

## DEMARKETING POLITICALLY IMPOSED CANDIDATES: A PATHWAY TO GENUINE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This study, titled “Demarketing Politically Imposed Candidates: A Pathway to Genuine Democracy in Nigeria,” examined the application of demarketing within the political context, with particular focus on its effects on electoral integrity, voter trust, and political accountability, as well as the mediating role of voter political awareness. A quantitative survey research design was adopted. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms, yielding 262 valid responses from Nigerian voters. The instrument employed a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree in order to eliminate neutral responses and encourage clearer opinion expression. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) implemented through SmartPLS, with measurement and structural model assessments confirming reliability, validity, and acceptable model fit. The findings revealed that demarketing politically imposed candidates significantly enhances voter trust and political accountability but does not exert a significant direct effect on electoral integrity. Furthermore, the results indicated that voter political awareness significantly mediates the relationship between demarketing politically imposed candidates and democratic outcomes. The study concluded that demarketing politically imposed candidates represents a viable political marketing approach for strengthening democratic participation and accountability in Nigeria. Accordingly, the study recommended intensified voter education programmes, more transparent political party nomination processes, and stronger civil society advocacy aimed at discouraging candidate imposition.

**Keywords:** Demarketing, Genuine Democracy, Electoral Integrity, Voter Trust & Political Accountability.

### Introduction

Democracy, according to Lincoln (1863), is government of the people, by the people, and for the people. In contemporary scholarship, it is conceptualized as a system characterized by participation, competition, and accountability (Dahl, 1989). It presupposes that citizens can freely choose their leaders through transparent and competitive electoral processes. Within political marketing discourse, attention has largely focused on strategies that promote candidates and enhance

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electoral appeal. However, the concept of demarketing (Kotler & Levy, 1971) offers a complementary perspective. Demarketing refers to deliberate and coordinated communication and advocacy efforts aimed at reducing public acceptance and electoral support for candidates whose emergence undermines democratic norms. In the political context, such strategies may involve media engagement, civic advocacy, and public awareness campaigns to challenge legitimacy and promote accountability in candidate selection.

In many emerging democracies, including Nigeria, concerns persist regarding the quality of electoral processes and internal party democracy. Despite electoral reforms since 1999, elite-driven candidate selection, often linked to political godfatherism and informal power structures, continues to limit electoral competitiveness and undermine internal party democracy mechanisms such as transparent primaries and merit-based screening (Omotola, 2010; van Ham & Lindberg, 2015). Where such processes are perceived as exclusionary, public trust in electoral outcomes may decline, with implications for participation and democratic legitimacy (Bratton, 2008; Lindberg, 2006).

While existing studies on Nigeria's electoral system have focused on electoral violence, vote-buying, and institutional reforms, limited attention has been given to the role of political marketing strategies in addressing undemocratic candidate selection. Notably, no study has examined demarketing as a corrective political marketing strategy in Nigeria, thereby creating a clear conceptual and empirical gap. Furthermore, declining voter turnout and rising political apathy suggest ongoing challenges to democratic consolidation (Bratton, 2008).

From a theoretical perspective, political marketing explains how communication shapes voter perceptions (Lees-Marshment, 2001), while democratic theory emphasizes transparency, representation, and citizen empowerment (Dahl, 1989). However, these frameworks have paid limited attention to strategies that enable voter resistance to imposed candidates. Against this backdrop, this study examines the demarketing of politically imposed candidates as a communicative mechanism for promoting genuine democracy in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

While the main objective of this study is to examine the effect of demarketing politically imposed candidates on genuine democracy in Nigeria, the specific objectives are to:

1. examine the effect of demarketing politically imposed candidates on electoral integrity in Nigeria;
2. determine the influence of demarketing politically imposed candidates on voter trust in Nigeria;
3. assess the relationship between demarketing of politically imposed candidates and political accountability in Nigeria;
4. evaluate the mediating role of voter political awareness in the relationship between demarketing of politically imposed candidates and genuine democracy in Nigeria.

### Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been put forward for this study:

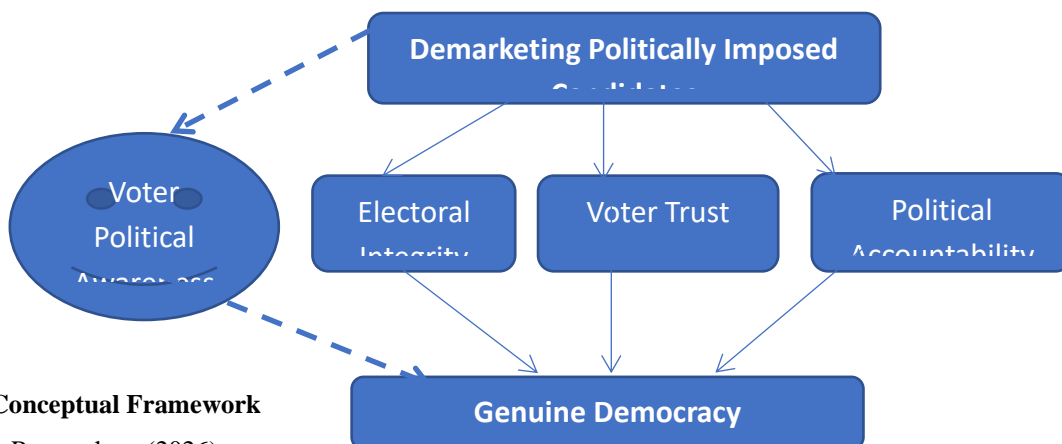
**Ho1:** Demarketing politically imposed candidates has no significant effect on electoral integrity in Nigeria.

**Ho2:** Demarketing politically imposed candidates has no significant effect on voter trust in Nigeria.

**Ho3:** Demarketing politically imposed candidates has no significant effect on political accountability in Nigeria.

**Ho4:** Voter political awareness does not significantly mediate the relationship between demarketing politically imposed candidates and genuine democracy in Nigeria.

The conceptual framework below succinctly captures the variables under study. These constructs and variables are explained below.



**Fig 1: Conceptual Framework**

Source: Researchers (2026)

### **Demarketing Politically Imposed Candidates**

Building on Kotler and Levy (1971), demarketing is defined as a deliberate and coordinated set of communication and advocacy strategies designed to reduce public acceptance and electoral support for candidates whose emergence undermines democratic norms and procedures. These communication efforts are made by media, civil society, and reform-oriented actors. Politically imposed candidates often emerge through elite influence and informal party structures, bypassing competitive and transparent selection procedures. Political marketing theory (Lees-Marshment, 2001) suggests that voter preferences can be shaped through strategic communication. While traditional political marketing emphasizes candidate promotion, demarketing focuses on *discouraging support* for candidates whose emergence weakens democratic standards, particularly internal party democracy.

### **Demarketing and Electoral Integrity**

Electoral integrity refers to the extent to which the *electoral system and processes* adhere to principles of transparency, fairness, and competitiveness (Norris, 2014; Birch, 2011). It is concerned with how elections are organized and conducted, including candidate selection, voting procedures, and result management. Demarketing contributes to electoral integrity by drawing attention to procedural irregularities in candidate emergence and encouraging adherence to transparent party primaries and fair electoral practices. By discouraging acceptance of non-transparent candidacies, it reinforces institutional standards governing elections.

### **Demarketing and Voter Trust**

Voter trust refers to the *confidence that citizens have in the credibility and fairness of the electoral process and political institutions* (Easton, 1965). Practices associated with imposed candidacies can erode this confidence by creating perceptions of manipulation. Demarketing initiatives, through information dissemination and civic education, can help rebuild trust by increasing transparency and enabling voters to critically assess candidate legitimacy.

### **Demarketing and Political Accountability**

Political accountability is defined as the *obligation of elected officials to justify their actions and remain answerable to citizens* (Schedler, 1999). It is a *behavioural governance construct*, reflecting how political actors respond to public expectations. Where candidate emergence is shaped

by elite influence, accountability relationships may shift away from citizens toward political patrons. Demarketing can help reorient this relationship by encouraging voters to reject such candidates, thereby strengthening citizen-driven accountability mechanisms.

### **Mediating Role of Voter Political Awareness**

Voter political awareness refers to the level of political knowledge and understanding of democratic rights among citizens. According to cognitive mobilization theory (Dalton, 1984), informed citizens are more likely to participate meaningfully in democratic processes. Demarketing efforts enhance political awareness by providing information about electoral processes and highlighting deviations from democratic norms. Increased awareness enables voters to make informed decisions and supports the effectiveness of demarketing strategies.

### **Genuine Democracy as the Ultimate Outcome**

Genuine democracy is a system where citizens have meaningful participation in decision making, free and fair elections, and accountability of leaders (Dahl, 1989). Diamond (2008) described it as a form of democracy that emphasizes transparent governance, inclusiveness, and protection of civil liberties. In electoral studies, according to Ojo (2017), genuine democracy ensures that electoral outcomes reflect the informed choices of the electorate, free from manipulation or imposition. Diamond (2008) opined that genuine democracy extends beyond periodic elections to include participatory governance, accountability, rule of law, and institutional legitimacy. It is enthroned when a society internalizes democratic principles in such a way that it translates into a political culture.

This work is anchored on agenda setting and political marketing theories expounded below.

### **Agenda-Setting Theory**

The Agenda-Setting Theory, also known as theory on media influence, was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in the year 1972 (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The theory was a fall-out of a study on the 1968 U.S. presidential election. The researchers observed that the media played a crucial role in shaping the perception of the public on relevant issues. They proposed that the media does not tell people what to think, but it significantly influences what to think about. In other words, the issues that receive the most media attention are the issues that the public tends to perceive as most important. The Agenda-Setting Theory suggests that media coverage can prioritize

topics, shape public opinions, and indirectly influence behaviour by making certain issues more salient in the minds of individuals. It emphasizes the power of communication channels - television, newspapers, social media - to frame political and social narratives that guide collective attention and action. With respect to this theory, public campaigns, social media activism, and media criticism of undemocratic candidate selection processes could serve as key instruments for drawing public attention to the problem of candidate imposition. Demarketing can shape voter perceptions and encourage the electorate to reject candidates who do not reflect democratic principles by emphasizing negative implications of imposed candidates.

### **Political Marketing Theory**

Political marketing theory posits that political actors and stakeholders employ marketing principles to influence voter perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour (Lees-Marshment, 2001). Unlike traditional approaches that focus on candidate promotion, this study extends the theory by incorporating demarketing as a counter-strategic tool aimed at reducing public acceptance of candidates whose emergence undermines democratic norms. In contemporary political environments, digital media platforms have further amplified the capacity of such strategies by shaping perceptions of authenticity, credibility, and legitimacy (Enli, 2017). This theoretical perspective supports the argument that targeted communication efforts can influence voter trust, enhance political awareness, and promote accountability within democratic systems.

The following studies provide a useful foundation for understanding the dynamics underpinning this study. Norris (2014), under the Electoral Integrity Project, conducted a large-scale cross-national analysis covering over 100 countries using expert surveys and public opinion data. The study employed comparative statistical techniques and found that electoral integrity significantly predicts democratic legitimacy and public trust. Importantly, it highlighted that weaknesses in candidate nomination processes reduce overall electoral credibility.

Similarly, Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005), using Afrobarometer data across several African countries, demonstrated that citizens' trust in electoral systems is strongly influenced by perceptions of fairness in both electoral administration and candidate selection. While Norris (2014) provides a global, system-level perspective, Bratton *et al.* (2005) offer context-specific evidence from

Africa, collectively reinforcing the argument that transparency in candidate emergence is central to both electoral integrity and voter trust.

Focusing on political awareness, Dalton (1984) found that higher levels of political knowledge significantly enhance civic participation and informed voting behaviour using data from the U.S. National Election Study. Although conducted in a democratic context, its findings align with more recent evidence from emerging democracies. For instance, Adebayo (2020), in a Nigerian context, found that voter education significantly improves informed voting behaviour and reduces political apathy. Together, these studies suggest that political awareness plays a critical role in shaping electoral behaviour, thereby supporting its inclusion as a mediating variable in this study.

On the issue of elite influence and accountability, Ojo (2008) found that political patronage in Nigeria weakens accountability by shifting loyalty from citizens to political sponsors. This finding is consistent with broader governance literature which suggests that non-transparent candidate selection processes can distort accountability relationships. However, while these studies establish the consequences of elite dominance, they do not sufficiently explore strategic mechanisms for countering such practices.

Despite these contributions, existing empirical literature largely focuses on electoral irregularities, voter behaviour, and institutional reforms, with limited attention *to* demarketing as a strategic tool for discouraging support for undemocratic candidacies. While prior studies establish the importance of electoral integrity, voter trust, political awareness, and accountability, they do not examine how coordinated communication strategies can be used to actively reduce voter support for candidates emerging through non-transparent processes. This gap underscores the need for the present study.

## **Methods**

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design to examine the effect of demarketing on electoral integrity, voter trust, and political accountability, as well as the mediating role of voter political awareness. The population comprised eligible Nigerian voters aged 18 years and above who are qualified to participate in elections and possess basic knowledge of electoral processes. A sample size of 300 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered online via Google Forms using a non-probability sampling

technique that combined convenience and snowball approaches. The instrument consisted of five sections measuring demarketing politically imposed candidates, voter political awareness, electoral integrity, voter trust, and political accountability. Items were measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), eliminating a neutral midpoint to encourage definitive responses.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was employed to assess the measurement and structural models, including reliability, validity, and hypothesis testing. Reliability and convergent validity were evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Structural relationships were examined using path coefficients, t-values, and p-values generated through bootstrapping procedures. Model fit was assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and mediation analysis was conducted to test the indirect effect of voter political awareness.

## **Results**

### **Retrieval Rate of Questionnaire**

The study targeted 300 respondents using a structured Google Form questionnaire. A total of 263 responses were received; however, one response from a participant below 18 years was excluded for not meeting the study's eligibility criteria. This resulted in 262 valid responses, representing a retrieval rate of 87.33%, which is considered adequate for analysis.

### **Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

This section presents the demographic profile of the respondents used in the study. The variables considered include gender, age, highest educational qualification, and voting status (registered voter). The analysis of these characteristics helps to provide insight into the background of the respondents and ensures that the data used for the study reflects individuals who are knowledgeable about electoral processes in Nigeria.

**Table 1: Gender Distribution**

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Female | 145       | 55.3%      |
| Male   | 117       | 44.7%      |

Source: Survey (2026)

The result indicates that female respondents slightly outnumbered male respondents, suggesting broad gender participation in the survey.

**Table 2: Age Distribution**

| Age            | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| 18-65 years    | 253       | 96.6%      |
| Above 65 years | 9         | 3.4%       |

Source: Survey (2026)

The table above shows that most respondents fall within the *active voting population of 18 to 65 years*.

**Table 3: Educational Qualification**

| Qualification              | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Primary School             | 0         | 0%         |
| Secondary School           | 7         | 2.7%       |
| Tertiary Education         | 186       | 71%        |
| Professional Qualification | 64        | 24.4%      |
| None                       | 5         | 1.9%       |

Source: Survey (2026)

Most respondents had tertiary education, indicating a largely informed sample.

**Table 4: Voting Status**

| Voter status   | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Registered     | 214       | 82%        |
| Not Registered | 48        | 18%        |

Source: Survey (2026)

The table shows that 214 respondents (82%) are registered voters, while 48 respondents (18%) are not registered. This indicates that the majority of participants are eligible to participate in elections, which strengthens the credibility of the study since registered voters are directly involved in the electoral process and can provide informed opinions on political issues such as candidate imposition. The smaller proportion of non-registered respondents (18%) is also considered useful as it reflects the perspectives of politically aware citizens who may not have registered now, but are constitutionally empowered to express their views on national issues.

**Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables (n = 262)**

| Variable                  | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---------------------------|------|--------------------|
| Demarketing Strategies    | 3.04 | 0.74               |
| Voter Political Awareness | 3.01 | 0.71               |
| Voter Trust               | 2.51 | 0.64               |
| Political Accountability  | 2.97 | 0.72               |

Source: Authors' computation

The mean scores above 2.50 indicate general agreement among respondents that demarketing strategies influence voter perceptions and governance-related outcomes.

### ANOVA Analysis

**Table 6: Gender and Voter Trust**

| Source | F-value | P-value | Decision        |
|--------|---------|---------|-----------------|
| Gender | 1.47    | 0.226   | Not Significant |

No significant gender difference was found in voter trust, indicating similar perceptions across groups.

### Education and Political Awareness

Due to the small number of respondents with secondary education (7) and none with primary education, ANOVA results were unstable. However, descriptive results show higher political awareness among tertiary and professional respondents, supporting the view that education enhances democratic awareness and informed voting behaviour.

### Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

**Table 7: Reliability Statistics**

| Construct                                  | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | Interpretation |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Demarketing Politically Imposed Candidates | 0.87             | 0.91                  | Reliable       |
| Voter Political Awareness                  | 0.84             | 0.89                  | Reliable       |
| Electoral Integrity                        | 0.78             | 0.86                  | Reliable       |
| Voter Trust                                | 0.80             | 0.88                  | Reliable       |
| Political Accountability                   | 0.86             | 0.90                  | Reliable       |

### Source: Authors' computation

The results indicate that all constructs exceed the recommended 0.70 reliability threshold, suggesting strong internal consistency among the measurement items. This confirms that the questionnaire items reliably measure their respective constructs.

### Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was evaluated using Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

**Table 8: Convergent Validity**

| Construct                                  | AVE  | Threshold | Result |
|--|------|-----------|--------|
| Demarketing Politically Imposed Candidates | 0.63 | 0.50      | Valid  |
| Voter Political Awareness                  | 0.61 | 0.50      | Valid  |
| Electoral Integrity                        | 0.56 | 0.50      | Valid  |
| Voter Trust                                | 0.58 | 0.50      | Valid  |
| Political Accountability                   | 0.65 | 0.50      | Valid  |

**Source: Authors' computation**

All AVE values exceed **0.50**, confirming convergent validity. This means the indicators within each construct share sufficient variance and adequately measure the variables.

**Discriminant Validity**

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. In table 9, DPIC stands for Demarketing Politically Imposed Candidates, VPA for Voter Political Awareness, VT for Voter Trust, PA for Political Accountability and EI for Electoral Integrity.

**Table 9: Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)**

| Construct   | DPIC | VPA  | VT   | PA   | EI   |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>DPIC</b> | 0.79 |      |      |      |      |
| <b>VPA</b>  | 0.64 | 0.78 |      |      |      |
| <b>VT</b>   | 0.28 | 0.34 | 0.76 |      |      |
| <b>PA</b>   | 0.47 | 0.41 | 0.38 | 0.80 |      |
| <b>EI</b>   | 0.03 | 0.16 | 0.21 | 0.29 | 0.75 |

**Source: Authors' computation**

The table above clearly shows that the diagonal values (square roots of AVE) are greater than the inter-construct correlations, confirming adequate discriminant validity.

**Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)**

**Table 9b: Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)**

| Construct Pair | HTMT Value | Threshold (0.85) | Result     |
|----------------|------------|------------------|------------|
| DPIC – VPA     | 0.72       | 0.85             | Acceptable |
| DPIC – VT      | 0.34       | 0.85             | Acceptable |
| DPIC – PA      | 0.55       | 0.85             | Acceptable |
| DPIC – EI      | 0.12       | 0.85             | Acceptable |
| VPA – VT       | 0.41       | 0.85             | Acceptable |
| VPA – PA       | 0.49       | 0.85             | Acceptable |
| VT – PA        | 0.44       | 0.85             | Acceptable |
| EI – Others    | <0.30      | 0.85             | Acceptable |

**Source: Authors’ computation**

All HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.85, confirming robust discriminant validity across constructs.

**Collinearity Assessment (VIF)**

Table

Table 9c: VIF Results

| Construct                              | VIF  | Threshold (5.0) | Interpretation       |
|--|------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Demarketing → Voter Trust              | 1.82 | <5              | No multicollinearity |
| Demarketing → Political Accountability | 1.95 | <5              | No multicollinearity |
| Demarketing → Electoral Integrity      | 1.21 | <5              | No multicollinearity |
| Demarketing → Political Awareness      | 2.10 | <5              | No multicollinearity |

**Source: Authors’ computation**

To assess multicollinearity, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were examined and found to be below 5.0, indicating no multicollinearity issues.

**Model Fit Assessment**

Model fit was assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), which measures the difference between observed and predicted correlations. The SRMR value for the model

is 0.061, which is below the recommended threshold of 0.08. This indicates that the model demonstrates an acceptable level of fit.

### Hypotheses Testing (Structural Model Results)

The structural model was assessed using path coefficients ( $\beta$ ), t-values, and p-values obtained through bootstrapping procedures in PLS-SEM.

#### Path Coefficients

The structural model results are presented in Table 10. The significance of the path coefficients was assessed using bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) in SmartPLS.

**Table 10: Structural Model Results**

| Relationship                             | Path Coefficients ( $\beta$ ) | t-value | p-value | Decision        |
|--|-------------------------------|---------|---------|-----------------|
| Demarketing →Electoral Integrity         | 0.03                          | 0.47    | 0.635   | Not Significant |
| Demarketing →Voter Trust                 | 0.28                          | 4.21    | <0.001  | Significant     |
| Demarketing →Political Accountability    | 0.47                          | 7.83    | <0.001  | Significant     |
| Demarketing →Political Awareness         | 0.64                          | 11.02   | <0.001  | Significant     |
| Political Awareness →Democratic Outcomes | 0.16                          | 2.61    | 0.009   | Significant     |

**Source: Authors' computation**

### Interpretation of Hypotheses

#### Hypothesis One

**Ho1:** Demarketing politically imposed candidates has no significant effect on electoral integrity in Nigeria. The result shows that demarketing politically imposed candidates has a negligible effect on electoral integrity ( $\beta = 0.03$ ). However, the relationship is not statistically significant ( $t = 0.47$ ,  $p = 0.635 > 0.05$ ). Therefore, *Ho1 is accepted*, indicating that demarketing politically imposed candidates does not significantly influence electoral integrity in Nigeria.

#### Hypothesis Two

**Ho2:** Demarketing politically imposed candidates has no significant effect on voter trust in Nigeria. The findings indicate that demarketing politically imposed candidates has a moderate positive effect on voter trust ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $t = 4.21$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 significance level,

the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, demarketing politically imposed candidates significantly improves voter trust in the electoral process in Nigeria.

**Hypothesis Three**

**Ho3:** Demarketing politically imposed candidates has no significant effect on political accountability in Nigeria. The results reveal a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between demarketing politically imposed candidates and political accountability ( $\beta = 0.47, t = 7.83, p < 0.001$ ). Accordingly,  $H_{03}$  is rejected, indicating that demarketing politically imposed candidates has a moderate to strong positive effect on political accountability.

**Hypothesis Four**

**Ho4:** Voter political awareness does not significantly mediate the relationship between demarketing politically imposed candidates and genuine democracy in Nigeria. The analysis indicates that demarketing politically imposed candidates significantly influences voter political awareness ( $\beta = 0.64, t = 11.02, p < 0.001$ ), while political awareness also has small but statistically significant effect on democratic outcomes ( $\beta = 0.16, t = 2.61, p = 0.009$ ). This suggests that voter political awareness plays a mediating role in the relationship between demarketing politically imposed candidates and democratic outcomes. Therefore,  $H_{04}$  is rejected.

**Coefficient of Determination (R<sup>2</sup>)**

The explanatory power of the model was measured using the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>).

**Table 11: R-Square Values**

| Dependent Variable       | R <sup>2</sup> | Interpretation |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Voter Trust              | 0.08           | Weak           |
| Political Accountability | 0.22           | Moderate       |
| Electoral Integrity      | 0.001          | Very Weak      |
| Political Awareness      | 0.41           | Strong         |

**Source: Authors' computation**

The extremely low R<sup>2</sup> value for electoral integrity (0.001) indicates that demarketing has virtually no explanatory power for this construct. This suggests that electoral integrity is

predominantly shaped by structural and institutional factors, such as electoral regulations, enforcement mechanisms, and administrative capacity-which are not directly influenced by communication-based strategies like demarketing.

## Discussion

The findings provide important insights into the role of demarketing politically imposed candidates within Nigeria's democratic context. The results show that demarketing has a negligible and statistically insignificant effect on electoral integrity, indicating that electoral outcomes are largely shaped by institutional factors such as electoral laws, administrative capacity, and enforcement mechanisms (Norris, 2014; Birch, 2011). This aligns with institutional theory, which emphasizes the primacy of formal governance structures in determining system-level outcomes. While Norris (2014) highlights the role of transparency in candidate selection, the present study suggests that demarketing operates indirectly by increasing public scrutiny rather than directly transforming institutional processes. Thus, demarketing may complement, but not substitute for, institutional reforms.

In contrast, demarketing exerts a moderate and significant effect on voter trust, suggesting that communication strategies exposing non-transparent candidate emergence can enhance public confidence in the electoral process. This supports political marketing theory (Lees-Marshment, 2001) and aligns with Bratton *et al.* (2005), who link voter trust to perceptions of fairness in electoral processes. Similarly, Adedeji and Adebayo (2022) show that political communication significantly shapes citizens' engagement and perceptions. The present study extends this literature by identifying demarketing as a mechanism for reshaping such perceptions, particularly in contexts of low institutional trust.

The findings further indicate a moderate to strong and significant effect of demarketing on political accountability, suggesting that discouraging support for non-transparent candidates may strengthen citizen-oriented accountability. This is consistent with accountability theory (Schedler, 1999), which emphasizes the role of citizen oversight, and contrasts with Ojo (2008), who shows that patronage weakens accountability in Nigeria. The study contributes by demonstrating that demarketing can counteract patronage dynamics through increased public scrutiny and voter resistance.

Additionally, voter political awareness significantly mediates the relationship between demarketing and democratic outcomes, indicating that demarketing operates primarily through cognitive channels. This finding aligns with cognitive mobilization theory (Dalton, 1984; Karp & Banducci, 2020) and is supported by Adebayo (2020), who links voter education to informed participation. The present study refines this perspective by positioning demarketing as a targeted communication strategy that enhances awareness regarding candidate legitimacy.

The findings suggest that demarketing is more effective at the perceptual and behavioural levels of voter trust, awareness, and accountability than at the systemic level of electoral integrity. This underscores the need to integrate communication-based strategies with institutional reforms in strengthening democratic governance.

### ***Conclusion***

This study examined the influence of demarketing politically imposed candidates on genuine democracy in Nigeria. The findings reveal that while demarketing does not significantly influence electoral integrity, it enhances voter trust, strengthens political accountability, and improves voter political awareness, which in turn mediates democratic outcomes. The study concludes that demarketing represents a viable political marketing strategy for reducing the effects of candidate imposition and strengthening democratic engagement, particularly when combined with institutional reforms.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Electoral management bodies should strengthen voter education programmes aimed at enhancing political awareness and empowering citizens to critically evaluate political candidates and resist undemocratic practices such as candidate imposition.
2. Civil society organizations should intensify advocacy efforts that promote transparency and accountability in political party candidate selection processes.
3. Political parties should adopt transparent and democratic candidate selection mechanisms to improve electoral credibility, reduce candidate imposition, and strengthen public trust in the electoral process.

4. Media institutions should play a proactive role in scrutinizing political nomination processes and providing balanced information that enables voters to make informed electoral decisions.
5. Government and democratic institutions should encourage political practices and reforms that promote accountability, transparency, and adherence to democratic principles in the electoral system.

### Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the literature by introducing demarketing politically imposed candidates as a political marketing construct within democratic governance, demonstrating the mediating role of voter political awareness in shaping democratic outcomes, and providing policy-relevant insights for electoral bodies, civil society, and reform advocates in strengthening democracy in Nigeria.

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