

**ELITE FACTOR AND ELECTORAL CHOICE OF CANDIDATES IN  
NIGERIA: A STUDY OF PARTY PRIMARIES FOR THE 2023  
GENERAL ELECTION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Election in modern liberal democracy remains an important element that guarantees citizens' right to political participation either as aspirants/candidates or as electorates. The emergence of candidates of political parties preparatory to the general election is a function of the party primary. It is at this stage of the electoral competition that unpopular candidates resort to manipulation of the processes in order to clinch the ticket. The paper, therefore, examines the factor of the elite in the conduct of primaries for the 2023 elections in Nigeria. The paper relied on secondary and primary sources and collected data from related secondary documents such as; articles in journals, newspapers, unpublished papers, INEC official documents, etc. The primary source includes raw data in its original form through interview methods/verbal discussions with relevant stakeholders in the field on one-to-one interviews and small group discussions. Findings in the paper revealed among others that, the Political elites whose children aspired to inherit them in the primaries for the 2023 election cut across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria with many of them "selected" as party candidates at various levels. The paper recommended among others strict enforcement of sanctions on violators as provided in the electoral act 2022.

**Keywords:** Delegates, Electoral choice, Elite, Liberal democracy, Party primaries

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In a Liberal democracy, the election is an important element that guarantees citizens' right to political participation either as candidates in an election or as electorates. It is therefore obvious; no election can take place without candidates competing for positions. The emergence of candidates who are also called flag bearers of a political party is therefore a function of the party primary. The election management body is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that political parties comply with the processes of nominating candidates preparatory to the general election. In the conduct of primaries for the 2023 election in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had prepared and issued out guidelines explaining the process. Earlier on the 28th February 2022 the commission had released the timetable and schedule of activities for the 2023 General Election, which inter alia set the period for the conduct of political party primaries at between 4th April and 3rd June 2022. The political parties have the responsibility under section 84(I) of the 2022 electoral act to schedule and conduct primaries in order to allow delegates choose their desired candidates and also provide

aspirants with the platform to actualize their dreams and aspirations. It is at this stage of electoral competition that candidates who are unpopular will resort to manipulations in their desperate moves to clinch the party ticket. Such desperate politicians and delegates tend to manipulate the process. The primaries for the 2023 general election saw the emergence of political contractors/ entrepreneurs that assumed the position of go-between the candidates and the delegates in vote buying transactions.

Unlike with previous electoral legislation, the electoral act 2022 has placed some constraints on the process of nomination of candidates. The large numbers of statutory delegates (usually political appointees) are not recognised by law. In this regards section 84 (12) of the 2022 electoral act allows only elected delegates to vote in the primary election. However, it is on records as discussed in the body of this paper that, the state governors mostly appointed these delegates. The control of delegates/votes in the primaries was therefore in the hands of the state governors. However, the party primary for the 2023 general election was significantly different in some respects with the ones in previous years. This time around some contestants openly challenged the transactional political activities declaring not to pay any bribe to the delegates when they know the votes will go to the candidates designated by the governors/godfathers. Interestingly some that paid and lost asked for refund, while some delegates went home with their money. Corroborating this assertion Prof Jibrin Ibrahim as reported in Premium times of May 27, 2022 noted that:

...Political entrepreneurs at all levels of political system have to make their money and that is why party primaries have become vast arenas of transactional politics as we have described above. The elections themselves become marred by irregularities because people have invested too much to accept the possibility of losing.

The politicians comprising party officials, political office holders, financiers/ party bigwigs, political godfathers are the elites while Nigerians follow. The paper limit its discussions on four political parties out of the Eighteen registered political parties namely; the All progressive congress (APC), Peoples democratic party (PDP), labour party (LP) and the New Nigeria People's party (NNPP) essentially because the APC and the PDP are the dominant political parties in Nigeria and the activities of the elites in the primaries are quite elaborate and revealing. Again records/ statistics available at the Nigeria's National assembly website revealed that both parties controlled over 90 % of the 996 state assembly seats. In the senate the APC control 66 seats and PDP control 39 seats. The NNPP lost its only I seat with the defection of Senator Ibrahim shekarau (Kano Central senatorial seat) to the PDP. The labour party and the NNPP on the other hand are also in the scope of this paper because both parties provided alternative platforms to some disgruntled politicians that lost favour in either the APC or the PDP. This is also because the conduct of the elites in both parties during their primaries was not significantly different with other political parties in terms of non-compliance with the principles of internal democracy. The main objective of this paper therefore is to examine the factor of the elite in the conduct of party primary for the 2023 election in Nigeria while the specific objectives are:

- To identify the strategies deployed by the elites in the primary elections.
- To establish the level of influence they had on the electoral choice of candidates in the primaries for the 2023 elections.

## 2.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### 2.1 Elite

Elite in the most general sense denotes a group of people who in any society have the highest indices or hold position of eminence in their areas of activities. In a classical conceptualization of elitism Mosca (1939, p.50) noted thus:

In all societies, two classes of people appear, first, a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous performs all political functions, monopolise power and enjoys the advantages that power brings. Whereas the second, the numerous class is directed and controlled by the first.

According to Mills (1956, p. 1) the power elite is composed of men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women. It is clear from these definitions that, the elites though fewer in number yet, they are most domineering in the society including the political space.

### 2.2 Election

The international Encyclopaedia of social science vol.5, Cited in Lawal (2008, P.13), defined Election as one procedure of aggregating preferences of a particular kind. In the same vein according to Anifowose (2003, P.21) election broadly conceived, refer to the process of elite selection by the mass of the population in any given political system. Anifowose like other scholars portray elections as the very heart of democracy. Election from the definitions above provides the necessary platform upon which elites are selected by the people to govern the society.

### 2.3 Political Party

Satori, (1976, P.63) define political party as “any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections free or non- free, candidates for political office. Schattschneider, (1942, P.35) sees political party as “an organised attempt to get control of government.” Both definitions admitted the possibility of placing a candidate at elections through elections that are not free and fair hence; the use of “organised attempt” by Schattneider and “free or non- free” election by Satori.

### 2.4 Primary Election

According to Wikipedia (2022) Primary elections often abbreviated to primaries are processes by which voters can indicate their preference for their party’s candidate, or a candidate in general, in an upcoming general election, local election, or by- election.

## 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on party primary elections in Nigeria is replete with instances of elite manipulations of the process of choosing candidates of political parties for general elections. Except in some few instances when the rank and file in the party or delegates decided to choose aspirants either

than those preferred by the party leaders. Contrary to the principle of internal democracy in the election of party candidates, the political elites in Nigeria have over the years devised their own methods/ strategies of conducting party primaries. Such methods include: affirmation, adoption, consensus option, automatic ticket, compensation, stepping down, and sometimes-outright imposition of candidates. Some form of inducements used to bribe delegates garnishes these methods, especially money being an important factor next to incumbency in party primary in Nigeria.

In the Nigeria's first republic there was no democratic process in the selection of party candidates. Leaders of regional political parties in Nigeria's first republic had entrenched strong leadership control in the running of the political parties and to a very large extent they determined who should be the candidate of their party in any election. At this period money was not a factor in the choice of persons for general elections. The skill that was mostly required in an aspirant was rhetoric and eloquence in speech, especially in terms of condemnation of colonial rule and Northern traditional establishment, which they considered reactionary. In this regards Hyacinth (2021, P.33) corroborated this assertion when he stated that:

The democratic process in the selection of party candidates at this period did not matter as preference could be on the individuals that can display braveness in confronting the colonial government or bridging penetration by political rivals from other part of Nigeria as manifested in post- independence party formation in Nigeria.

The choice of candidates for election when Nigeria began the experimentation of presidential system in 1979 except in National party of Nigeria [NPN] the emergence of presidential candidates in other political parties was based on automatic ticket. According to THISDAYLIVE report of May, 25, 2022:

There were no elaborate primaries of the parties. This was partly explained by the fact that, the 1979 presidential election took place in a course of a political transition in which a military regime superintended. Perhaps it was only in the National party of Nigeria (NPN) a number of northern presidential aspirants emerged based on a zoning arrangement. Alhaji Shehu shagari emerged as the candidate, eventually won the election. Not much of the primaries took place before the candidates of other parties emerged as follows: chief Obafemi Awolowo, Unity party of Nigeria (UPN); Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigerian people's party (NPP); Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim, Great Nigerian people's party (GNPP); and Malam Aminu Kano, Peoples Redemption Party (PRP).

Other primary elections conducted in the same period were characterized by imposition of candidates by party leaders. For example Awolowo (1947, 1958) cited in Hyacinth (2021, P.33) argued, while defending his actions on the imposition of Pa Alayande his preferred candidate in the gubernatorial primary election in Oyo state in the second republic. According to him, "it was the height of absurdity for any one to think that largely non- literate electorates would be capable of deciding what is in its interests and to believe otherwise was to be nothing but irresponsible". According to Joseph, (1989,P.103); Jim Nwobodo who contested under the Nigeria People's party as a gubernatorial candidate was imposed by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe through a handwritten paper to the party in 1978. In search of a solution to this abuse of internal

democracy, General Babangida the then Military leader made an attempt during transition to democracy from 1986-1993 to entrench internal democracy by creating two political parties, the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) (one, a little to the left and the other a little to the right) and built party offices at all the states and local government headquarters and paid for other expenditures. This single action somehow incapacitated the political elites in terms of disallowing them to mobilize party members and to hire party offices. This is one of the strategies the elites often used to control the political party machinery for their interests including choosing who should be a candidate for an election. Corroborating this assertion Amucheazi (2008, P. 63) argued that:

The government deliberately disallowed special privileges or conditions that would make for undue privileges among the party chieftains in particular. All members of the party were supposed to be “equal founders and equal joiners” of the party...

The military elites were not different in the manipulation of political processes. General Abacha sacked the interim government of chief Ernest Shonekan and embarked on a desperate move to continue in office in what was then described in political parlance as “Tazarce” a Hausa word meaning Continuity (Hausa is a member of the Afro- Asiatic language family). In order to actualize his ambition five political parties that emerged under his regime asked him to metamorphose into a civilian president hence, adopted him as the sole candidate for the 1999 elections, nullifying therefore, the imperative for party primaries. Subsequently, those politicians that got the tickets in the 1998 primaries were largely handpicked. In the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) for example, according to Amucheazi (2008, P.68):

... The control of the party structure fell into a few hands that bought over the party with money. They financed the activities of the party and in turn seized the party organs and ran the party with little participation of members and consultation with party organs and units. Results of party primary elections were ignored; and the wives, girlfriends, sons, and surrogates of the wealthy got approval to run for offices at the various levels sometimes without even going through primaries.

In the Action congress of Nigeria (ACN then AC) 2007 primaries, according to Vanguard of January 14, 2011 “fielded former vice president Atiku Abubakar as its standard bearer after decamping from the PDP as the presidential candidate of the party”. The Alliance for democracy (AD) and the All Nigeria progressive party (ANPP) were equally caught in the web of manipulating party primaries in 2003. According to Ologbenia and Nwomeh, (2009), cited in Hyacinth, (2021, P. 34); the issue applied to the ANPP in 2003 primaries in which five out of the six aspirants stepped down for Muhammadu Buhari and the protest from one of the aspirants was ignored. According to Oladeji in an article titled “Party primaries and accountability in governance” in Thisdaylive of June 2022 noted that; Political party primaries in the AD in 1999 were more of a concluded affair because party ticket was largely used to compensate individual commitment to the struggle against military repression.

In Lagos state the then governor of the state Bola Ahmed Tinubu was described as the sole determinant of the 2016 party primaries of the Action congress (AC). Corroborating this assertion Ologbenia and Nwomeh (2009, P.67) indicated that:

Tinubu was the sole determinant of the delegate list as well as the party's candidates for all elections in the state. It was alleged that Tinubu compiled the lists for all political offices alone, all in the bid to install anointed successor Mr. Babatunde Raji Fashola, his former chief of staff.

According to Nzeakah, (2007, P. 18); In the PDP governorship primary in Rivers state Rotimi Ameachi won the primary but was subverted but he later reclaimed it through a supreme court ruling in October 2007. In the 2011 primary election in the PDP, the incumbency factor played a very important role in the elections of party flag bearers. Accordingly, Reuter's world news of January 14, 2011 reported that; "In a stark demonstration of the power of incumbency Jonathan trounced rival Atiku Abubakar, a former vice president in all but a handful of the country's 36 states". In the same report, Ben Obi, "Complained of irregularities, saying the delegates' lists had been doctored and Abubakar himself made a fiery speech at the convention condemning Jonathan for breaching the zoning pact".

The APC primaries in 2015 were heavily influenced by the "Buhari factor" that was characterized by the change Mantra especially in Northern Nigeria. The desire for the actualization of the merger agreement by the political elites in the then opposition parties and the factions of the PDP and APGA to oust the then ruling PDP also influenced the outcome of the primaries in favour of Buhari as the candidate of the APC. Internal democracy also manifested in the way aspirants contested the primary freely with most of them scouring impressive votes. According to vanguard newspaper of December 11, 2014 Buhari polled 3,430 and Atiku and Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso among others polled 974 and 954 votes respectively. The acceptance of the credibility of the primaries explained why the losers in the primaries accepted defeat and declared to work with Buhari to success in 2015 general election.

The then ruling PDP adopted President Goodluck Jonathan as the sole candidate for the 2015 election. This was a decision that shut out other candidates in what appeared to be an agreement between the political elites within the party especially PDP governors. Accordingly, the then governor of Niger state Babangida Aliyu made the announcement on behalf of the governors. Governor Babangida Aliyu was reported in premium Times of September 18, 2014 thus; "... That all PDP Governors had in their meeting on Wednesday unanimously without any reservation decided to endorse the sole candidature of president Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 Election".

From the literature review it is clear, there is an established relationship between elite factor in terms of their influence and the outcome of primary elections in Nigeria. However what this paper seeks to do is to establish the extent at which the elites influenced the outcome of the 2023 primary elections.

## 4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper derives inspiration from the Elite theory in order to examine the role of the elite in electoral choice of candidates in the primaries for the 2023 general election in Nigeria. The elite theory could be traced to the works of a number of European thinkers such as Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca. Some other American social scientists such as Schumpeter, Harold Lasswell and C. Wright Mills have all contributed to the advancement of the theory in the 1950s. The theory rests its tenets on the following:

1. Power classification in terms of how elite theorists look at human society comprising two groups, first, those who have important political power and those who have none and cannot therefore exercise any power over the functions of government.
2. The capacity of the Elites to organize themselves. Generally in terms of how elite theorists look at elites as people that are highly coordinated, organized, intellectually endowed and skillful in manipulating their way into political power. In this sense, the elites because of their economic and political power they influence decisions in the society including politics.
3. The linkages between elites and various social forces in the society such as socio-cultural organisations as well as religious organisations.
4. Access and succession to power. In this regards Pareto (1848-1923) among others believed that the elites a minority that possesses the qualities necessary for its ascension to full social and political power rules every society.
5. Elites exercise power by using state apparatus to compel obedience of the masses.

The theory is therefore relevant and applicable to this study because it aptly describes the configuration, nature and character of Nigerian elites. The theory also explains how elites in various political parties could use among others their organizational skills, economic and access to political power to influence the choice of candidates in primary elections as in Nigeria in the primaries for the 2023 general election and because the masses (in this case party delegates) are so disorganized and impoverished the interest of the elites prevailed interms of their success in primaries leading to their eventual success in the general election thus; maintaining their political positions as governors, or senators and or influencing the choice of their children, allies or surrogates in the primaries.

## 5.0 METHODOLOGY

The paper relied on secondary and primary sources and collected data from related secondary documents such as articles in journals, Newspapers, online resource, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) official documents such as Electoral Act 2022, guidelines for the conduct of party primaries etc. The primary source include raw data in its original form through interview methods/ verbal discussions with the relevant stakeholders in the field, on one to one interview and small group discussions. Interviewees include some INEC officials, petty traders and local politicians especially the foot soldiers. The author met other Nigerians at car wash places, mechanic workshops and engaged them through verbal discussions individually on one to one and collectively in a small group and gathered Data through direct participant observation. The method of the interview/ discussions was the informal impromptu type. Before going to specifics, the author started with general discussions on the state of the nation while talking with the people. This was to create a relax atmosphere in order to illicit the necessary information without hindrance. The data collected were analyzed descriptively to realize the objectives of the paper.

### 5.1 Elite factor and electoral choice of candidates in the 2023 primary election

The elites leveraged on their sense of coordination, organizational skills and intellectual endowment attributes and above all political and economic powers to manipulate the primaries for the 2023 general election in Nigeria through various strategies such as: Vote buying/use of

money to bribe party delegates, selection/control of delegates, elite personalization of political space leading to the emergence of political dynasties, stepping down, Consensus option/automatic ticket, Imposition of aspirants on members of the party among others.

## 5.2 Selection/Control of delegates

Unlike with previous electoral legislation, the Electoral Act 2022 has placed some constraints on the process of nomination of candidates. Under the new electoral Act the large numbers of statutory delegates (usually political appointees) are not known to the new legislation. The act allows only elected delegates to vote in the primary election. However, elite factor played an important role in the manner the state governors influenced the selection of the so-called elected delegates. They are surrogates of the state governors and have no choice of their own. Their obligations were to the governors or godfathers and whoever dropped the highest bid. The control of delegates/votes in the primaries for the 2023 general election was therefore in the hands of the state governors, nullifying therefore, the imperative of internal democracy. Bakare Majeed corroborates this in a report of Premium times of August 16, 2022 titled 2023: “Many federal lawmakers ousted as governors show heavy hands in party primaries” thus:

Many lawmakers have agreed that the situation was their own creation. The 2022 Electoral Act, specifically, section 84 (8) of the law, has eliminated statutory delegates and allowed governors and their strong men to produce the so- called elected delegates who elect party candidates. However, even when statutory delegates were allowed, as was the case prior to the recent amendment of the Electoral Act, governors still controlled the parties and determined who got their parties’ tickets

## 5.3 Vote buying/Use of Money to bribe Party delegates

Some Nigerians variously described the party primary for the 2023 general election as “human trade fairs”, “vast arenas of transactional politics,” while some of the party bigwigs were described as “political contractors/ entrepreneurs” all because there was clear evidence of money exchanging hands between the delegates and the aspirants or their agents. In a THISDAYLIVE report of May, 25,2022; Alhaji Sule Lamido former governor of Jigawa State and a notable chieftain of the PDP described the primary election as” human trade fairs.” Evidence of vote buying or political corruption by the political elites was manifest in most states. In Kaduna state for example among other states, the primaries in most of the parties were characterized by heavy corruption. It was a transaction based on the highest bidder. One of the interviewee mentioned that while some candidates especially in the PDP decided not to pay a dime to the delegates, some others paid.

The primaries for the 2023 general election brought a lot of interesting scenes. Losers asked for refunds from party delegates. In a daily trust Newspaper of 24th may 2022 an aspirant Adam Namadi Sambo the son of former vice president Namadi Sambo “has reportedly asked delegates to refund the 2 million Naira each he doled out before the election.” In a similar report Usman ABG another aspirant also demanded for immediate refund. Both Adam Namadi and Usman ABG lost to the highest bidder Samaila Suleiman the incumbent member of House of Representatives who decamped from the APC to the PDP. According to the Daily Trust Newspaper of 24th May 2022 report; “Suleiman had distributed between 3.5 Million Naira and



4 Million Naira to each delegate while ABG gave out 2.5 Million in Cash and Namadi had distributed 2 Million to delegates.”

This is one of the strategies deployed by the elites and how they influenced the outcome of the primaries for the 2023 general election.

## 5.4 Imposition of Aspirants in the party primaries

Imposition of aspirants on party members was one of the strategies adopted by the elites to influence the outcome of primaries in order to foster their political interest. In Ogun state in a move by the elites in the PDP to defeat the APC in the forthcoming 2023 general election, the PDP cashed on the already battered relationship between the political elites in the APC, and in order to woo former governor Amosun, his loyalties were imposed on the party members and replaced those that were already elected in a primary election as PDP candidates for the state house of assembly. Corroborating this assertion, Saturday Punch of 13TH August 2022 reported that:

The PDP had Saturday last week asked five candidates for the state House of Assembly to step down for Amosun’s loyalists. A source said two seats at the Abeokuta south and three others were conceded and that new primaries were held to replace them. This was in addition to a senatorial slot conceded to Amosun’s group.

In Sokoto state the second term PDP governor of the state Aminu Tambuwal also influenced the outcome of the primaries through imposition of his favored candidate Saidu Umar against the interest of the party members in the state. According to punch Newspaper report of 13TH August 2022 a PDP Stalwart in the state Yusuf Mohammed noted that:

...The outcome of the primary shattered the hopes of many party members. Noting that it will be difficult for the party to retain the state... I don’t know the reason why our governor came to this wrong arithmetical conclusion to drop the favorite among PDP elders, Youths and the citizenry and the most feared candidate by the APC in Sokoto State because of his acceptability. He was dropped for someone people barely knew and does not have the strong personality to win even the election. The disaffection in the PDP arising from the imposition of Saidu Umar led to mass defection from the party.

In Delta state like in other states the elite factor also played an important role in the selection of candidates during the PDP Primaries. The PDP bigwigs in the state Governor Ifeanyi Okowa and former governor James Ibori were in different camps and they supported different aspirants. Okowa supported Sheriff Obovevori while James Ibori Supported David Edevbie. Using incumbency factor Okowa’s candidate was declared the winner of the primary election. According to Punch Newspaper of 13TH August 2022 “...aggrieved supporters protested at both state and National headquarters of the PDP. Though the court had sacked Okowa’s favorite but the governor’s political camp has objected the court judgment and filed for a stay of execution”.

In Plateau state some of the gubernatorial aspirants in the APC primaries for the 2023 general election accused the governor of the state Governor Simon Lilong of imposing his preferred

aspirant Dr Nentawe Yilwatda as the gubernatorial candidate against the wishes of the party members in the state. The aggrieved aspirants had formed a forum and under the leadership of Amos Gozi are challenging the emergence of Nentawe the governor's favorite candidate. According to Gozi cited by Punch Newspaper report of Saturday 13th August 2022; "We have said it before that; we don't recognize Nentawe Yilwatda as the APC governorship candidate in Plateau state unless the right thing is done. What took place during the party primaries was a sham and we cannot take it." Following this development some aggrieved APC members have dump the party and found refuge in other parties.

Elite factor also manifested in the labor party in plateau state. The party also witnessed an intense struggle between the political elites to outwit one another in the party's' primaries. Ambassador Yohanna Margif who defected from the APC clinches the governorship ticket of the labor party. Sooner than later the elite factor manifested in a high level intrigues in the party with the aim of replacing him with another person. In the Nigerian Tribune of Monday 8TH August 2022, Ambassador Margif was quoted as saying "...Some politicians had approached me to relinquish the ticket for them, but I am in the race to give plateau a quality leadership that would stand the test of time". The source continued that; "the refusal of Ambassador Margif to yield to the request of the party bigwigs led to a Kangaroo gubernatorial primary of the party held on Friday and produced Dr Patrick Dakum as its candidate."

In the APC Kwara state the elites political struggle manifested in the leadership tussle between the leading political elites especially the current governor Abdulraham Abdulrazaq and the current Minister of information and culture Alhaji Lai Mohammed. The elite factor like in most states played an important role in the manner incumbency factor was used in the choice of candidates during the APC primaries in the state. The outcome of the primaries that favored the Governor's camp was heavily challenged by the Lai Mohammed's camp. According to Saturday punch of 13TH August 2022:

Some aspirants who were dissatisfied with the conduct of the primaries for various seats in the state have challenged the results in court. While some aggrieved members have defected to different parties, some others stayed in the party to challenge the outcome of the primary.

Rivers state politics also presents a classical example of elite's intense struggle for political power. According to one of the interviewee the elite factor also played a prominent role in the primaries for the 2023 general election of the PDP in Rivers state. "Party members were dissatisfied over the imposition of Siminialayi Fubara as the party's gubernatorial candidate by Governor Nyesom Wike. Leading political elites in the party such as Celestine Omehia, Austin Opara and Lee Maeba were not particularly happy with such imposition of a candidate by the governor." There is similar disaffection in the APC Rivers state. Former governor and former Minister Rotomi Ameachi is a leading political figure in the state. Amaechi's political influence on the choice of candidates in the APC primaries in Rivers state led to serious intra party conflicts leading to litigation. This is corroborated by Saturday punch of 13TH August 2022 report thus:

The APC is having its internal crisis, which has forced some members to dump the party. Some heavy weight, including Tonye princewill, Ms. Ibim Semenitari, Chris Fine bone, Dr Dawari George and Senator Magnus Abe have all dumped the party.

In Kaduna state APC gubernatorial Primary, the elite factor was also manifest in what look like a coronation for the governor El- rufai's anointed candidate Senator Uba Sani, a close ally and a former adviser to the governor on political matters between 2015 and 2019. Senator Uba was declared the winner of the APC gubernatorial primary in Kaduna state. According to Premium Times of May 25, 2022 "Mohammed Dattijo, Mr. El- rufai's former chief of staff had also declared interest in the ticket but the governor asked him to step down for Mr. Sani." In Kano state NNPP Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso the former governor of the state and leader of Kwankwasiyya political movement and now the NNPP presidential candidate had also imposed his son in- law Abba Yusuf, alias Abba gida gida as the gubernatorial candidate in the state.

## 5.5 Consensus option/ Automatic ticket

Consensus was one of the strategies that were used by political elites/ APC leadership. One of the interviewee who claimed to be an observer of the APC politics noted that, in an attempt to address some of the internal crisis that bedeviled the party, governors asking for second term were given automatic ticket and those that have completed their second term were allowed to present their successors following the APC's strategic decision meant to avoid previous mistakes that led to the loosing of some states like Bauchi, Zamfara among others. In Zamfara state for example the elite factor influenced the outcome of the APC primaries for the 2023 general election through consensus. The APC Leaders resolved as follows; Governor Bello Matawalle got automatic ticket for his second term. Former governor Abdul-Aziz Yari got automatic ticket for senatorial seat. Former Senator Kabiru Marafa also got automatic ticket for a senatorial seat. The former PDP members of the House of Representatives that defected with Governor Matawalle to the APC were replaced with former governor Abdul-Aziz Yari and former Senator Kabiru Marafa's loyalties. Corroborating Zamfara consensus arrangement, the state governor Bello Matawalle in the Nigerian Tribune of November 22, 2021 remarked that, "the outcome of the party's congresses have continued to produce consensus candidates in the exercise of oneness and unity in the political history of Zamfara".

In Borno and Yobe States in the Northeast geo political zone like in other APC control states in other zones the elite factor played an important role in the primaries that favoured the incumbent governors through the Consensus option. Governor Professor Babagana Zulum and Governor Mai Mala Buni won the APC gubernatorial tickets unopposed and were ratified through voice vote. This is corroborated by the News report of the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR) of 27th May 2022 on 2023 primaries in Nigeria noting that; "The chairman of the APC Primary election committee in Borno state Uba Maigari disclosed that, 1,422 Delegates were accredited while 1411 Voted and endorsed Zulum through Voice Vote". Governor Maimala Bunu of Yobe state was also endorsed through voice vote. Gombe state governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya is another APC stalwart that got automatic ticket in the party's primary for the 2023 general election.

The political elites in the PDP in the Northeast zone like their counterparts in the APC also called the shots at the primaries for the 2023 general election conducted in their states. In

Adamawa state Governor Ahmadu Fintiri being the party leader and using the power of incumbency secured his second term as the sole candidate. Others in the PDP that completed their second term went for senatorial seats and some of them contested for presidential primaries and lost and in a dramatic double-quick match manner proceeded to secure either senatorial seats or second term as governors. Example of such governors are Governors Bala Mohammed of Bauchi state and Aminu Tambuwal of Sokoto state respectively. The Nigeria's political elites have always proven their greed and insatiable thirst for power. If they are not directly occupying political offices then it must be their children, wife or favourites. Corroborating this assertion Wale Odunsi in Daily post of May 27, 2022 noted that, "Most of them (Governors) leaving have been able to successfully push a number of their favourites as flag bearers". Although nomination of candidates base on consensus is one of procedure allowed by law as stipulated in section 84 (2) of the 2022 electoral act but it is not without conditions. For example section 84 (9) provide that; "A political party that adopts a consensus candidate shall secure a written consent of cleared aspirants for the position, indicating their voluntary withdrawal from the race and their endorsement of the consensus candidate". The sole candidature of most of the governors if not all is therefore a clever way of evading the provision of section 84 (9) of the 2022 electoral act. The Zamfara consensus arrangement that appear to be a mere sharing of positions among the leading political elites in the state as discussed above may not be in total agreement with the provision of the act. This is the extent of elites' influence on the primaries for the 2023 general election in the state.

## 5.6 Elite Personalization of the political space

The personalization of political space by the elites members of dominant political parties (Former vice president of the federal Republic of Nigeria, Serving and former governors, former senators, former Ministers, former Chief justice of Nigeria) leading to the emergence of political dynasties manifested during the primaries for the 2023 general election probably more than any time in the Nigeria's political history. This has been the strategy of political elites in Nigeria at any time they decide to step aside of politics. They do everything humanly possible to keep members of their family in Power thereby creating their political dynasties. In their active political life they make all attempts to directly or indirectly perpetuate their stay in power and to continue to benefit from what power brings. A popular example is the Saraki political dynasty in the politics of Ilorin and beyond. This is also typical of elites anywhere in the world including politically developed societies with the examples of the Bush and Gorge Kennedy political dynasties in the United States of America. According to leadership online news of 31 st July 2022; the list of political elites whose children aspired to inherit them in the primaries for the 2023 general election cut across the six geo- political zones of Nigeria with many of them "selected" as party candidates at various levels. The elite factor played an important role in the "selection" essentially because of the overwhelming political influence of the parents who are presently either occupying political offices as state governors or former governors or they are party financiers in their respective states. The tremendous political influence of their parents on the party delegates made it very easy for some of them to pick the tickets as flag bearers. Even though some other factors played out. For example in Kaduna state the sons of the former Vice president Namadi sambo as well as a business tycoon in the telecommunication Industry Alhaji ABG lost out to the current member of the House of Representatives Samaila Suleiman on account of transactional politics of the highest bidder. Daily Trust Newspaper of 24th May 2022 reported that; "Suleiman paid between 3.5 Million

to 4million to each delegate to defeat Vice president Namadi and Alhaji ABG's Sons who paid less". Other children of the elites include among others; Abba the son of the current governor of Kano state Umar Ganduje won unopposed as the candidate for APC (Rimin Gado and Dawakin Tofa federal constituency) following the withdrawal of the incumbent Junaid Yakubu. Interestingly Kano state politics represent a classical example of elites/ bourgeois struggle for political power. The elite factor also played out in the PDP primaries for the 2023 general election in Kano state, for example Sadiq Wali the eldest son of a former Ambassador and a chieftain of the party in the state, Alhaji Aminu Wali won the governorship ticket base on the primaries conducted by the Aminu Wali's faction (his father). The other faction produced Alhaji Mohammed Abacha (The son of late Head of state, Gen. Abacha) as the gubernatorial candidate of the party.

Members of other Nigerian political families that participated in the primaries for the 2023 general election in various political parties and that enjoyed the supports and influence of their parents according to Premium Times of May 29, 2022 include:

Joju Fayose, the son of former governor Fayose of Ekiti state nominated as PDP's candidate for Ekiti central Federal constituency, Marilyn Okowa Daramola, the daughter of Governor Ifeanyi Okowa was nominated as the PDP candidate for Ika North East federal constituency in Delta sate. The son of former Jigawa state governor Sule Lamido was elected as the gubernatorial candidate of the PDP for the state, Governor Ganduje's Son- in- law and the son of former governor of Oyo state, Idris Abiola Ajimobi, also won the APC ticket for the Ibadan south west II State constituency in Oyo State, Mr. El- rufai's son, Bello, has secured the APC ticket to represent his constituency in the House of Representatives.

Reports in the Cable news of May 24, 2022 indicated what was clearly the factor of elite influence in PDP Primaries in Delta state with the success of the Ibori's political family. The daughter of former governor James Ibori Erhiatake Ibori- Suenu got the ticket and is now the PDP candidate for Ethiope federal constituency. In the BBC News Pidgin of 31 st may, 2022 the children of notable political elites in Zamfara state former governors Ahmed Yerima and Mamuda Shinkafi (Abba Sani Yerima and Usman Mamuda Shinkafi) also aspired to inherit their parents.

## 6.0 FINDINGS

Base on the findings it is clear the objectives of this paper in terms of the strategies deployed by the elites and how they influenced the choice of candidates in the primaries for the 2023 general election have been realized thus:

- Despite the constraints placed by the electoral act 2022 on the nomination of candidates the state governors mostly influenced the "election" of the delegates making it possible for the governors to control the delegates/votes in the primaries for the 2023 general election.
- The party primary for the 2023 general election was significantly different in some respects with the ones in previous years. This time around some contestants openly challenged the transactional political activities, declaring not to pay any bribe to the

delegates when they know the votes will go to the candidates designated by the governors/godfathers.

- Interestingly some of the politicians that bribed the delegates and lost asked for refund, while some delegates went home with their money.
- The political elites in the four political parties, the scope of this paper called the shots at the primary elections conducted in their states. Most of the governors that completed their second term have successfully pushed a number of their favourites as flag bearers. While those that will complete their second term got automatic tickets as sole candidates for the gubernatorial election in their states.
- The personalization of the political space leading to the emergence of political dynasties manifested during the primaries for the 2023 general election, probably more than any time in the Nigeria's political history. Political elites whose children aspired to inherit them in the primaries cut across the six geo- political zones of Nigeria with many of them "selected" as party candidates at various levels.

## 7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Contrary to the principle of internal democracy in the election of party candidates the political elites in Nigeria have over the years devised their own methods of conducting party primaries. Such methods include: affirmation, adoption, consensus Option, automatic ticket, compensation, stepping down, and sometimes-outright imposition of candidates. Some form of inducements used to bribe delegates garnishes these methods, especially money being an important factor next to incumbency in party primary in Nigeria. Elites manipulation of party primaries leading to imposition of candidates on the rank and file of the political parties or delegates negates all principles of internal democracy. This attitude of the elites encourage corruption in the Nigeria's political space and leading to presenting candidates for general elections that may not serve the interest of Nigerian people but that of their sponsors. It is therefore clear in this sense that, the manner in which the primaries for the 2023 general election were conducted in Nigeria shows that, the elites have successfully deployed several strategies including the use of political and economic powers in the choice of favored candidates or in maintaining their seats. This explain why several months after the primaries were conducted especially in the PDP and APC as reported by Daily trust Newspaper of Tuesday October 4, 2022 litigation trailed the exercise in several states. The implication of manipulating processes of the primaries by the elites ran contrary to the principle of internal democracy. The realization of genuine internal democracy in Nigeria leading to free and fair primaries therefore will remain a mirage. Against this backdrop, this paper recommends that more work should be done on the electoral act interms of creating stringent measures such as banning from political participation, establishing independent courts to try electoral offences and to enforce sanctions on violators as provided in part vii sections 120- 129 of the electoral act 2022.Expectedly, these would check the excesses of the political leaders in the way they always manipulate party primaries and therefore sanitize the polluted political atmosphere.

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