

## Effect of Vote Buying on Democracy in Nigeria: A Review Ugwu Jovita Nnenna

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### ABSTRACT

Money politics and vote-buying has made election results to have little or nothing to do with the performance in office of politicians. Precisely because performance is not a critical factor in electoral outcome, the incentive to perform is very weak. And because vote-buying is very effective in achieving electoral victory, the resort to it is very high. Consequently, elected public office holders who spent huge sums of money to secure victory at the polls would usually have a greater propensity to pursue their private business and financial interest and sometimes those of their corporate sponsors or mentors and financiers, euphemistically referred to in Nigeria as political god-fathers. In this situation, public interest takes the back seat in the calculation, thus degrading the responsibilities of the elected officials to the people. It is for this reason that this paper evaluated the impact of vote buying on good governance in Nigeria. Another negative impact of money politics and vote-buying on good governance is that the winner in the elections when he occupies a public office that gives him access to public fund becomes more prone to corruption. Hence, the paper called for more transparent and effective screening methods to be developed by the political parties and the electoral body, to ensure the exclusion of politicians with overt or covert tendency to corrupt the electoral process and the electorate.

**Keywords:** Vote buying, Politics, Money, Democracy, Nigeria.

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### INTRODUCTION

Democracy is considered to be the best form of government all over the world; however, it is constantly assaulted in Nigeria due to the phenomenon of money politics and vote buying [1,2,3,4,5]. Although, Nigeria enthroned democratic governance in the fourth republic on May 29th, 1999, the dividends of democracy to the people are very scanty and far apart [6,7,8,9]. This is because the concept and practice of democracy appears to be at variance in Nigeria [10,11,12,13]. Actually money politics and vote buying have vitiated the good qualities of democracy in the country [14,15,16,17]. In fact, the destructive power of money politics has been fingered as one of the factors that undermine good governance in Nigeria [18,19,20,21].

The role that money and vote buying play in Nigeria politics today have earned them a dominant position in the election of officers into position of authority where they can authoritatively

decide who gets what, when and how [12,13,14,15]. Money seems to have taken the center stage in the political process in most countries and in Nigerian politics, it is, sadly, now playing an increasing critical role to such an extent that the word, 'money politics' with a pejorative connotation, have crept into the country's political lexicon", [1,16,17,18,19,20]. The problem with this situation is that the electoral process is often compromised resulting in elections not being free and fair [18,19,20,21]. This paper looks at the effect of this malady on the nation's democracy.

#### Concept of Vote Buying

Vote buying is a corrupt act which usually takes the form of "a gift or gratuity bestowed for the purpose of influencing the action or conduct of the receiver; especially money or any valuable consideration given or promised for the betrayal of a trust or the corrupt performance of an allotted duty, as to a fiduciary agent, a judge, legislator or

other public officer, a witness, a voter, etc” [2,11,19,20]. As a corrupt act, vote buying can be defined as any form of persuasion in which financial gain is suggested by one person to another with the intention of influencing a person's vote. This includes not only the payment of a simple bribe, but also the payment of excessive traveling expenses and the payments of excessive election workers. Political bribery involves a situation where persuasion income is channeled and also the attitude of the voter to his vote preference is commercial. In this case, voters are approached in public houses and at home and would be offered financial rewards if they voted for the right candidate [1]. Section 24 of the Nigerian Electoral Act 2006 (Offences of Buying and Selling of voter's card) defined vote buying as selling or attempting to sell any voter's card whether issued in the name of any voter or not ; or buying or offering to buy any voter's card whether on the buyer's behalf or on behalf of any other person. Section 131 of the Electoral Act 2006 (Prohibition of Bribery and Conspiracy) also outlines the following actions as vote buying:

(a) Direct or indirect offering or aiding in offering inducement in any form whatsoever to a person or a political campaign for the purpose of corruptly influencing that person or any other person to support or refrain from supporting a political party or candidate;

(b) Direct or indirect giving or offering to give money or valuable consideration to any person during a political campaign in order to induce that person or any other person to support or refrain from supporting a political party or candidate;

(c) Accepting any inducement, money or valuable consideration from any person, candidate or political party in order to compel that person or any other person to support or refrain from supporting a political party or candidate.

#### **Arena of Political Vote Buying In Nigeria**

Vote buying takes place at various institutional levels in the polity. However it is often difficult to ascertain the exact amounts of money used for this purpose

because of the secretive way this is done. Some of the levels at which vote buying takes place include the following: Vote buying in the legislature: the legislature is the law and policy making institution in every democracy and this explains why individuals and groups would normally want to illegally influence its members to enact laws that would be in their favour. The media has informed Nigerians of the phenomenon of vote buying in the legislature. Some of the celebrated cases include (a) bribing of legislators to approve education budget for the Federal Ministry of Education in 2005 (b) bribing of legislators to approve (MTN) contracts in 2003 (c) bribing of legislators to vote for tenure elongation in 2005/6 (d) bribing of legislators to vote against tenure elongation 2005/6. Vote buying also takes place during registration of voters. In the past registration exercises, registration officers sold empty or completed voters cards to politicians of opposing camps (this results in accusations of insufficient registration materials). The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) reported numerous cases of vote buying nationwide during the 2002 voter registration exercise.

#### **Vote Buying and the Value of Democracy**

According to [3], vote buying as noted earlier is largely illegal, criminal and therefore unconstitutional. It has tremendous impact on the process of transitioning to democracy in a number of ways. First, vote buying promotes the primacy of money in politics to the detriment of merit, ideology and free and fair competitive political competition [7,9,10,13]. The character and quality of persons seeking mandates are not questioned and worrying too, this does not feature in national discourses. In addition, there has been a disappearance from political praxis, debates on ideas and issues affecting the populace [8,11,20]. Old and unproductive politicians are re-cycled into the political process, with obvious implications that such individuals are only concern with personal projects and primitive accumulation of wealth. Vote buying

therefore obstructs the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria because of the ultra-privatization of transition project by money bags, political instability due to recurring electoral and political violence amongst political groups. This instability weakens the national economy. Second, vote buying promotes elitist politics and weakens popular participation. Only persons with the resources get access to political offices in Nigeria. Communities with grass root solidarities hardly have access to political power because of their inability to participate actively in the monetized political system. Third, the political parties that bought votes monopolize power to the exclusion of financially weak parties. They become new sets of autocrats in the political process. In such situation they can become disconnected from the people. Fourth, political institutions (parliaments and government houses in Nigeria for instance) are currently inhabited by some politicians with stolen mandates via vote buying. This has affected the image and respects for such national institutions which are supposed to direct the course of democracy. This situation will ultimately have a devastating impact on the legitimacy of such institutions.

#### **The influence of Money Politics and Vote-Buying on Governance**

Good governance is based on the tenets and practice of democracy. A government that enjoys the trust and support of the majority of the people must be a legitimate one. Legitimacy engenders trust and support of the people to government policies and reform agenda. But money politics and vote-buying erode this very important attribute of democratic government. This is because, it is the conviction among the people that those who rule do so, on the basis of popular consent, freely expressed, is the tonic required to make the people make material sacrifices that reform agenda, social, political or economic inevitably demand. The truth is that, without legitimacy, there is no trust, and without trust there can be no genuine political support. It logically follows that without strong support of

government policies by majority of the people no reform programme, including electoral reform programme can be successfully carried through and ultimately sustained. But with the diabolical role that money played in the 2007 elections, the past civilian regime of Musa Yar'Adua and later Dr. Goodluck Jonathan because President Yar'Adua died on 5th May, 2010 and the then Vice President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan took over. The President cannot be said to enjoy a robust legitimacy among the majority of the people. On the 2007 elections and its legitimacy status, Asobie has this to say: The set of elections conducted in April 2007 by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which purportedly produced legislators at both the state and national levels and Governors/Deputy Governors and President/Vice respectively, has created problem of political legitimacy. That problem is yet to be addressed. From the look of things, the electoral tribunals cannot resolve it. It is also unlikely that the ruling class in Nigeria will be minded to find a lasting solution to it. It is the Nigerian people in their non-governmental capacities that seem to have the solution to this political underdevelopment [4]. Again, spending money beyond what is ordinarily required to defray legitimate campaign expenses by directly or indirectly bribing voters is definitely an electoral malpractice and the favourable electoral results emanating from that would not represent the true wishes of voters i.e. their actual political preference minus the intervention of money.

Also according to [5], "people of integrity and those who genuinely want to serve the people but have no money to buy votes may lose out in the electoral contest, while bad candidates with abundant financial resources or those with corrupt tendencies may get elected." When this happens, the immoral and condemnable use of money to buy votes is then celebrated to high heavens, as a good and effective weapon, in electoral battles by

successful contestants. Money Politics and vote-buying has also made election results to have little or nothing to do with the performance in office of politicians. Precisely because performance is not a critical factor in electoral outcome, the incentive to perform is very weak. And because vote-buying is very effective in achieving electoral victory the resort to it is very high. Consequently, elected public office holders who spent huge sums of money to secure victory at the polls would usually have a greater propensity to pursue their private business and financial interest and sometimes those of their corporate sponsors or mentors and financiers, euphemistically referred to in Nigeria as political god-fathers. In this situation, public interest takes the back seat in the calculation, thus degrading the responsibilities of the elected officials to the people. It is for this reason that the Nigeria National Orientation Agency, a public enlightenment body sponsored a radio and television jingle during political campaigns and rallies by which it warned the electorate to be wary of politicians who want to buy their votes because according to the jingle, anyone who uses "wuru-wuru" (crooked, illicit means) to get elected could certainly render "wuru-wuru" service to the people (Davies, op cit). Another negative impact of money politics and vote-buying on good governance is that the winner in the elections when he occupies a public office that gives him access to public fund

#### **CONCLUSION/ THE WAY FORWARD**

It is quite doubtful that money politics and vote-buying can be totally eradicated in Nigeria. However, there should be at least some mechanisms by which its negative consequences on good governance can be minimized. For instance, there is also money politics in the United States of America, even when legal limits are fixed in the solicitation, acceptance and disbursement of funds for political campaigns, but such limit has been honoured more in breach than in observance, and American politics has been very much oiled by money from "Fat cat contributions" [7], yet the American

becomes more prone to corruption. For instance, if he is a legislator, he becomes more prone to receiving gratifications to promote and support the private interest of his sponsors. There is now a popular feeling, indeed thinking, among a coterie of Nigerian politicians, that political contest is a high risk investment opportunity. The higher the risk, the greater the returns. This type of thinking has been corroborated by a former president of the Nigerian Senate when he affirmed in an interview that because votes are not free, politicians considered electoral contest for seats in the National Assembly as an investment and that many of them invest their fortunes, incurred debts and even sold their houses to contest and get elected [5].

The unequivocal message that was being sent by the former president of senate is that if huge sums of money have been invested to contest election then it is inevitable for the investor to strive to recover his money or part of it through different ways. It therefore logically follows that: if the investor with the political investments motives wins and is eventually entrusted with power, it is quite logical for people to assume that the pay back is likely to come from public funds [6].

This kind of unwholesome practice constitutes a serious blemish on public policy and legislative process and consequently brings the highest indignity to the democratic process.

government is much more effective in service delivery to the people, than the Nigerian government.

Consequently, it is of primary importance to first and foremost call on all stakeholders in the Nigerian project for attitudinal changes so as to have positive perception of politics. This is because a system of free and fair election is not guaranteed by officially sanctioned legal instrument alone. As Alabi correctly points out: For example, while stiffer punishment for rigging may be a panacea, such can have meaning only if the enabling legal/judicial system is

such that justice is assured at all times. This requires the cooperation and alertness of all the stakeholders- the government, the electoral commission, the political parties, the candidates, the electorate, the civil society and the press each of which must cultivate the right attitudes to make democracy work by ensuring that the game of politics is played according to the rules [8]. This call for the right attitudes towards politics essentially questions our democratic credentials as a people. The important issue here is the attitudes and perceptions of the individuals toward election in particular and politics in general. As Ovie-Whiskey rightly notes in respect of the electoral Act, 1982, the problem is not the law as such, but the society, insisting that: If the individual can have self-examination and determine to be honest at elections come what may, there will be free and fair elections. What we need is a deep sense of patriotism and a devoted sense of selfless to the acquisition of wealth by unjust means and refuse to be bought at election time or to commit any electoral offence or other kinds of evils during elections and if we refuse to make ourselves marketable commodities, the elections will be free and fair.

Further if we behave like descent persons and law abiding in the absence of uninformed police officers or soldiers, the elections will be free and fair [8]. There is the need for some ethical codes to be enacted for all elected officials to prohibit them from exhibiting stupendous wealth which gives negative signal to the people that election to public office gives one the rare opportunity to amass wealth. This type of signal will of course, unnecessarily raise the stake, push the candidates in elections to see the contest as akin to fight to finish affair, and consequently heat up the polity. On the side of the people, they should shun those politicians displaying

ill-gotten wealth knowing fully well that the money belongs to them, but being frequently siphoned by the opportune politicians. They should show self-respect for themselves and hold high their dignity by ignoring and showing disrespect to incompetent but wealthy office holders.

More transparent and effective screening methods must be developed by the political parties and the electoral body, to ensure the exclusion of politicians with overt or covert tendency to corrupt the electoral process and the electorate. There is also the need for political education of the electorate to be more discerning in their electoral choices, and minimize the pressures put on their elected representatives for financial and material rewards for voting. Again, political parties should refrain from projecting the financial profile of the wealthy candidates and their financial importance to the parties. This is because such candidates have the tendency to want to live up to the image so created by injecting more money into the campaign than is morally justified. Additionally, party officials should be trained on how to manage electioneering campaigns in which candidates have a well thought out manifestoes. Unlike in the second republic when major political parties clearly articulated their cardinal programmes, the case is not so in the fourth republic where voters are as confused as the politicians. Lastly, the mass media has a role to play in sensitizing voters to know their primary responsibilities in electing credible candidates. For example, where the media is celebrating money-bags, who are using their wealth to subvert the democratic process and good governance, the phenomenon on money politics and vote-buying will continue to thrive in the Nigerian political scene.

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