

# MONEY POLITICS, POLITICAL INTIMIDATION, AND VOTER BEHAVIOR: EXAMINING THE 2026 APC PRIMARIES IN NASARAWA STATE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzed the effect of money politics and political intimidation on voter behavior during the 2026 All Progressives Congress (APC) primaries in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The objectives were to examine the manifestations of money politics and intimidation in the primaries, analyze their influence on voter choice, and assess their implications for party democracy. Employing qualitative content analysis, seventeen content units comprising media reports, political discourses, and social media discussions (Facebook) were examined using thematic coding framed by Elite Theory. Findings revealed that money politics remains entrenched in Nigeria's electoral architecture, manifesting through commercialized party processes, extortionate demands on aspirants, and manipulation of participation rules. Political intimidation emerged through threats, voter suppression, strategic exclusion, and voter list manipulation, representing severe infringements upon democratic participation and voter autonomy. These practices negatively affect internal party democracy, diminish merit-based candidate selection, undermine democratic consolidation, and erode public confidence in electoral institutions. The study recommends robust enforcement of electoral laws, enhanced transparency measures, and strengthened institutional oversight by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to safeguard electoral integrity.

**Keywords:** Money politics, political intimidation, voter behavior, APC primaries, Nasarawa State, internal party democracy

## Introduction

Since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, electoral malpractice, vote buying, political patronage, and poor internal party democracy have been recurring challenges in its democratic trajectory (Omotola, 2010; Suberu, 2007). Political parties, which should serve as democratic institutions for leadership selection, citizen participation, and political socialization, have increasingly become forums for elite bargaining, financial influence, and coercive political practices (Joseph, 1987). This development raises fundamental questions about the quality and sustainability of Nigeria's democracy.

Party primaries represent critical stages in Nigeria's electoral process through which candidates are selected for general elections. Primaries are intended to serve as the bedrock of democratic representation, providing party members and delegates the opportunity to select candidates based on competence, vision, and popularity. However, many primaries reflect not democratic competition but rather the influence of financial inducements deployed by powerful political actors seeking to secure delegate loyalty and predetermine outcomes (Ovwasa, 2013). The APC primary in Nasarawa State in 2026 provides a critical case for examining the nexus between money politics, political intimidation, and voter behavior in party machinery.

Nasarawa State constitutes a political hotspot in North-Central Nigeria. Characterized by ethnic and religious diversity, the state has witnessed significant APC influence since 2015. The history of party politics in Nigeria suggests that struggles for control are hardly unique within dominant parties, featuring monetary inducement, patron-clientism, and intimidation of delegates and opposition groups (Ibeanu, 2007). The 2026 governorship primaries attracted considerable attention due to the ticket's high stakes and the number of aspirants seeking it.

Political intimidation manifests through harassment, threats, exclusionary tactics, violence, and procedural manipulation aimed at influencing electoral outcomes. In Nigerian politics, intimidation may involve actions by party officials, security personnel, political thugs, traditional rulers, or influential patrons. Such practices can include beatings, arrests, property damage, threats, manipulation of delegate lists, last-minute venue changes, and biased accreditation procedures (Suberu, 2007). These practices, combined, fundamentally violate democratic principles, including the right to free choice, the integrity of electoral processes, and the principle of one-person-one-vote.

Hence, this study aims to investigate the role these dynamics play in voter behavior during the 2026 Nasarawa State APC primaries. By relying on media coverage, social media dialogues, and current academic literature, the study provides a holistic understanding of how financial incentives and coercive tactics affect internal party elections.

## Statement of the Problem

Despite two decades of democratic progress in Nigeria, party primaries remain plagued by irregularities reflecting corruption, financial inducement, and coercive political practices (Adejumobi, 2000). Candidate selection frequently depends not on ability, popularity, or ideology but rather on financial resources, privilege, and political connections. This situation has produced a political elite more loyal to sponsors than to constituents.

The monetization of politics has raised concerns about political exclusion and diminished democratic accountability. The credibility of candidate selection processes is compromised by pressure from influential political actors on delegates and party members (Yakubu, 2021). Political intimidation discourages independent participation, creating a climate of fear among voters, party stakeholders, and aspirants lacking strong party connections. Many qualified candidates are

deterred from contesting primaries by their inability to match the resources or political connections of well-financed aspirants.

Concerns regarding voter manipulation, elite interference, and intra-party conflict have raised doubts about the integrity of the APC's primary election in Nasarawa State. Multiple media reports documented claims of result manipulation, pre-arranged outcomes, and the use of state machinery favoring particular aspirants (Blueprint Newspapers, 2026; Leadership Newspaper, 2026). However, limited academic work has specifically focused on the interplay between money politics, intimidation, and voter decisions in the state's 2026 APC primary elections.

This study addresses this gap by systematically analyzing the impact of money politics and intimidation on voter behavior and electoral outcomes. It provides empirical evidence based on media sources and social media platforms to document the level and types of such practices.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the manifestations of money politics in the APC primary elections in Nasarawa State in 2026.
2. Analyze the influence of political intimidation on voter behavior during the primaries.
3. Assess the consequences of money politics and intimidation on internal party democracy and democratic consolidation.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the manifestations of money politics in the 2026 APC primaries in Nasarawa State?
2. What forms of political intimidation were employed during the 2026 APC primaries?
3. What are the implications of these practices for internal party democracy and democratic consolidation in Nasarawa State?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Concept of Money Politics**

Nigeria, like many other African democracies, has developed money politics as a primary method of electoral contestation. Scholars contend that the prohibitive cost of political participation leads to the domination of party structures by wealthy candidates through patronage, clientelism, and vote buying (Ovwasa, 2013). During primaries, voters wield significant power in determining outcomes, and financial inducements are often directed toward this smaller, more accessible group compared to general elections involving millions of voters.

Research on Nigerian elections has demonstrated that politicians distribute cash, gifts, clothing, foodstuff, mobile phones, and other material incentives to sway political support (Lindberg, 2010). The monetization of politics institutionalizes political inequality, disadvantaging candidates lacking significant financial resources regardless of their ability, integrity, or popular appeal. Candidates who do not participate in money politics often cannot secure delegate votes, as delegate support has become commodified requiring payment. This creates a vicious cycle where money politics becomes normalized and expected.

#### **Political Intimidation in Party Primaries**

Political intimidation encompasses harassment, threats, exclusionary tactics, violence, and procedural manipulation designed to influence electoral outcomes (Ibeanu, 2007). In Nigerian politics, intimidation may involve actions by party officials, security personnel, political thugs, traditional rulers, or influential political patrons. Intimidation manifests through beatings, arrests, property damage, threats, last-minute venue changes, and biased accreditation procedures.

Studies of internal party democracy reveal that intimidation targets those who oppose elite wishes and those who support non-establishment candidates (Suberu, 2007). Candidates perceived

as threats to political power may face procedural manipulation, denial of venues, or political harassment. Intimidation instills fear, undermines democratic participation, and compels compliance with elite directives. Voter experiencing intimidation may feel compelled to vote for preferred candidates to avoid becoming subsequent targets.

### **Voter Behavior and Choice**

Voter choice in party primaries is influenced by ethnicity, religion, party loyalty, ideology, candidate charisma, monetary considerations, and political pressure (Omotola, 2010). However, within many Nigerian party organizations, voter autonomy is significantly constrained by economic dependency, poverty, and patron-client dynamics. Voters are ordinary party members with limited financial resources, making the promise of material benefits potentially outweigh considerations of candidate quality or policy.

Research shows that economic vulnerability combined with transactional politics leads voters to prioritize short-term material gains over democratic principles. Consequently, elections reflect bargaining processes rather than free and fair contests. This results in the delegitimization of primaries and the selection of candidates who may lack popularity or governance capacity.

### **Internal Party Democracy**

Internal party democracy encompasses transparent, participatory, and competitive candidate and leadership selection procedures (Ake, 1996). Democratic primaries should achieve fair competition, accountability, inclusiveness, and fairness. Well-functioning internal party democracy reinforces the democratic system, provides credible candidates, enables citizen political participation, and promotes party accountability.

### **Social Media and Political Discourse**

Social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter (now X), and WhatsApp have become key mediums for political communication, mobilization, and public opinion formation in Nigeria. During the 2026 elections, social media emerged as an alternative platform for citizens, party members/voters to disseminate information, voice complaints, and contest official narratives. The unmediated nature of social media allows allegations and counter-allegations to circulate rapidly, shaping public opinion before official results are announced.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Elite Theory as its analytical framework. Elite theory, as developed by Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and C. Wright Mills, posits that political power is held by a few significant individuals who control political institutions and processes. Regardless of the democratic character of a society, a minority rules while a majority is ruled.

In the context of APC primaries in Nasarawa State, political elites utilize their financial resources, patronage relations, media access, and intimidation to determine candidate selection and influence primary processes. Elite Theory explains how party structures are dominated by wealthy political actors who seek to limit democratic participation. The theory also elucidates why reforms aimed at enhancing internal party democracy often fail, those benefiting from the status quo possess both the means and motivation to obstruct meaningful change.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative content analysis research design. Content analysis is appropriate for analyzing text-based materials to identify recurrent themes, patterns, meanings, and discursive strategies related to money politics and political intimidation. This approach is suitable for analyzing political phenomena where direct observation is challenging or where researchers seek to investigate how phenomena are depicted in public discourse.

### **Sources of Data and Sampling**

The study utilized secondary data sources including media reports, political commentaries, and online discussions. Seventeen content units comprising news reports from Blueprint Newspapers, Leadership Newspaper, Legit.ng, Nasarawa Eye, PM News Nigeria, Punch Newspapers, and The Nigeria Standard were systematically analyzed. Additionally, Facebook discussions and public commentary threads on the APC primaries in Nasarawa State were examined.

### **Sampling Justification**

The selection of seventeen content units was purposive, based on their relevance to the research objectives and their capacity to provide rich, detailed information on money politics and political intimidation in the 2026 APC primaries. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate for this qualitative study as it enables the deliberate selection of information-rich cases that are most likely to yield comprehensive insights into the phenomena under investigation (Patton, 2015). The selected media outlets represent diverse editorial perspectives and geographic coverage, enhancing the breadth of data. The sample size of seventeen content units was determined by data saturation, the point at which additional materials yielded no new themes or insights relevant to the research questions (Guest et al., 2006).

### **Method of Analysis**

Collected materials were subjected to thematic analysis using a coding framework derived from the research objectives and prior studies. Coding categories included:

- i. Vote buying and financial inducement
- ii. Voter manipulation and inducement strategies
- iii. Political patronage and godfatherism
- iv. Elite manipulation and backroom deals
- v. Intimidation tactics (physical, psychological, structural)
- vi. Internal party conflict and factionalism
- vii. Electoral coercion and pressure
- viii. Voter behavior and decision-making

Themes, coding, and interpretation were conducted through the lens of Elite Theory. Triangulation of findings from different sources was employed to enhance the validity of the findings.

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### **Manifestations of Money Politics**

The study revealed that money politics remains a major problem in Nigeria's party primary system. The 2026 APC governorship primary in Nasarawa State was influenced by the implementation of direct primaries, which involve all registered party members voting to elect a party's flag bearer rather than a small college of delegates. The direct primary was specifically designed to reduce the money and manipulation associated with delegate-based indirect systems. Policy debates leading to the Electoral Act 2026 anticipated that direct primaries would cure candidate imposition, vote buying, rigging, and manipulation associated with the delegate system. Direct primaries shift the focus of influence from a few hundred or thousand voters to potentially tens of thousands of voters across 147 wards, making it more difficult and expensive to secure sufficient votes to determine the election outcome.

However, money politics did not disappear with the advent of direct primaries but merely transformed. The 2026 APC Primary elections in Nasarawa State did not feature widespread allegations of vote buying as in 2015, 2019 and 2023; rather, financial influence manifested through different mechanisms. The North-Central APC Forum raised concerns that national party

officials had turned the main elections into business, moving from state to state collecting money from aspirants to sell APC tickets. The Forum stated: "What they are doing now is they are sending officials to different states to collect money from aspirants and promise them party tickets instead of making sound arrangements for free and fair primary elections." In this manifestation of money politics, the targeting of voters occurs upstream through extortionate demands on aspirants for clearance, favorable screening, or procedural benefits. Additional complaints indicated that state party officials issued arbitrary voter accreditation instructions designed to exclude party supporters of candidates they opposed, thereby limiting the number of voters requiring inducement. Thus, while direct primaries may raise the logistical bar for vote buying, money politics adapts, manifesting through commercialization of party processes, manipulation of participation rules, and financial pressures on aspirants, all evident in Nasarawa State's 2026 APC primaries.

### **Political Intimidation and Voter Manipulation**

The analysis uncovered several types of intimidation in the 2026 APC primaries in Nasarawa State. These included:

**Threats of political exclusion:** Allegations that voters who did not support preferred candidates were threatened with expulsion from the party and loss of future party benefits.

**Manipulation of ward lists:** Reports of ward list manipulation removing names of electoral wards perceived as favoring non-establishment candidates.

**Coercive pressure from party leaders:** Alleged coercion by high-ranking party officials directing voters on who to vote

**Strategic use of security structures:** Allegations that security agents were deployed to scare voters or prevent certain individuals from accessing polling stations.

**Physical violence:** Cases of thugs disrupting voting exercise.

Those who opposed dominant political interests were marginalized, humiliated, or threatened. An anonymous voter cited in news reports stated: "We were compelled to vote for their candidate, otherwise we won't get any appointment or contract from the government" (Leadership Newspaper, 2026). These practices discourage independent political participation and concentrate power in party machines and elite hands.

### **Influence on Voter Behavior and Autonomy**

Financial inducements, fear of reprisal, and political pressure significantly influenced voter behavior in the party primary elections. Voter decisions were often determined by material incentives, threats, and political pressure rather than candidate competence, vision, or ideology. Many voters expressed frustration at their loss of autonomy while feeling unable to resist due to political consequences of defiance.

Voter disenfranchisement emerged as a major theme in reports. Some aspirants and voters claimed they were not afforded the opportunity to vote fully. Observers noted that restrictions on voting access, bias in the party's accreditation process, and manipulated result collation represented serious concerns for the party's internal electoral system. This affects democratic representation and facilitates the emergence of candidates selected not by popular vote but through elite bargaining.

### **Social Media and Public Perception**

Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, significantly influenced public perceptions of the APC primaries. Considerable polarization characterized discussions, with both pro- and anti-establishment supporters making various counter-claims. Most material analyzed expressed concerns over lack of intraparty democracy and elite interference in primary conduct, though some users supported the process and defended party leadership.

The most prevalent theme on social media was intimidation and political pressure. Online chats and political reports documented coercion and pressure on aspirants, voters, and party stakeholders before and during the primaries. Political commentators alleged that significant political figures attempted to manipulate party officials and voters to achieve desired outcomes for their preferred candidates. Such allegations generated public perceptions that the primaries were not entirely free and fair.

Social media framed the primaries as a form of political godfatherism and elite bargaining rather than democratic competition, reflecting growing public discontent with the commercialization of politics. The study also identified manipulation and irregularities across a wide sector. Commentators accused the collation process of lacking transparency and of attempting to manipulate results in favor of certain aspirants. Many online users doubted result credibility even as APC officials and supporters defended the process. These discrepancies reveal low trust levels among party members and the public in internal party elections.

### **Implications for Democratic Consolidation**

Money politics and intimidation carry grave implications for democratic consolidation in Nasarawa State and Nigeria generally. First, these practices undermine intraparty democracy as candidate selection depends on money rather than popular choice. Second, they erode public trust in democratic institutions, as citizens lose faith in election fairness. Third, they perpetuate political corruption, as politicians view their expenditures as investments requiring recovery after election through improper means (Joseph, 1987).

The absence of internal democracy may also lead to electoral violence, political disaffection, poor governance, and the maintenance of political power by a small, wealthy minority. Citizens may conclude their votes are meaningless, predetermined through money and intimidation, and consequently withdraw from political participation. This threatens the foundations of democratic governance.

### **Conclusion**

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine the relationship between money politics, political intimidation, and voter behavior during the 2026 APC primaries in Nasarawa State. Findings indicate that financial incentives and political pressure significantly influence voter behavior and candidate selection mechanisms. Money politics and intimidation were found to be pervasive, entrenched, and mutually reinforcing. Money politics and intimidation diminish electoral credibility and internal party democracy while jeopardizing democratic consolidation in the State and undermining democratic participation. These practices will continue to erode public confidence in governance and produce a political elite more loyal to powerful benefactors than to constituents unless fundamental institutional changes occur.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. INEC should substantially enhance monitoring activities in party primaries, including the presence of observers at voting centers and delegate selection venues, ensuring real-time oversight and documentation of proceedings.
2. Electoral laws should be amended to impose severe penalties, including heavy fines, disqualification, and criminal prosecution for vote buying during primary elections, creating meaningful deterrence.
3. Security agencies should maintain independence and neutrality during party primaries, taking proactive measures to prevent political intimidation, violence, and coercion.

4. Political financing rules should be strengthened to limit campaign expenditure, ensure transparency in funding sources, and minimize the monetization of elections.
5. Courts should be empowered to review and expeditiously decide cases alleging money politics or intimidation, with capacity to nullify primary results where substantial irregularities are proven.

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