

# Political Campaign Finance: Safeguarding Electoral Integrity in Africa

**Mr. Rushdi Nackerdien**

In 2018, the late Kofi Annan affirmed that not only electoral management bodies but also political leaders, civil society, and ordinary citizens must play their part in ensuring electoral integrity, which is the foundation of democracy. Also last year, South Africa's Constitutional Court stated in a judgment on campaign finances that a nation's future largely stands on how elections are conducted, with transparency and accountability being paramount. As elections move forward in Africa, electoral management bodies should broaden their existing technical roles to include fostering greater accountability and transparency, particularly in campaign financing. Without greater integrity in campaign financing, the resilience of African institutions and democracies will be severely tested.

Running for political office costs money. Just ask some of the female candidates in the last Kenyan elections who sold their cars to finance their campaigns for political office. Ask those who have to borrow money to hold a political rally or pay administrative fees. Ask the small parties that cannot obtain state funding because they do not meet the minimum thresholds required to access it.

Beyond such legitimate fees, there is also pressure to raise money for illicit purposes such as vote-buying, bribing officials, or even fomenting election-related violence. In this context, accountability and transparency are paramount, highlighting the need for more enforcement. Voters need to know where parties are receiving funds from and on what they are spending.

Modern African election campaigns are increasingly investing in running sophisticated operations that use foreign public relations companies and analysts.

Meanwhile, electoral management bodies are playing catch-up in a process that is rapidly outstripping current legal provisions and understandings of political campaign finance. While some bodies focus on regulations and laws—politicians are already at the next frontier in the era of the permanent political campaign—which seems to run on a 24/7/365 basis. Campaigns often weave a narrative of fraud and attack electoral institutions, undermining democratic ideals. At times, this culminates in electoral violence and manipulation of the courts in order to disrupt electoral preparations. This is the new reality of adversarial African politics—a reality that should be more effectively managed by African societies.