theory in this chapter.

Aid Allocation Theory

Aid Allocation Theory is somewhat self-explanatory. It explains *how* and *why* aid is provided or allocated to certain countries and their political parties. One characteristic of this theory is its examination of how donors distribute foreign assistance. The three critical pillars of this distribution are the donors’ interests (including political and economic interests), the needs of recipients of donor funds (driven by poverty and humanitarian factors), and the effectiveness of aid (including issues such as governance and absorption capacity). At times, aid allocation is accompanied by interventionist mechanisms, but in other instances, such mechanisms are non-existent (Bourguignon & Platteau, 2025). One of the critical questions asked when it comes to donor funding is “why do some poor countries receive so much aid and others receive so little?” (Isopi & Mavrotas, 2006:1). This question leads to the conclusion that a country’s needs do not entirely determine if that it will receive aid. Other factors are considered, including the anticipated direct and indirect benefits to the donor country. This aligns well with the dictates of realism theory, as explained above, regarding advancing national interests. Amongst the reasons that trigger donor funding are commercial, humanitarian, political, and strategic. In each case, the donor country

prioritises national interests. Therefore, Aid Allocation Theory is relevant to this chapter.

Donor aid and its impact on political sovereignty in Sub-Saharan African countries

When foreign donor aid is provided by countries, agencies, and institutions with genuine intentions and is in the hands of the right people, it can contribute immensely to the economic and social development of sub-Saharan African countries. Similarly, the impact of donor aid provided to political parties depends on the intentions of the donor countries, institutions and agencies and the calibre of the political leadership of the recipient countries. If performed properly, donor aid can contribute to democratic consolidation. In instances where donor aid is provided with ill intent or driven by national interests rather than a willingness to help political parties, it can significantly undermine the political sovereignty of national governments in recipient countries. Also, if donor recipients are not vigilant, such aid can be harmful.

Historically, donor aid to African countries is not a new phenomenon. Aid programmes dealing with African countries date back to the colonial era. Between the 1920s and the 1930s, colonial powers injected funds into their African colonies obtained following the Berlin Conference, convened by Otto von Bismarck in Berlin, Germany, from 1884 to 1885. It aimed to establish rules governing the peaceful colonisation of the African continent. Even at this stage, foreign aid was not given to African countries for their benefit. Instead, the primary objective was resource extraction. Moreover, it was undertaken to strengthen ties between donors and their colonies for the former's benefit. Donor funds also assisted Western colonisers in claiming bragging rights for better service in their colonies than their European competitors. Importantly, colonial powers used these funds to build colonial infrastructure so that they could extract and export African raw materials to their home countries in Europe (Terreblanche, 2011; Alemu, 2019). Later, the infrastructure would enable these European colonial powers to transport finished goods for colonial consumption (Brett, 1973), thereby further enriching colonial (donor) countries. In that sense, donor support was always motivated by ulterior motives.

Following the end of the Second World War in September 1945, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the USA, and the

World Bank (WB) provided financial aid to address the challenges caused by the war. As many African countries gained political independence between the 1950s and 1980s, donor aid was used to support reconstruction in the previously colonised countries. But in the 1970s and 1980s, this donor funding came with terms and conditions through structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which led to state development giving way to market-led development (Lal, 1984). Some of the independent sub-Saharan African countries became one-party states, while others were led by dictators who did not embrace democratic principles. Nigeria was one of the African countries ruled by dictators (Oyededeji, 2021). So, elections were a rare phenomenon in some of these African countries. Others held elections as a formality to return dominant political parties to power under the guise of embracing democratic principles.

As mentioned earlier, donor support is not unique to sub-Saharan Africa. This is a global phenomenon which is influenced by the political context. Corroborating this view, Brett (2020:32) observes that “changes in the global system, the political climate and crises, have produced significant changes in the power relations and political strategies that govern the international aid system.” While these developments transcend geographical boundaries, the difference is that when donors give funds to sub-Saharan African countries, they generally appear genuine and empathetic. However, close analysis reveals that the intentions are not as innocent as they seem. Instead, “foreign aid only crystallises the donor’s leverage” over recipient states (Cherkaoui, 2022:3). This is the general principle. National interests always take centre stage whenever funding is provided. McGillivray (2003:5) observes that “emanating from influential research conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s, there is a widespread belief that donors pursue political, economic and strategic interests in inter-country aid allocation.” A related view is that “political conditionalities” accompany donor funding from various governments (Stokke, 1995). This also applies to electoral funding. Foreign governments and aid institutions support certain political parties as an investment. Their unstated expectation is that, once in power, those political parties will work closely with the donors who financially assisted them. The two theories discussed above fit neatly into this analysis and observation. Donor countries provide funds to satisfy their national interests.

Generally, the structural vulnerability of certain countries and their political stability determine how donor funds are used

and how those countries are susceptible to foreign manipulation (Guillaumond & Chauvet, 2001; Chauvet & Guillaumond, 2022). There is an observation that countries with the worst governance are generally also the poorest. Therefore, donor aid is least effective in those countries where it is most needed (Collier, 2007; Kanbur & Sumner, 2012). If external donors were genuinely concerned about improving the lives of people in recipient countries, they would be providing more funding to countries with the worst governance and the lowest incomes.

Unlike the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) allocation formula or the aid allocation rule proposed by Collier and Dollar (2002), national governments' decision to provide financial aid to sub-Saharan African countries holding elections is primarily informed by national interests. In the process, some political parties are preferred by these donor countries for their own reasons and envisaged benefits. Sometimes, financial flows negatively impact recipient countries by skewing electoral fairness. Parties that have access to funding stand a better chance of winning elections, even through dubious means. Sadly, challenging them through normal legal processes proves difficult at best and impossible at worst. For example, the parties that are beneficiaries of such donor funding engage in illegal and corrupt practices such as vote-buying and bribing those within the justice system to rule in their favour. One general observation is that the institutional weaknesses of many beneficiary countries, coupled with incidents of misuse of donor funding, have not been accorded the significance that they deserve (Alesina & Weder, 2002). This leads to the conclusion that the problem caused by donor funding could be more serious than we know.

This synopsis leads to the conclusion that while external donor funding has assisted many countries in sub-Saharan Africa in achieving their development objectives, it has also produced negative outcomes. Ideally, electoral donor funding is supposed to assist recipient countries in their democratic consolidation efforts. However, such funding has a negative impact on the political sovereignty of recipient countries. The continued mineral extraction from sub-Saharan African countries to Western countries can best be explained through a cogent analysis of external donor funding. While this is a global phenomenon as mentioned above, the economic weaknesses of many sub-Saharan African countries leave the region vulnerable to exploitation by external donors. Some external governments have direct contact with African governments.

Others do so through third parties such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

A quick focus on certain sub-Saharan African countries that embraced multi-party democracy during the third wave of democracy from the 1990s will illuminate some of the arguments made thus far.

The resurgence of multiparty elections in sub-Saharan Africa and the influence of foreign aid

The 1980s and 1990s are classified in the broader literature as marking the third democratic wave (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Nwosu, 2012). It was during this time that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa abandoned authoritarian, socialist, and single-party regimes and both wittingly and unwittingly embraced multiparty democracy. A quick look at the period between 1990 and 1999 confirms this assertion.

The 1990 Constitution of Namibia set the country on a new political path. Chapter 1 Article 1 states that “The Republic of Namibia is hereby established as a sovereign, secular, democratic and unitary state founded upon the principles of democracy, the rule of law and justice for all” (LAC, 1990). This Constitution aimed to breathe life into Namibia’s political independence, achieved on 21 March 1990. Henceforth, the country was to operate as a sovereign state independent of South Africa, which had controlled it up to that point. The South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) has won every election in Namibia since 1990. Successive elections have entrenched the democratic ethos in Namibia. But SWAPO’s political survival has been made possible by foreign donors. Such funding began with a UN-sponsored Donors Conference which was held in New York on 21–22 June 1990. Pledges obtained from around ten countries exceeded R700 million in total (du Pisani, 1991).

On 31 October 1991, Zambia held its first multi-party democratic elections after about three decades of one-party rule by the United National Independence Party (UNIP), which was led by President Kenneth Kaunda, who ascended to power on 24 October 1964. Frederick Chiluba’s Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), which was registered on 4 January 1991, won the election and Chiluba succeeded Kaunda as Zambia’s new President (Chikulo, 1993). Chiluba claimed to draw from his trade unionist and Christian experiences to set the country on a new political path. Unfortunately, after his first term in office, Chiluba’s popularity waned. He approached Parliament, trying to change the Constitution so that

he would be allowed to run for the presidency for a third term when his constitutional second term ended. He failed. Chinese interest in Zambia attracted foreign influence (Mngomezulu, 2013).

The 1992 Constitution in Kenya repealed Section 2A of the 1963 independence constitution and reintroduced multiparty democracy, which led a few political parties to become active in politics (Kabarak University, 2021). This change meant that the Kenya African National Union (KANU) would now have real competition. As the country prepared for the 2002 general election, President Daniel arap Moi made vain attempts to amend the Constitution to allow him to run for a third term as president. When his plan failed, he anointed Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Kenya's first President, Jomo Kenyatta, to be his successor. This plan, too, was scuttled by the formation of a fourteen-member National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), which won the 2002 general election with Mwai Kibaki as its leader. Democracy prevailed. Moi had been kept in office by foreign donors that pumped money into KANU, ensuring that it remained in power (Brown, 2001).

In April 1992, Ghana adopted a new constitution, which led to the country's return to civilian rule on 7 January 1993, after a suspension since 1979. The Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), led by Jerry Rawlings, announced the lifting of the ban on party politics in May 1992. A law governing the formation of political parties was passed (Abdulai, 1992). The elections of 29 December 1992 saw Jerry Rawlings ascend to the presidency as a civilian ruler under the National Commission on Democracy (NCD) ticket, after his party obtained 60% of the vote. He beat the National Patriotic Party (NPP), led by historian Professor Adu Boahen, and the People's National Convention (PNC), led by Dr Hilla Limann, who had led Ghana's Third Republic. Amongst the funders of NCD was the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

In South Africa, the emergence of F.W. de Klerk as the leader of the National Party (NP) and his ascendance to the presidency following the NP's victory in the 1989 general election set the country on a new pedestal. Addressing Parliament on 2 February 1990, de Klerk announced that the liberation movements would be unbanned and that their leaders would be released from prison, with those in exile allowed to return to the country. This historic announcement reconfigured the political landscape in South Africa. The Groote Schuur Minute of 2 May 1990 and the Pretoria Minute of 6 August 1990 paved the way for the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) talks. Following these talks, the Interim Constitution of 1993

was adopted as Act 200 of 1993 (RSA, 1993). The first democratic election of 26–28 April 1994 was guided by this Constitution. The idea was that, soon after the election, the government would embark on drafting a post-apartheid Constitution. This was undertaken when the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996) was signed into law by President Nelson Mandela on 10 December 1996 in Sharpeville, Soweto in Gauteng province. This place was symbolic. It was in Sharpeville where 69 people lost their lives on 21 March 1960 when they protested the carrying of passes by black people – an event that was organised by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) led by Robert Sobukwe. Since then, foreign aid has flown into the country.

Malawi and Mozambique also embraced multiparty democracy in 1994. In this context, Malawi transitioned from a one-party system under President Hastings Banda to a multiparty democracy. In 1994, the country adopted a new constitution to guide its political affairs henceforth. Similarly, after 15 years of a destructive civil war between Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) and Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), in 1994 Mozambique held its first multi-party democratic elections. Foreign aid came into the country from various Western sources.

After many years of military rule, in 1999 Nigeria adopted a new constitution which returned the country to civilian rule (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). This change saw Olusegun Osanjo becoming the country's President from 29 May 1999 to 29 May 2007. Since then, Nigeria has remained a democratic country, enjoying foreign donor aid. This point is expounded below.

Other sub-Saharan countries such as Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Togo also embraced the third wave of democracy, thereby attracting foreign aid.

Foreign aid and party politics after the third democratic wave

As demonstrated through the few selected examples cited above, the 1990s saw many sub-Saharan African countries embracing multi-party democracy by relinquishing autocratic rule and one-party states. While all these examples brought a glimmer of hope that the sub-Saharan African region would now experience political sovereignty, social and political stability, and economic

growth and development, the unintended consequence was that this political phase attracted more foreign aid to these African countries. Such foreign donor aid both assisted democratic consolidation and tempered these countries' political sovereignty. Consequently, one of the criticisms levelled against foreign aid is that donor countries sometimes use their financial support to interfere with the economic and political activities of recipient countries. They dictate to them what to do, what their focus should be, and even support certain political parties to advance their own national interests once those parties are in government. In many instances, when sub-Saharan African countries embraced democracy in the 1990s, there was a shift from direct foreign aid to global agreements with individual countries (Cherkaoui, 2022:3). Most decisions about the political and socio-economic future of sub-Saharan African countries were taken outside the African continent. These decisions were *inter alia* epitomised by a focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2016 (Brett, 2020; Carboni & Casola, 2020).

Regarding electoral support, foreign aid continued to come from different sources and in different ways to achieve different goals – some of which were not openly stated but operated clandestinely. As discussed later in this chapter, in many instances, foreign governments provided direct support to their African counterparts. In other instances, specific political parties preferred by these foreign governments received electoral support, enabling them to win elections and become indebted to their foreign donors. Generally, NGOs were also used to hide some of the Western governments' real intentions. These institutions continue to play a critical role in service delivery and democratic consolidation in sub-Saharan Africa to this day. However, sometimes they are used as avenues to influence national, regional, and African continental politics. This undermines the political sovereignty of sub-Saharan African countries. It was for this reason that a report by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), which focused on West Africa, made the following recommendation on NGOs: "ECOWAS and its technical and financial partners must carefully identify and support credible NGOs while putting in place safeguards to avoid their turning into supporters of political parties or candidates" (ISS, 2015:10). This means that political parties that receive campaign funds from foreign donors through NGOs should be kept under the spotlight to ensure that they are not used to advance

foreign interests, which undermine African national and regional political sovereignty.

But African leaders contribute to the dominance of NGOs in African politics by failing to provide services to their people. One observation is that globally, NGOs are generally perceived by several agencies and policymakers as more efficient and cost-effective in providing services to communities than national, provincial, and local governments. The situation becomes worse in Africa, where leaders struggle to deliver services to their people. (Shivji, 2007; Mlambo *et al.*, 2021). There is sufficient evidence to show that NGOs played a critical role in shaping enterprise policy in Zimbabwe (Karanda & Toledano, 2020). While the influence was positive in improving the lives of rural communities, it was impossible to dismiss foreign influence in Zimbabwean politics through NGOs.

Some foreign countries openly and directly fund elections in many African countries for their own national interests. This was the case with the 1994 general elections in Mozambique. The USA played a critical role in funding these elections, which followed 15 months of civil war. Belgium also provided support through its embassy. Britain's support came through the British Department for International Development (DFID). Multilateral institutions such as the United Nations (UN) provided financial aid through the UN Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ). Such support brought hope to the people of Mozambique, but did not nullify all potential and real challenges associated with foreign donor aid to African countries (Chapman, 1995).

When Malawi held elections in 1994, the issue of money exchanging hands for the wrong reasons surfaced. Those with access to funds were prone to engage in corruption. A report from observer missions addressed this issue. The report stated *inter alia* that "There were several allegations that voter certificates were being purchased by agents of the political parties in areas where they had weak support for the purpose of destroying them. The UDF claimed that this was being done by the MCP, while the latter responded that those buying votes were UDF agents dressed as MCP supporters" (ICJ, 1994:11). The 1994 election was not an exception. There were similar concerns in other elections as well. Studies conducted in Malawi covering the period 1999 to 2013 provide detailed accounts of foreign aid and its role in Malawi's politics (Khomba & Trew, 2022).

In South Africa, party funding has been a contentious issue for some time, leading to the promulgation of the Political Party Funding Act No 6 of 2018 (RSA, 2018), which came into effect on 1 April 2021. In 2024, it was amended to include independent candidates who were allowed to participate in elections in accordance with Chapter 2, Sec 19(3)(b), which states that “Every adult citizen has the right to stand for public office and, if elected, to hold office” (RSA, 1996).

Studies on private funding of political parties provide interesting statistical data. The African National Congress (ANC) has been the governing party in the first six administrations until it lost its majority in the 2024 general election. Roland “Tiny” Rowland, a British business tycoon, supported the ANC from 1989 until 1996. His support included jet rides and the purchase of a house for Oliver Tambo (Alemu, 2019). Other donors included King Fahd of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the government of Taiwan, Libya’s Col. Muammar Gaddafi, Nigeria’s General Sani Abacha, Sheikh Zaid bin Sultan al-Nahayan of the United Arab Emirates, Russia’s Viktor Vekselberg, Uruguay’s Gaston Savoi, and Czech fugitive Radovan Krejcir. Institutions such as Anglo American, British Aerospace, France’s Thales, and Japan’s Hitachi Power Africa also funded the ANC in different ways at different times. Observers read more into these donations, arguing that they were not “innocent” donations (Alemu, 2019).

But the ANC is not the only political party that has benefited from foreign donations. The Democratic Alliance (DA) received donor aid from Anglo American, AngloGold, and other institutions. The same funders also funded the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). Previously, the New National Party (NNP) received donations from individuals, including Italian Count Riccardo Augusta (Alemu, 2019).

Some foreign organisations continue to fund political parties in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve certain goals, such as democratic consolidation. These include the German political foundation, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). Amongst the political parties that it funds in South Africa are ActionSA, Congress of the People (COPE), DA, and IFP. Across Africa, the KAS funds political parties that are centre-right or conservative. Given its close association with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the KAS also funds political parties with Christian-democratic leanings. The difference with the KAS is that it generally does not provide direct funding to political parties. Instead, its support comes through capacity-building, training programmes, and political dialogues. Therefore, an argument

could be made that its primary objective is to promote democratic consolidation.

The same cannot be said about organisations whose primary aim is to influence the politics of sub-Saharan African governments. This happens in two ways. Firstly, foreign donors support the ruling party to ensure continuity, especially if they have established ties with those parties. This has been the case in countries like Botswana, which received financial support from Western countries; Central African Republic, which received donor funds from Russia; Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which received financial support mainly from the USA; Mozambique, which received donor funds from the Group of 19 and other Western countries and agencies; Namibia which received most of the financial support from China and the USA; Nigeria which received donor funds from countries like France and the USA, etc.

Secondly, some foreign donors support new and opposition political parties with the intention of keeping the governing party in check or removing it from power. Historically, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) provided donor support to RENAMO in Mozambique to counter FRELIMO. Cuba and Russia supported UNITA in Angola to counter the MPLA. Parties such as DA, COPE, and others in South Africa have received foreign donor aid to reduce the ANC's majority, with the aim of eventually removing it from power. The ANC has made this job easier through its self-destruction and allowing factionalism to weaken it. Similar examples can be found across sub-Saharan Africa of such foreign aims, which came in the form of money, arms, ammunition, and uniforms. Cold War politics, epitomised by competition between capitalism and socialism (or communism), pitted countries against one another as they provided foreign aid to African countries. Each donor aimed at maintaining one of the two forms of organising society. Their support was intentional.

During elections, foreign aid comes in different forms. As mentioned earlier, some countries and organisations support electoral education, while others support individual political parties to running their election campaigns. Where foreign donor support prioritises the national interest of the donor country, the intention to influence the electoral outcome becomes clear. The party that emerges victorious after receiving financial and material support from a foreign donor abandons its election promises to satisfy the

needs and wishes of the foreign donor. In that sense, the political sovereignty of African countries is undermined.

Even multilateral institutions are guilty of this practice. They provide financial aid to African countries and then dictate to them what they must do. Even the economic policies of these African countries address the mandate of multilateral institutions. The Structural Adjustment Policies referred to earlier operate in the same way. They prescribe to African countries how to craft their policies and dictate the economic direction that donor and recipient countries should follow. This undermines the political and economic independence of many sub-Saharan African countries. Consequently, foreign donor aid is sometimes frowned upon because of its negative impact on the political sovereignty of sub-Saharan African countries. When an African country refuses to abide by the rules set by multilateral institutions, it is ostracised and hit with economic sanctions. This was the case, for example, with Zimbabwe under the late President Robert Mugabe. He experimented with foreign aid and found it too prescriptive and undermining his country's political sovereignty. President Mugabe decided to refuse foreign aid. Surely, the consequences were not good for Zimbabwe, but he made a political statement that the political sovereignty of African countries could not be compromised under the guise of embracing the much-revered multilateralism.

Therefore, while foreign donor aid has contributed to development in sub-Saharan Africa, it is an irrefutable fact that such aid has also undermined the region's political sovereignty. In the same vein, African countries have been prevented from pursuing their own economic policies to accommodate those that are prescribed by foreign donors. The same applies to electoral politics. Some political parties have been sustained by foreign donor aid, while others have been removed from power by opposition and new political parties through the influence of foreign donors. For this reason, foreign donor aid has tampered with political sovereignty in sub-Saharan Africa.

The way forward for sub-Saharan African countries

Given the many challenges that sub-Saharan African countries continue to wrestle with, foreign donor aid will continue to flow into the continent. What is needed is for the African political leadership to be vigilant, learn from previous experiences, and improve

where possible. One of the major concerns is that sub-Saharan African countries are taking too long to put their house in order. For instance, although the continent is endowed with a wide range of mineral resources, there are still no industries to process them. These are exported to foreign countries as raw materials only to be sold back to African countries at inflated prices. When election time comes, foreign donors see it as an opportunity to influence national politics by supporting the political parties that they want to see emerge victorious, so that they can work with them to advance their national interests. This undermines the political sovereignty of these African countries. The political leadership in sub-Saharan Africa should invest in industrialisation to end this trajectory of perpetual dependence on foreign aid, thereby compromising the political sovereignty of this African region.

Another concern is the level of corruption. The money available in sub-Saharan African countries does not go where it is needed most. Instead, it ends up in the hands of a few individuals, either politicians or those connected to them. There are two complementary views. One is that foreign aid does not cause corruption (Hydara, 2023). Another one states that no empirical link has been demonstrated thus far between the secrecy surrounding the funding of political parties and the presence of corruption (Sarakinsky, 2007; van Biezen, 2010). However, this does not dismiss the fact that corruption thrives under foreign aid and leaves sub-Saharan African countries susceptible to reliance on more foreign donor aid. As a way forwards, these African countries should refrain from corrupt activities.

The third concern is that many sub-Saharan African countries have stronger links with their erstwhile colonisers than with other African countries. This enables former colonisers to influence electoral outcomes in Africa. Africans can easily address this issue by strengthening ties with fellow African countries. Initiatives such as Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) would assist in this regard. Once the African continent is economically viable, foreign donor aid would be a choice rather than an inevitable necessity. Sub-Saharan African countries would be able to own their economic policies, fund their political parties, and sustain their various development programmes.

The fourth and related concern is the number of political parties in each country with no clear ideological differences. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have over 200 political parties, with some, like the DRC, having over 900, and South Africa recording over 800.

Even a small country like Lesotho has over 60 registered political parties. The mushrooming of new political parties on the eve of an election creates fertile ground for foreign donors to influence the country's politics. By reviewing or amending national constitutions to curb the number of political parties, sub-Saharan African countries would be able to control their internal politics. Many global economies have few political parties that have clearly defined ideologies. The UK and the USA only have two dominant political parties – the Labour Party and the Conservative Party in the UK and the Democratic Party and the Republican Party in the USA. Sub-Saharan African countries can draw lessons from these experiences.

The fifth concern is the growing tendency to retain senior citizens as Heads of State. At 93, Paul Biya remains Cameroon's President. Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa is 83 years old. A few others are in their 70s, which has become the norm. The danger of keeping senior statesmen and women in positions of power is that there is little chance for innovation and fresh ideas. The risk is that such leaders may be tempted to keep their political parties in power, even to the extent of employing undemocratic practices. This invites foreign interference. Burkina Faso's President Ibrahim Traore is a refreshing example. At only 38 years old, he has been able to reposition his country. Under his leadership, Burkina Faso has multiple community-funded tomato processing factories. He has also launched the Itaoua electric vehicle. This shows, through practical examples, how young leaders can rebrand the African continent. If more sub-Saharan African countries were to progress in this manner, party politics would not be the primary focus. Instead, economic development would take centre stage, create proper jobs, reduce the number of political parties that have driven political careerism, and thus render foreign donors insignificant. This would help to protect Africa's political sovereignty.

Conclusion

In conclusion, foreign donor aid, which is a global phenomenon, has dominated African politics. Internal weaknesses within Africa have left the continent and its sub-Saharan region vulnerable. While it cannot be denied that foreign aid has kept many sub-Saharan countries viable political entities, it is equally true that these donations have rendered African countries perpetual beggars. External aid given to political parties on the eve of an election is

usually driven by national interests. It is for this reason that realism and Aid Allocation Theory have been used to anchor this chapter. The main argument is that donor aid is driven by the donor country's national interests. Sub-Saharan African countries that are recipients of donor aid become perpetual beggars if they fail to learn from the past and reposition themselves. Internal weaknesses such as corruption, a thirst for power, as evidenced by the mushrooming of political parties, lack of unity, failure to industrialise, and maintaining strong links with former colonisers leave African countries vulnerable and susceptible to foreign influence. Surely, there is nothing wrong with external donor funding because it is a global phenomenon. However, this poses a challenge when such funding interferes with national politics, especially when certain political parties are funded to influence the election outcome. This chapter contends that foreign donor aid should not be assumed to be a panacea for sub-Saharan Africa's endemic challenges. Instead, foreign support should be welcomed to supplement what African countries are doing on their own. The status quo cannot be sustained indefinitely if the African continent hopes to be truly free from the legacy of colonialism. The political leadership must lead by example. President Traore has already demonstrated how this journey to economic and political emancipation could start. Unless this approach is embraced, foreign countries will continue to determine the economic and political fate of sub-Saharan Africa and the entire African continent.

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Chapter Seven

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Chapter Eight

Reforms and Innovations in Campaign Financing

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Introduction

Campaign financing refers to the mobilisation of individuals, corporations, political parties or charitable organisations for funds to promote candidates, political parties or policy initiatives and referendums (Gulzar *et al.*, 2022; Wood & Grose, 2022). It includes all monetary and in-kind contributions and expenditures incurred or collected by candidates, parties or supporters. Why does campaign finance matter? In a democracy, political parties and candidates require resources to engage the electorate in discussions on how best to run the country, city, or community. However, opaque funding of the political process creates corruption risks that jeopardise democracy (Wood & Grose, 2022). People have a right to know where those who wish to run their country or area obtain their campaign funding, and how they use it. However, there is a growing concern about the dominance of moneyed interests and non-transparent funding, intensifying the risk of corruption, state capture, clientelism, and the erosion of democratic accountability (Gyampo, 2015; Amadu & Ibrahim, 2025). Increasingly, instances of pervasive political corruption, especially vote buying and electoral fraud, are noted in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries, including Kenya, Uganda, Benin, Madagascar, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, Tanzania, and South Africa (Nwozor *et al.*, 2021).

Across SSA, governments, electoral commissions and civil societies alike, in responding to concerns of corruption, vote-buying, illicit funding and unequal competition, have intensified reforms

in campaign financing. Spending limits, disclosure requirements, public funding provisions, and stronger enforcement mechanisms have been introduced to promote transparency and fairness have been introduced (Amadu & Ibrahim, 2025; Boateng & Ameyaw, 2021). At the same time, campaign financing, also known as political financing, election financing or political donations, is increasingly becoming a digital affair (Lupato *et al.*, 2024). Innovative financing solutions such as digital fundraising, mobile money micro-donations, and online platforms that enable parties or candidates to receive small contributions from dispersed supporters are on the rise. Technological advancements ranging from real-time reporting tools to citizen-led monitoring and open-data initiatives are improving oversight and public accountability (Dommett *et al.*, 2020).

Despite growing attention to campaign financing reforms, notable literature examines institutional and legal reforms in sub-Saharan Africa (Boswell, 2019; Amadu & Ibrahim, 2025; Boateng & Ameyaw, 2021). Existing scholarship lacks empirical evidence on how these reforms perform under rapidly expanding digital fundraising systems and weak enforcement environments. First, most literature articulates formal rules such as spending limits, disclosure laws, public funding and oversight institutions, rather than evaluating implementation outcomes such as compliance, effectiveness, sanctions and real reductions in illicit funding and campaign corruption. This exposes a gap in whether these reforms produce real improvements in campaign transparency and fairness beyond the law on paper. Only 51 African countries have donor information available digitally through oversight institutions (Transparency International, 2025).

Equally, while innovations such as mobile-money funding, crowdfunding and online micro-donations are on the rise, the literature remains fragmented on how these technologies reshape regulations and risks in campaign financing. Digital fundraising, while it can broaden participation through example micro-contributions, introduces new oversight and enforcement challenges, which the literature rarely provides an evaluation of within the SSA context. Likewise, there is a need to update lessons learned from reforms and innovations in countries such as Kenya, Ghana, Senegal, and South Africa to fit today's digital and informal financing realities across the region. The literature needs updating on what works, under what conditions, and how technology-driven financing should be governed without undermining fairness. Against this backdrop, this chapter aims to examine how recent reforms, innovative campaign financing mechanisms, and emerging best practices in SSA are reshaping

campaign financing through the lens of transparency, accountability, and equitable electoral competition.

Methodology

The chapter adopted a desktop review method, a form of secondary research that involves gathering, analysing, and synthesising existing data, documents, and literature rather than collecting new data first-hand. It is a compilation of the empirical method for literature review and a theoretical method for processing previously collected empirical (Topolewski *et al.*, 2023). As desktop review is a methodological approach that facilitates identification and analysis of policies, and grey area literatures (Barbieri *et al.*, 2025) which aligns with this study as it aims to review and analyse relevant literature, including published articles, books, reports and other grey sources to identify trends and experiences based on the reforms made and innovative approaches towards campaign financing in SSA. To synthesise the existing secondary literature and map reforms and innovations in campaign financing, the implementation outcomes, challenges and best practices, a scoping method is applied. Scoping reviews are a type of evidence synthesis that aims to identify and map the breadth of evidence available on a particular topic, field, concept, or issue, within or across a defined context or contexts. Unlike a systematic review, a scoping review synthesises knowledge and maps concepts, evidence, and gaps in related research to provide a broad overview of the existing knowledge and its gaps (Alemu, 2019). Scoping reviews play a key role in the evidence ecosystem, a focus of this study (McMeekin *et al.*, 2020).

Campaign Financing in SSA: Trends, Experiences and Outcomes in Reforms and Innovations between 2020 and 2026

Political campaign financing is a central element of democratic competition; however, when inadequately regulated, it can drive significant political corruption. Weak regulatory systems, non-transparent funding mechanisms, and the undue influence of private money undermine electoral integrity and weaken democratic accountability. Globally, the excessive influence of money in politics compromises electoral integrity, reinforces elite control, and erodes public confidence in democratic institutions (Transparency International, 2025). This challenge is particularly evident in many developing democracies, where campaign finance systems are

often weak, oversight mechanisms are limited, and private funding flows into political processes with minimal transparency (Amadu & Ibrahim, 2025). Under such conditions, elections risk shifting from genuine contests of ideas to transactions driven by financial power (Lessig, 2011). Consequently, political campaign financing, corruption and unfair competition have remained major concerns for democracy globally.

Between 2020 and 2026, campaign financing has witnessed substantial technology-driven transformations and regulatory reforms. Governments, electoral commissions and civil societies, in responding to increasing concerns of vote-buying, illicit funding, state capture and unequal competition, have instituted numerous legal and regulatory reforms. These changes are characterised by a rapid increase in total spending, the growing prominence of digital fundraising and ongoing efforts to address the transparency and accountability gaps associated with independent expenditure groups. Key reforms and innovations implemented are primarily focused on bolstering digital regulation, implementing small-donor matching systems, and increasing real-time transparency. The content below highlights key trends and regulatory reforms that have happened between 2020 and 2026 across various SSA countries.

A surge in campaign costs is noted in many SSA countries. Campaign financing has become increasingly expensive, yet weakly regulated. Kenya provides the clearest example of escalating campaign expenditure in Africa. Kenya's 2022 general elections were the most expensive in the country's history, with presidential campaigns estimated at over KES 10 billion for a single coalition, which was largely financed through personal wealth, business networks and private donors (Ihembe *et al.*, 2026). Despite the presence of laws, such as the Election Campaign Financing Act, over KES 252 billion circulated outside the formal banking system during the 2022 election in Kenya (OurKenya, 2026). This highlights the scale of informal and opaque financing and a limited implementation of the laws because of political resistance, reflecting a lack of political will. In Tanzania and Uganda, research shows that electoral liberation has increased the cost of running for office, making campaigns financially demanding. Large portions of campaign funds originated from personal wealth, business networks and private donors, often with limited disclosure. In Uganda, candidates spend between US\$43,000 and US\$143,000 to be elected to parliament (Kanyinga & Mboya, 2021). In Tanzania, ruling party candidates consistently outspend the opposition, creating an uneven field while weak enforcement permits actors to circumvent

financing rules with minimal consequences (Babeiya, 2024). Campaign financing strengthens incumbency advantage and limits genuine electoral competition.

To counter the influence of large, undisclosed donations, jurisdictions have implemented public campaign financing systems that match small donations with public funds. Small donor matching systems encourage candidates to focus on grassroots fundraising. Several African states, such as Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania, have reformed campaign finance but stop short of matching funds. Weak administrative capacity, low transparency, dominance of elite financing and clientelism, and limited tax bases to sustain matching subsidies are cited as reasons for the absence of a small-donor matching system in SSA (Sule, 2021). However, policy debates and donor-supported reforms are moving towards incentivising small contributions, reducing dominance of “big men” financing and strengthening electoral accountability. Most SSA countries rely instead on public subsidies, private donations, or pooled funds, not a matching mechanism. Few partial, emerging, or analogous approaches have emerged in SSA that are often confused with small-donor matching but are structurally different. For instance, the South African Electoral Commission has established the Multi-Party Democracy Fund (MPDF), in which private donations are pooled and then redistributed to parties according to a specific formula (10% equal and 90% proportional representation). The MPDF reflects a reform logic similar to matching by reducing dependence on large private donors.

Emerging reform trend in SSA countries is also focusing on tightening disclosure and anti-coordination rules. Growing efforts to limit the coordination between campaigns and independent expenditure groups (Super PACs) are noted across SSA countries. Globally inspired reforms, similar in spirit to the DISCLOSE Act in the US, include a requirement for disclosure for private donations above a threshold in South Africa (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2026), regulations on campaign spending as noted in Kenya, Nigeria (Amadu & Ibrahim, 2025; Okeke & Nwali, 2020) and Tanzania (Bak & Therkildsen, 2022). However, the major underlying concern is the hidden political financing and covert coordination, which is highly relevant across SSA. These actors rarely appear as formal “Super PACs”; instead, they operate through civil society fronts, business networks, foundations, or informal campaign structures. Progress in the region is constrained by informalities and enforcement gaps.

While these efforts are emerging, they are uneven and focus on transparency rather than matching caps. For instance, Uganda lacks a comprehensive statute that specifically regulates campaign finance and limits on parties' or candidates' expenditures. With unregulated spending, candidates are free to spend as much as they can mobilise; hence, campaigns have become highly monetised.

A notable global push for accountability is noted in most SSA countries. Most African states practice a multi-party system with a dominant ruling party that gives incumbents an advantage. Under such a setup, competition is high, exerting political pressure on parties and electorates to remain relevant and secure sufficient elective posts, fuelling financial pressure and, in turn, illegal financing sources. Consequently, international bodies, such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), are pushing for reforms that treat campaign finance within the broader anti-corruption frameworks, aiming to curb vote-buying, illicit financing and patronage through increased oversight and strict penalties for unlawful contributions (International IDEA, 2026).

The above trend reflects a wider change in African politics, where having significant financial resources is becoming a key factor in winning elections. As campaign costs continue to rise, it becomes harder for ordinary candidates to compete, leaving the field largely to wealthy individuals or those supported by influential economic interests. Equally, it reflects the efforts of SSA states and the international community in facilitate accountability and fairness in politics. However, the question remains whether the existing reforms are sufficient to address the challenges that SSA states face. To what extent is the political arena reshaped by the advancement in information and technology, impacting campaign financing? The next subsection highlights the innovations in campaign financing and the inherent risks that they entail.

Over the last decade, African elections have been shaped not just by what happens at polling stations but also by what happens online. A myriad of activities from campaigning, financing and the actual elections are increasingly becoming a digital affair (Lupato *et al.*, 2024). Currently, elections are no longer just fought at polling stations, but increasingly shaped by narratives spreading in the digital space. Misinformation and disinformation generated using artificial intelligence (AI) and powered by the rapid spread and wide reach of social media have made elections increasingly vulnerable to manipulation. This has increased the danger where falsehoods

outpace facts, eroding trust in democracy. Digital dominance is also evident in campaign financing across many SSA countries.

The increasing utilisation of technologies such as AI for predictive analytics and the creation of personalised messages to optimise donor outreach and engagement for fundraising is noted. SSA is at the forefront of digital payment innovations, including mobile money, fast payment systems, and digital currencies (Ricci *et al.*, 2025). States in the region are increasingly integrating campaign financing into the broader fintech ecosystem, including digital wallets, fast payment systems, and other digital financial infrastructure. These systems create platforms that can be used for real-time political donations and fundraising transparency tools. For instance, mobile money, a form of fintech, is a major disruptor of traditional banking and utilises technology to enable transactions. Mobile money platforms are one of the most transformative innovations in campaign financing. They are deeply embedded in African economies, with transactions exceeding \$1 trillion annually and widespread adoption across countries (Chaouki, 2025; Osabutey & Jackson, 2024).

Political actors and supporters are increasingly using mobile money for campaign financing. In Kenya, mobile money flows account for a large share of gross domestic product (GDP), enabling direct financial transfers that bypass traditional political intermediaries. Mobile money-based campaign financing is on the rise in SSA. Mobile money platforms such as Vodacom M-Pesa and MTN Mobile Money (MoMo) have become instrumental in campaign financing in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Ghana. Mobile money's political significance lies in its capacity to mobilise grassroots funding, collect small donations, and circumvent traditional financial and political intermediaries. Mobile money-based financing can bypass historical elite financing networks and weaken the patron-client system in politics that controlled access to resources (Kalyango & Adu-Kumi, 2013; Chaouki, 2025). Moreover, elements of integration of multiple innovative approaches are noted in countries like Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, with the integration of social media for targeted campaigns, digital messaging and mobile-based donations. Political campaigns combine WhatsApp, Facebook, and mobile payment links to mobilise funds rapidly.

Online crowdfunding for political campaigns is also gaining traction in the region. Digital technologies in member states are enabling new low-cost financing models and mobilisation

of savings through online platforms (Ofori-Sasu *et al.*, 2025). In Tanzania, political parties and party activities have significantly contributed to the nation's leapfrogging into the digital age. Political parties and candidates made wide use of social media platforms, especially WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, to mobilise political agendas, promote party ideologies, and raise funds (Awinia, 2021). Crowdfunding encourages not only transparency but also diaspora community engagement. The broader emerging innovation in campaign financing is the cultivation of a culture of micro-contributions via digital tools.

These digital political campaign financing strategies have not only dramatically reshaped campaign finance by altering political patronage, government accountability, and power dynamics between states and citizens, but also introduced the region to serious risks that cut across governance, security, equity and democratic integrity. As campaign finance goes digital, the region is at the forefront of fighting emerging challenges, including misinformation and disinformation in African elections (International IDEA, 2025). The political implications of digital campaign finance are neither uniformly liberating nor controlling. Over the last decade, African elections have been shaped not just by what happens at polling stations but also by what happens online. African elections are increasingly affected by coordinated disinformation campaigns using bots, fake content, and targeted messaging (IDS, 2024). Artificial financial information can be easily falsified and propagated at high speed, reaching a wider population through social media. This leaves citizens confused about what is real and what is fabricated, stripping them of agency and, hence, they cannot meaningfully hold leaders accountable. While cash-based politics is gradually declining, with greater inclusion of youth and informal sector participants, and improvements in accountability, weak regulation may still allow opaqueness. When digital finance is opaque, insecure, or abused, it contributes to broader concerns about electoral integrity and public trust. Citizens may lose confidence in elections if they perceive them as influenced by hidden digital flows of money.

Digital finance can enable anonymous or "dark money" in politics, weakening accountability and increasing corruption. Digital systems make it easier to move money widely and quickly, but not necessarily transparently. Many African countries still lack systems for digital disclosure of campaign finance, making it difficult to track donors and expenditures. A study by Transparency International

reveals that only 1 out of 51 African countries had accessible digital donor information, showing severe opacity (Transparency International, 2025). The report further attests to the lack of a system for an oversight institution to publish political finance information digitally. The lack of transparency not only undermines accountability but also democracy in the region by eroding public trust and facilitating corruption. Limited public data is available on the current extent of mobile payment use in elections, and impacts on contribution behaviour (Most Policy Initiative, 2021). Publishing the non-machine-readable files of received reports is far from a fully user-friendly approach, but it is significantly more accessible than keeping the reports in a desk drawer. Digital discourse, the online publishing of political and financial data in a timely and user-friendly manner, is the only way to enhance transparency.

The rising adoption of digital financial services in Africa has been accompanied by increasing cyberattacks and fraud risks (Carnegie Endowment, 2024). Digital campaign finance relies on financial technologies that are vulnerable to cyber risks. Weak security systems coupled with a lack of regulations can expose users and political actors to hacking and financial loss. Campaign funds can be stolen, manipulated, or diverted, undermining trust in electoral processes.

Digital payments can easily circumvent traditional political structures. In countries like Kenya and Tanzania, mobile money allows candidates to send funds directly to supporters, bypassing party hierarchies. This pattern was replicated in Tanzania's 2020 election, where opposition candidates made use of mobile money to fundraise and distribute resources directly to supporters (Chaouki, 2025). While this can democratise funding, it can also weaken institutional accountability and encourage vote-buying or patronage at scale.

Digital financing may amplify corruption and state capture. Digital funding does not eliminate corruption; it can reshape and sometimes intensify it. Campaign financing in Africa is already linked to state capture, elite dominance, and distorted electoral outcomes. Digital tools may scale up illicit financing, making it faster and harder to detect. With weak regulatory compliance, typical of most SSA countries, a digital campaign finance strategy may enable state capture, manifesting through defective laws, ineffective institutions, and unequal distribution of resources (Philip, 2026). Weak oversight allows both legal and illegal funds to influence policy decisions.

Policy backlash and unintended consequences are on the rise in the region as governments reactively attempt to address the noted risks and emerging challenges associated with digital campaign financing. Governments sometimes respond with restrictive measures. For instance, taxes on mobile money have triggered public resistance and reduced usage amongst low-income populations. Such taxes may attenuate the disproportionate impact on the lowest-income households (Hearson *et al.*, 2024). Digital systems do not benefit everyone equally. Digital campaign finance may privilege urban, tech-savvy, and wealthier groups, reinforcing political inequality (Stark, 2021). Overregulation reduces financial inclusion and may push political financing back into informal, less transparent channels.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Digital political campaign finance in SSA is a double-edged sword; while enhancing efficiency, inclusion, and grassroots mobilisation, it also introduces new risks of opacity, cybercrime, inequality, and manipulation. The central challenge is not the technology itself but governance capacity, regulation, and institutional strength. Consequently, this study reflects lessons learnt and draws recommendations on what SSA as a region and its member states need to do.

Notably, most African countries lack a unified and comprehensive law on party financing, and where it exists, enforcement failures and sanctions render the laws ineffective. Many African nations lack robust mechanisms to enforce political finance regulations, allowing politicians to violate spending limits with impunity (Sule, 2021). Annoyingly, because most campaign finance in African states is sourced from state treasuries, the potential for bribery, corruption, looting, and misgovernance is high. Equally, the reliance on private, often undisclosed funding sources drives political corruption, prioritising financiers' interests over public needs. There is a need to strengthen oversight bodies, improve transparency and enforce compliance to improve democratic accountability (Ohman, 2016; International IDEA, 2025).

Additionally, while the reforms provide for it, there is no effort by the SSA states to tame the menace of excessive campaign spending and the use of money in politics. There is a need for both systemic approaches and ad hoc responses to crises; for example, countering

viral misinformation or disinformation only after it has spread widely is not enough. The reactive posture leaves democracies vulnerable are not enough.

Excessive spending in elections often leads to the commodification of politics, in which political power is bought rather than earned, thereby compromising democratic integrity. In the 2023 Nigerian election, despite efforts to ensure compliance with the law, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) faced challenges, including limited or absent party or candidate information and a lack of proper coordination with other agencies. Support groups may claim to have funded nomination forms and even bought cars as part of their support. However, tracking cash transactions made by third parties remains a challenge. The lack of clarity in some provisions of the political finance laws and regulations weakens their enforcement. Oversight institutions need to further increase the deterrent potential of digital disclosure by considering the interoperability of financial information with other data sources, such as tax records, business registers and cadastres.

Political party financing in Africa is affected by the parties' own patterns and the electoral process in place. The one-party system's dominance for over three decades, which made opposition hectic and burdensome, is further heightened by the adoption of technologies. Digital platforms are increasingly being used to sway the electoral process.

Digital platforms in sub-Saharan Africa have become central arenas for electoral competition, yet their use has increasingly reinforced political inequalities rather than mitigated them (Bossetta, 2018; Kefford *et al.*, 2023). Ruling parties utilise superior financial resources to dominate paid political advertising, exploit algorithmic amplification, and deploy data-driven microtargeting strategies, thereby gaining disproportionate visibility and influence over voters (Prasanna & Manjushree, 2021; Dobber *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, weak transparency in digital campaign financing obscures the scale of spending, while coordinated disinformation campaigns further distort public discourse (IDS, 2024; Transparency International, 2025). In some contexts, governments additionally manipulate digital access through regulatory controls or platform shutdowns, limiting opposition participation (Access Now, 2024; Freedom House, 2023). For example, reports from Tanzania highlight Internet disruptions and restrictions on opposition participation during elections, contributing to an uneven electoral playing field. Consequently,

digital technologies convert financial advantage into informational dominance, undermining the principles of fair competition, transparency, and multiparty democracy in the region (Miyandazi & Thuo, 2025; OECD, 2024).

The deployment of digital technologies in campaign financing has highlighted various loopholes in member states' campaigning and political finance regulations. For instance, the prevailing weak or non-existent regulatory framework on the use of social media makes it easy to spread disinformation and hate speech during elections. The study recommends, amongst others, that member states devise and adopt a unique framework for enforcing compliance with taming the excess of campaign spending and the use of state treasury for personal political purposes. While legal and regulatory frameworks are present in some states, the effective implementation of these reforms is a component to be strengthened.

Conclusion

Campaign financing in sub-Saharan Africa stands at a critical intersection between democratic necessity and democratic risk. While financial resources remain essential for political participation, mobilisation, and voter engagement, the growing dominance of opaque and money-driven practices continues to undermine electoral integrity. The evidence reviewed in this chapter shows that despite the introduction of legal and institutional reforms—such as spending limits, disclosure requirements, and public funding mechanisms—implementation gaps, weak enforcement, and entrenched informal financing networks persist. As a result, many reforms remain largely symbolic, with limited impact on curbing illicit funding, reducing corruption, or ensuring a level playing field amongst political actors.

At the same time, the rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the landscape of campaign financing across the region. Innovations such as mobile money, crowdfunding, and online micro-donations have expanded opportunities for grassroots participation and financial inclusion in politics. However, these same technologies have introduced complex challenges, including the rise of anonymous “dark money,” increased vulnerability to cyber risks, and the amplification of misinformation and digital manipulation. Rather than eliminating traditional problems of political financing, digital systems have, in many cases,

reshaped and intensified them, exposing significant regulatory and institutional weaknesses in SSA countries.

Ultimately, the future of campaign financing in sub-Saharan Africa will depend not only on the adoption of reforms but on their effective enforcement and adaptation to evolving digital realities. Strengthening oversight institutions, enhancing transparency through real-time and accessible digital disclosure systems, and fostering regional and international cooperation will be essential to addressing both traditional and emerging risks. Without such efforts, the increasing monetisation and digitalisation of politics may continue to entrench inequality and erode public trust in democratic processes. Conversely, if effectively governed, these same innovations hold the potential to promote more inclusive, transparent, and accountable electoral systems across the region.

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Chapter Nine

Beyond Ballots: Parties, Patronage and Campaign Finance in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) continues to unfold within a highly complex and contested environment in which formal democratic institutions coexist with deeply entrenched informal power structures. This duality has produced a political landscape in which elections are not merely procedural mechanisms for selecting leaders, but rather arenas where history, identity, economic inequality, and institutional weakness converge to shape political outcomes. Against this backdrop, the book has undertaken a sustained and integrative interrogation of the structural relationships amongst political parties, electoral motives, and campaign financing within SSA.

The basic analytical proposition advanced throughout the chapters is that the three pillars of electoral politics do not function as independent variables that can be investigated or modified independently. Instead, they form an interdependent system within a larger political economy characterised by historical state formation trajectories, uneven socioeconomic development, institutional instability, and the ongoing entanglement of formal laws and informal governance practices. In this way, political parties, voter behaviour, and campaign funding structures all reinforce one another, resulting in patterns of political competition that frequently repeat rather than resolve fundamental disparities. This framework

has important theoretical and empirical implications, as it profoundly contradicts the mainstream proceduralist conception of electoral democracy in SSA.

It is important to note that politics in the region cannot be effectively described by narrow institutional or legalistic views that view elections as technical exercises focused exclusively on voting processes, ballot integrity, or electoral administration. While these aspects are significant, they are insufficient to explain the underlying dynamics that determine political rivalry, voter decision-making, and governance results. Instead, as the chapters' synthesis shows, elections in SSA are better understood as venues of power reproduction and structured contestation, with numerous forces intersecting and interacting in complicated ways. Material resources determine political actors' competitiveness; identity formations such as ethnicity and regional affiliation shape voter alignment; institutional capacities condition the credibility and enforceability of rules; and external influences add layers of constraint and opportunity. In this configuration, elections are less about expressing abstract democratic choice and more about negotiating, redistributing, and consolidating power within specific historical and socioeconomic settings.

This analytical approach has a strong connection to the foundational political economics critique given by Claude Ake (1996), who contends that democracy in Africa is frequently structurally disembedded from the socio-economic foundations required for meaningful participation. For Ake, the issue is not only the lack of democratic institutions, but their disconnect from the material realities of inequality, underdevelopment, and state dependency that create political life. Similarly, Mkandawire (2015) describes African democracies as "choiceless democracies," in which legal political rights coexist with very limited substantive choices. Under such circumstances, electoral competition is formally open but materially organised in ways that limit genuine policy options for citizens.

The evidence offered in this book necessitates a significant theoretical movement away from institutional determinism, which holds that formal norms and institutional design affect democratic results, and towards a stronger structural-institutional synthesis. Institutions, according to this viewpoint, are important, but they are enmeshed in larger configurations of power, history, and material inequality. Electoral results are, thus, more than just the mechanical result of electoral laws, party bylaws, or administrative procedures; rather, they emerge from historically consolidated

political economies that impact both elite strategies and voter behaviour. Elites use resources, identities, and institutional flaws to preserve advantage, while voters negotiate limited contexts in which choices are dictated by survival imperatives rather than ideological or programmatic considerations.

The book presents a fundamental paradox in the evolution of political parties in sub-Saharan Africa. Political parties began as liberation instruments rooted in ideological struggle, anti-colonial resistance, and nationalist mobilisation, rather than electoral machinery. They served as conduits for collective desire, channelling mass political energy towards the objectives of independence, sovereignty, and social revolution. During this formative period, party identity was inextricably linked to emancipatory myths and developmental promises, lending them moral authority and popular legitimacy.

However, the post-independence trajectory of several of these parties shows a slow but significant transition. Liberation movements were eventually institutionalised into ruling parties, and multiparty competition, where it exists, has frequently resulted in organisations that are increasingly elite-centred, personalised, and strategically orientated towards acquiring and retaining state power rather than ideological or programmatic governance. This transition reflects not only organisational deterioration, but also deeper structural continuities in African states' political economies, where access to state authority remains the key means of economic mobility, resource distribution, and social influence. This transformation is not accidental; it is structurally induced. In most SSA contexts, the state remains the dominant allocator of economic opportunity, employment, contracts, and distributive benefits. As a result, political competition becomes less about competing visions of governance and more about control of the state as a redistributive instrument. Within this framework, Joseph's (1987) concept of prebendalism remains analytically foundational, as it captures the systematic conversion of public office into a mechanism for private accumulation and group-based patronage. In such settings, party politics becomes an extension of distributive struggles rather than a platform for ideological contestation.

Contemporary empirical work significantly supports this structural explanation. For example, Cheeseman (2015) shows that many African party systems are still weakly institutionalised, with variable coalitions, limited organisational depth, and high levels of elite control. Similarly, Resnick (2013) demonstrates that party structures in many African democracies lack durable ideological

cleavages, resulting in weak voter-party links and minimal programmatic accountability. Recent comparative studies suggest that personalisation of leadership, factionalism, and incumbency advantage continue to define party rivalry throughout the area (Bleck & van de Walle, 2019; Rakner *et al.*, 2021). The result of these interactions is a systemic crisis in representation. Political parties are increasingly failing to perform their essential democratic functions, which include pooling societal interests, articulating coherent policy choices, and institutionalising responsibility between citizens and the government. Instead, they serve as transient electoral coalitions centred on influential elites, financial networks, and ethnoregional constituents. This tendency undermines democratic consolidation by restricting ideological competition and turning elections into competitions over organisational capacity and resource mobilisation rather than policy substance.

The broader relevance of this conclusion is that democratic improvement in SSA cannot be reduced to just increasing election competitiveness or enhancing electoral administration. It necessitates a fundamental reimagining of political parties as institutionalised actors immersed in programmatic politics, internal democracy, and ideological consistency. Without such reform, political parties would continue to serve as vehicles for elite circulation rather than democratic representation. In such a setting, elections risk devolving into cyclical rituals of elite turnover—procedurally competitive but substantively hollow in terms of government results and citizen empowerment. No doubt, the study of election conduct in SSA contradicts long-held and frequently simple theories that cast voter decision-making as illogical, controlled, or entirely ethnically determined. Rather than conforming to this simple binary, the evidence presented in this study supports a more nuanced and context-sensitive interpretation: electoral behaviour in SSA is best characterised as constrained rationality functioning within institutional constraints. Citizens make election decisions in circumstances characterised by prolonged economic uncertainty, uneven governmental capacity, inadequate welfare provisioning, and severely unequal access to public services.

In this confined setting, voting behaviour reflects adaptive tactics rather than ideological inconsistency or democratic weakness. Ethnicity and identity politics continue to influence election outcomes in much of the region; nevertheless, their permanence should not be read through essentialist cultural glasses. Instead, as Donald Horowitz (1985) contends, ethnic attachments frequently

serve as logical proxies for trust, security, and political inclusion in settings where formal institutions are unstable, politicised, or unavailable. In such situations, identification serves as an effective heuristic for lowering ambiguity and navigating risk in political decision-making. Recent research supports this perspective by showing that identity-based voting is frequently incorporated in rational calculations regarding group access to state resources, protection against exclusion, and distributive fairness (Posner, 2005; Cheeseman, 2018). In this view, ethnicity is more than just a cultural residue; it is a politically functioning mechanism through which citizens perceive and react to uneven state presence and selective governance. Similarly, the continuance of patronage politics is a logical reaction to material hardship and institutional underperformance. Voters engage in transactional trades, accepting short-term material incentives such as cash, products, or job offers, not out of ignorance or compulsion, but as a pragmatic response to current survival necessities. This aligns with Anthony Downs's (1957) rational choice framework, although its application in SSA must be qualified by structural scarcity and weak welfare systems. Under such conditions, the expected utility of long-term policy promises is often outweighed by the tangible certainty of immediate benefits.

However, this behavioural logic does not indicate a lack of democratic knowledge or aspirations. In contrast, comparative survey research, particularly from Afrobarometer, consistently demonstrates significant normative commitment to democracy, accountability, and electoral engagement across SSA people (Mattes & Bratton, 2021; Logan & Penar, 2022). Citizens broadly support democratic ideals, even if their voting decisions are influenced by non-programmatic factors. This seeming conflict highlights an important analytical point: democratic values and electoral behaviour do not always coincide when institutional constraints distort the range of accessible options. In this light, Thandika Mkandawire's concept of "choiceless democracies" is very interesting. He contends that democratic systems in Africa frequently produce formal political rights without resulting in meaningful economic and institutional transformation. As a result, citizens have the right to choose, but their options are structurally confined, limiting the meaning of those choices. Electoral action, thus, displays constrained agency rather than democratic indifference. This concludes that normative interventions, such as civic education campaigns or appeals to voter reason, cannot produce meaningful voting behaviour transformation on their own. While such initiatives may bring value, they are insufficient to address the underlying drivers of electoral behaviour.

Instead, long-term transformation necessitates profound structural interventions that increase economic opportunity, improve public service delivery, reduce inequality, and weaken citizens' reliance on patronage networks for survival. Only by addressing the underlying socioeconomic and institutional restrictions can voting behaviour move from survival-oriented reasoning to programmatic and policy-based political participation. In this view, voter behaviour in SSA is more than just a democratic variable to be fixed; it is also a structural indicator of broader developmental and governance conditions.

Perhaps the most important structural factor of electoral competitiveness revealed in this study is campaign financing, which serves as the material infrastructure of political power in SSA. The evidence presented in the chapters consistently shows that access to financial resources is more than just an enabler of electoral participation; it is a defining variable that shapes electoral competitiveness, determines the viability of political parties, influences voter outreach capacity, and, ultimately, structures governance outcomes. In practice, campaign funding serves as a gatekeeping device that governs access to serious political contestation.

Within this configuration, campaign finance systems in SSA are characterised by pronounced and persistent asymmetries. Incumbent governments, dominant parties, and politically connected elites have disproportionate access to fundraising networks, which include corporate donations, state-linked resources, and wealthy individuals. This structural advantage is not coincidental, but rather reflects the broader political economy of incumbency, in which power over state institutions frequently translates into privileged access to economic resources that may be mobilised for electoral purposes. As a result, electoral rivalry is frequently skewed before voting begins, posing serious concerns about the substantive equality of democratic participation. These inequities are exacerbated by inadequate transparency systems and the proliferation of informal funding sources. A significant proportion of campaign resources remains unreported or underreported, often routed through intermediaries, proxy organisations, third-party expenditures, and opaque cash-based transactions.

Magnus Ohman (2022) and Walecki (2023) found that in many SSA situations, campaign finance regulation suffers from chronic enforcement deficits, institutional fragmentation, and insufficient monitoring ability rather than a lack of legislative frameworks.

Similarly, Oni (2021) shows in the Nigerian context that even when formal legal provisions exist, compliance is inconsistent because of poor monitoring institutions, political meddling, and strategic circumvention of reporting obligations. As a result, there is a dual system of political finance: a formal, regulatory framework on paper, and an informal, operational system that governs actual resource mobilisation. This dichotomy seriously affects the transparency, predictability, and fairness of democratic competition. It also creates a structural advantage for politically embedded actors who have superior capacity to navigate, manipulate, or bypass regulatory constraints.

The consequences of these financial dynamics go far beyond the electoral arena. As Ofusori's work demonstrates, money dominance in electoral politics has a direct impact on post-election governance outcomes via processes of policy capture and elite influence. In such cases, elected officials frequently face considerable incentives to prioritise the interests of wealthy donors, corporate sponsors, and financial backers over broader public welfare concerns. This dynamic is consistent with Stigler's (1971) position, which holds that regulatory institutions and policy processes are commonly formed and dominated by the actors that they are supposed to regulate.

Contemporary studies support this conclusion by demonstrating that concentrated campaign financing not only distorts electoral competition but also undermines post-election accountability mechanisms, as financially dependent political actors become structurally linked to donor networks (Pinto-Duschinsky, 2019; Scarrow, 2021). In SSA environments where institutional checks and balances are frequently weakened, this generates a governance system in which policy autonomy is severely limited by financial liabilities incurred during electoral contests. The key inference emerging from the discussion in this book is that campaign financing cannot be treated as a peripheral or technical aspect of electoral management. Instead, it constitutes a core mechanism of political power distribution and a central determinant of democratic quality. It structures who can compete, under what conditions, and with what likelihood of success. Consequently, any meaningful agenda for democratic reform in SSA must directly confront the structural concentration of financial influence within political systems.

Without addressing these disparities, through more transparency, credible enforcement measures, and equitable financing frameworks, efforts to strengthen electoral integrity

risk remaining cosmetic. In this sense, campaign finance reform is about more than just controlling money in politics; it is also about rebuilding the political economy of power itself. A continuous and analytically relevant subject across the chapters is the continuing gap between formal institutional transformation and substantive behavioural change in SSA.

Over the last three decades, many nations in the area have implemented major legislative and policy reforms to improve election governance. These include campaign finance regulations, obligatory disclosure requirements, donation limitations, public funding mechanisms, and the formation of election oversight committees. Theoretically, these measures represent significant progress towards establishing transparency, accountability, and fairness in electoral competition.

However, the empirical reality provided in the chapters reveals a more complex and frequently contradicting conclusion. In practice, the implementation of these reforms is inconsistent, fragmented, and often purely symbolic. Legal provisions frequently exist in isolation from effective enforcement mechanisms, while regulatory institutions operate under significant political, financial, and administrative constraints. The result is a persistent disjuncture between *formal institutional design* and *actual institutional performance*, which undermines the transformative potential of legal reform. Institutional Theory provides the most effective explanation for this difference. According to North (1990), institutions should be seen as deeply ingrained systems made up of enforcement structures, behavioural norms, incentive arrangements, and historical path dependencies rather than as formal rules or legal frameworks. According to this perspective, the effectiveness of any reform is determined not only by its formal articulation but also by the larger institutional environment in which it operates. Formal norms are unlikely to yield meaningful behavioural conformity in situations where enforcement capability is poor, political intervention is prevalent, and compliance incentives are warped.

In many SSA settings, this theoretical understanding is strongly mirrored in practice. Regulatory agencies charged with implementing electoral and campaign finance rules frequently face severe capacity constraints, including insufficient funding, limited technical expertise, and reliance on presidential authority. In such circumstances, enforcement becomes selective, inconsistent, or politically bargained, rather than rule-bound. As a result, formal

institutions risk becoming performative structures that demonstrate adherence to democratic principles without substantially altering underlying power dynamics. The South African case, as examined by Tshishonga, is a particularly interesting example of this institutional paradox. Despite possessing one of the most advanced legal systems for political finance regulation in the region—based on structured disclosure requirements, contribution limitations, and public funding mechanisms—significant execution challenges remain.

Issues such as compliance gaps, unequal enforcement, and persistent public scepticism illustrate the limits of legal knowledge in the absence of strong institutional support. Even well-designed systems are susceptible to degradation when oversight organisations lack complete operational independence or when political motivations undercut regulatory impartiality. This empirical pattern shows that institutional reform in SSA should go beyond legal engineering and into a more holistic approach of state and governance transformation. Effective reform necessitates increasing bureaucratic expertise, ensuring the independence of electoral and judicial institutions, and integrating accountability mechanisms into both state and civil society structures. It also requires political actors to develop normative commitments to rule compliance rather than relying solely on coercive enforcement.

Recent governance studies support this viewpoint by emphasising the interdependence of formal rules and informal norms of compliance (Alemu, 2019). Where informal activities such as patronage, political patronage networks, and elite bargaining predominate, formal institutions are frequently adapted, bypassed, or selectively used rather than fully implemented. The main takeaway from this analysis is that, while legal reform is vital, it is insufficient for institutional transformation in SSA. Without comparable advances in enforcement ability, political insulation of regulatory bodies, and civic monitoring, formal institutions risk becoming procedural artefacts rather than effective governance tools. Addressing institutional fragility, therefore, requires a shift from *rule creation* to *rule embedding*—a process that aligns legal frameworks with the social, political, and administrative conditions necessary for their sustained effectiveness.

Another important finding from this study is the growing interconnectedness of domestic electoral processes in SSA with broader global political and economic trends. Elections in the region can no longer be understood solely as nationally contained

events; rather, they are embedded within transnational networks of influence involving foreign governments, multilateral institutions, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and donor agencies. These actors play a significant role in shaping electoral institutions, financing political and civil society activities, and influencing governance reforms across the region.

While such external engagement is frequently justified by claims of democratic consolidation, capacity building, and technical help, the evidence provided in this paper demonstrates that it is rarely neutral. As Alberto Alesina and Dollar (2000) show, the allocation of foreign aid is usually influenced by strategic geopolitical and economic goals rather than solely developmental or humanitarian concerns. External involvement in election processes reflects greater global power imbalances, in which aid, assistance, and institutional support are intertwined with donor self-interest, geopolitical alignment, and influence-seeking activity. This reality undermines the normative premise that international electoral help always enhances democracy. Instead, it raises critical concerns about sovereignty, policy autonomy, and institutional dependency.

(Alemu, 2019) warns that externally imposed institutional models frequently lack deep social legitimacy and can result in formal conformity without fundamental reform. In other words, institutions may be accepted in form but not fully anchored in local political, social, and historical contexts, resulting in “institutional mimicry” rather than true democratisation. Mngomezulu’s contribution confirms this duality by demonstrating that outsider intervention in SSA elections follows a conflicting logic. On the one hand, it can strengthen institutional capacity by providing technical assistance, funding for electoral commissions, civil society oversight, and political actor training. On the other hand, it has the potential to strengthen dependency systems, distort domestic policy goals, and perpetuate unbalanced power dynamics between donors and recipient states. The result is a complex governance environment in which external support simultaneously enables and constrains democratic development.

The primary plan of action conclusion drawn from this analysis is that external aid should be properly targeted to improve domestic ownership of election processes rather than replace it. Sustainable democratic growth cannot be constructed from the outside; it must be rooted locally in domestic institutions, political legitimacy, and citizen involvement. This necessitates a move

away from donor-driven institutional templates and towards more context-sensitive methods that acknowledge the political economics of aid and the role of domestic actors in driving reform trajectories.

In addition to these structural problems, the study highlights a number of emerging reform trajectories and innovations aimed at increasing the openness, inclusiveness, and efficiency of electoral financing systems across SSA. These include the rise of digital fundraising platforms, mobile money-based political donations, public financing systems for political parties, and improved disclosure and reporting mechanisms made possible by technical infrastructure. These developments mark a significant shift in the political economy of electoral participation. In principle, they have the ability to diversify the donor base, reduce reliance on large-scale private financiers, and boost citizen participation in political fundraising processes. Mobile money systems, in particular, have been widely promoted as tools for democratising political finance by enabling small, dispersed contributions from ordinary citizens, thereby reducing entry barriers to political competition.

However, the outcomes of this study show that the efficiency of these innovations is still largely dependent on institutional readiness and structural conditions. Without strong legislative frameworks, proper technological infrastructure, cybersecurity measures, and high levels of public trust, digital breakthroughs risk reproducing or exacerbating existing inequities in new and sophisticated ways. Wealthier political actors may continue to dominate digital ecosystems because of their greater access to technology, data analytics, and financial networks, limiting the democratisation potential of these reforms. As Goyayi's study shows, the available empirical evidence on these developments is scattered, immature, and primarily confined to grey literature. This prevents a rigorous assessment of their long-term influence on transparency, accountability, and electoral competitiveness. There is, therefore, a pressing need for rigorous comparative research to assess whether these innovations are genuinely transformative or merely incremental adjustments within existing power structures. This discussion suggests that while innovation in election funding and governance is desirable, it is not sufficient. Technological and policy innovations cannot, by themselves, address deeply ingrained structural disparities in political and economic institutions. To be durable, reforms must be integrated into larger transformations that address institutional capacity, socioeconomic disparity,

civic trust, and the political incentives that determine elite behaviour. In this sense, innovation should be understood not as a substitute for structural reform, but as a complementary mechanism whose effectiveness is entirely dependent on the broader institutional and socio-political environment within which it is deployed.

The study's most important finding is that political parties, electoral motives, and campaign financing in SSA do not work as distinct analytical domains. Rather, they form a unified, interwoven system of political reproduction, with each component constantly shaping and reinforcing the others. Political parties organise access to power and resources; electoral motivations govern how citizens engage in political competition under constrained conditions; and campaign financing serves as the material guidance for organising and sustaining political rivalry. These variables form a mutually reinforcing political economy of elections. From this perspective, initiatives to modify any one facet in isolation are unlikely to produce long-term or transformative results. Institutional improvements that focus solely on electoral management, for example, may improve procedural credibility while ignoring the financial disparities that distort competitiveness. Similarly, reforms aimed at increasing campaign financing transparency may have little effect if voter behaviour remains ingrained in patronage structures shaped by socioeconomic hardship. The existence of weak party institutionalisation weakens both reforms by lowering accountability and diminishing programming competitiveness. In short, the problem's structural nature makes piecemeal solutions inherently insufficient. As a result, the report identifies three interconnected reform imperatives that must be followed concurrently if substantial democratic consolidation is to be achieved throughout the region.

First, political parties must be refocused on programmatic competitiveness, internal democratisation, and ideological coherence. This necessitates a shift away from highly individualised, elite-driven institutions and towards institutionalised parties founded on policy platforms rather than patronage networks. Without such a shift, political rivalry will continue to centre on personalities, ethnic mobilisation, and resource allocation rather than fundamental governing options. Strengthening party institutionalisation is, thus, essential for any broader democratic reform programme.

Second, electoral incentives must be addressed by deeper socioeconomic development that lessens citizens' reliance on patronage networks while broadening the scope of substantive

political choice. As long as large segments of the population are economically weak and rely on informal survival strategies, electoral conduct will continue to be influenced by short-term material calculations and identity-related affiliations. Addressing these demands requires ongoing investment in equitable development, better public service delivery, and institutional reforms that strengthen state responsiveness and legitimacy. In this way, democratic choice is inextricably linked with developmental ability.

Third, campaign financing must be reorganised through transparent, enforceable, and inclusive regulatory procedures that limit the concentration of financial power and enhance accountability. This includes tightening disclosure rules, plugging gaps in reporting systems, controlling third-party spending, and ensuring that monitoring institutions have both autonomy and enforcement capacity. Without addressing financial inequalities in political competitiveness, formal democratic equality will be undercut by unequal material access to the political sphere.

Importantly, these three imperatives are interrelated rather than sequential. Fragmented reform strategies risk having unforeseen consequences, such as reinforcing existing disparities or shifting political rivalry to informal or unregulated spaces. A comprehensive reform strategy must, thus, take a systems-based approach that acknowledges the underlying links between institutions, behaviour, and resources. Finally, this book contributes to a key conceptual change in sub-Saharan Africa's understanding of democracy: from a procedural and event-based definition of elections to a more comprehensive structural interpretation of democratic governance. Elections, while important in democratic life, cannot be reduced to mere institutional exercises in voting and representation. Instead, they must be interpreted as embedded representations of larger sociopolitical and economic institutions that influence how power is structured, challenged, and reproduced.

In this context, Achille Mbembe (2021) presents a solid analytical foundation. He contends that the future of African democracy hinges on a shift away from formal institutionalism and towards systems that truly combine governance, citizenship, and material well-being. In this sense, democracy is sustained not only by institutional form but also by its ability to foster substantive inclusion, accountability, and social transformation. Electoral processes continue to be important components of the larger democratic project, but they are insufficient on their own.

Their democratic significance is ultimately decided by their integration into institutions that are transparent, inclusive, responsive, and socially acceptable. In the absence of such conditions, elections risk devolving into procedural rituals that reinforce rather than modify existing power arrangements.

The interaction of political parties, electoral motivations, and campaign financing, thus, represents more than an academic framework; it is a critical political arena in which the future trajectory of democratic government in SSA is actively determined. In this triangle connection, problems of representation, legitimacy, accountability, and inclusion are negotiated—and frequently challenged. The essential issue arising from this research is not only to better electoral management or institutional design, but to fundamentally rethink the structural conditions under which democracy operates. The work ahead is to guarantee that elections are not just procedurally credible, but also substantively meaningful—capable of changing both the distribution of political power and citizens' daily reality. Only then can democracy in sub-Saharan Africa move beyond formal survival towards genuine consolidation and developmental relevance.

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Chapter Nine

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