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Vote Buying and money politics: the challenges to Nigerian Democracy

Linus .C. Nnamani and Dan .I. Ugwuja

Department of Political Science Enugu State University of Science and Technology

ABSTRACT

The prominent roles which vote buying and money politics have been playing in Nigeria longest republic so far disturb many right thinking Nigerians. This is because candidates and their political parties exhibit unreserved display of offering financial and material inducements to party delegates during primary elections to buy their positions. The same vote buying continues during electioneering campaigns up to the Election Day without respect to the security agencies who at times benefit from the shameless sharing of fund. This sharing is possible because many electorates are willing to sell their votes. This uncharitable behaviour then produces political actors that would do very little in forms of provision of dividends of democracy because they would continue to amass wealth to refill their bank accounts within and outside Nigeria.

Keywords: Vote buying, money, politics and democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerians have been considering the degree of dividend of Democracy since 29th May 1999 which has been the longest civilian administration in the country. Democracy which is adjudged by majority as the best form of government is being constantly challenged in Nigeria due to influence of vote buying and money politics. Scholars like [1], [2] and [3] have written on money politics and vote buying in Nigeria politics. Those write-ups were necessitated by the devastating impacts which such vote buying are exhibiting on Nigeria polity. The negative impacts which money politics and vote buying impose on the polity include none provision of basic necessities of life like electricity, supply, water supply, functional education, employment opportunities etc. This implies that vote buying and money politics have vitiated the good qualities and democratic dividends in Nigeria. This is because when money is given unmerited consideration and position in every human endeavour, then, merit and

good conscience are relegated to the mud. Under the influence of money in political process, any kind of person or group would be elected into positions of trust where such individuals misplace priority and good governance. It should be noted that money should be used for Sundry services and logistics like mobilization of people in campaigns and rallies, printing of party posters, emblems and manifestoes etc.

Conceptual clarification

Vote buying simple means that candidate or their representatives 'buy' and citizens or electorates 'sell' votes as people buy commodities (food items or goods) in open markets. Money politics can be said to be a situation in Nigeria electoral process where contestants for elective positions or their representatives offer money as an inducement to the electorates, members of Electoral Management Body (EMB), political god-fathers, members of security Agencies,

political opponents and other influential members of the public in order to obtain or secure unmerited political support, favour or positions(s).

Sohner (1973:190) [3] Stated that: Money has in fact, been made to become the mothers' milk of politics, which the political gladiators must drink to remain in business

Dahl listed the following six (6) conditions which he affirmed must be present in any polity for good governance to thrive

- i. Control over governmental decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
- ii. Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted

- elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
- iii. Particularly, all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
- iv. Citizens have the right to express themselves on political matters without the danger of severe punishment.
- v. Citizens have the right to seek out alternative sources of information that are protected by law.
- vi. Citizens have a right to form relatively independent political parties and interest groups (Dahl, 1971:39) [4].

METHODOLOGY

The researcher obtained primary data through observation, interview and use of questionnaire. Secondary sources came from books, journals and other statistical documents.

A. When did vote buying and money politics commence in Nigeria?

During the first republic the major issues that were considered in political party activities and elections include

- Ethnic sentiments
- Religious affiliation
- Party leadership propaganda

There was so much display of affluence and use of money by the wealthy contractors and the mercantile class that those who emerged victorious in the conventions and the primaries of some of

In 1993, vote buying and money politics escalated in political activities by various contestants under the National Republic Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) decreed into money to sway the conduct and decision of electorates and Election Management Body. The excessive use of money did not

During the first republic money was not accorded the type of influence it plays now. That was mainly because each political party managed the funds they were able to raise. It appears that vote buying and money politics became very prominent during the second republic in 1979 in Nigeria. It appeared that Nigerians who made their money through supply of arms and ammunitions during the 1967-1970 civil war and government contractors that reconstructed war damaged facilities, ventured into politics or sponsored candidates for elective positions. [2] wrote

the political parties, notably the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) belonged to the business managerial group [2].

existence by the military. During 1993 political party primaries and the presidential elections, candidates and their political parties demonstrated excessive use of recognize or respect the fact that the political activities took place on the watchful eyes of the military.

Nwosu N. I (1996) wrote "Money was paid to party functionaries, who were

demanding and negotiating the amount of money to be given to as for payment to

win offices and for how votes will be

In supporting the above view, the then Military Head of state General Babangida

There were authenticated reports of election malpractice against agents, officials of the NEC and voters... there were proof of manipulation, offers and

The same sequence and possibly in greater magnitude, occurred during the fourth republic that came into existence in 1999 and the subsequent civilian-civilian transition elections in 2003, 2007,

With so much resources being deployed to capture elective offices, it is not difficult to see the correlation between politics and the potential for high level corruption. The greatest losers were the ordinary people, those voters whose faith and investment in

Further there have been allegations of pervasive use of money to buy positions even among the judicial officers in processing election tribunal matters.

allocated to aspirants”

in annulling the 1993 presidential election result declared.

acceptance of money and other forms of bribery. The amount of money spent by the presidential candidates was over 2.1 million naira [1].

2011 and 2015. The former President (1999 to 2007 Chief Olusegun Obasanjo), belatedly admitted the excessive use of money in Nigeria politics when he said.

the system are hijacked and subverted because money, not their will, was made the determining factors in elections. Can we not move from politics of money materialism to politics of ideas, issues and development [6].

Likert 4 point scale was used to reassess the information obtained from respondents. The result is shown on the following table.

Summary of Responses

Statement	VGE (4)	GE(3)	LE(2)	VLE(1)	ΣFX	X	Decision
Poverty	150(600)	30(90)	15(30)	5(5)	725	3.63	Great extent
Vote buying	146(584)	31(93)	18(36)	5(5)	718	3.59	Great extent
Money politics	140(560)	35(45)	15(30)	10(10)	645	3.22	Great extent
Monetary Inducement	160(560)	30(90)	8(16)	2(2)	748	3.74	Great extent

Source: compiled from field survey 2018

Grand Mean =14.18/4=3.55

Where

VGE = Very great extent

GE = Great Extent

LE = Low extent

VLE = Very low extent

The information from the above table confirms the responses and findings from the respondents. The results confirm that vote buying and money politics adversely

affect Nigeria Political activities to a great extent.

Predisposing factors for vote buying and money politics in Nigeria

Many factors have been adduced to be responsible for vote buying and money politics in Nigeria. Some of them include

- Ignorance of the electorate
- Poverty of the brain and that of the pocket
- Political apathy
- Deceit by the politicians
- Opportunity to get a share of the national resources by the electorate
- Investment by the contestants etc

[2], lists the following factors as being the reasons for vote buying and money politics in Nigeria.

- a. The inability of many political parties and the contestants to put in place comprehensive and comprehensible manifestoes for scrutiny by the voters. Instead of clear-cut manifestoes that would enable the electorate to make a rational political choice, meaningless slogans, demagogic and rabbleroising speeches are made. Such speeches either overestimate or underestimate the political perception of the voters, but are rarely educative and convincing. Many voters seem to be unimpressed by all the tricks the parties and the candidates employ, hence the need to bribe them for their votes.
- b. Political cynicism on the part of the voters who believe that political office holders are incurably corrupt, self-seeking and incompetent, that politics is a dirty and dishonorable enterprise, that the whole political process is a fraud and a betrayal of the public trust. This cynical view of politics is further accentuated by unruffled promises made by winners of past elections. Thus asking for a pay-off, another way by which the people receive their own share of the national cake. On the other hand, the candidates who gave money to voters probably believe that they were investing against electoral failure.
- c. Focusing on personalities rather than on issues. By the mode of their campaign, most candidates draw the attention of the

electorate away from the political parties to themselves. The consequence of this is that the political parties and their message become less important to the electorate. The candidates then take the centre stage and would therefore need to spend more money than their parties could afford in order to mobilize support for themselves.

- d. The peoples' perception greatly reinforced by obscene display of opulence by public office holders and ostentatious living of many politicians that every elected or appointed public officer is amassing wealth from the public treasury. This seems to have strengthened the resolve of many voters to sell their votes to the highest bidder.
- e. The penchant of politicians to strive to win elections, even at the party primary level, at all cost, makes desperate contestants to engage in all sort of malpractices including offering financial and material inducements to voters. Working on the poverty of the people, Nigerian politician have been known to distribute food stuff and other consumable materials to voters shortly before the elections and sometime on Election Day, contrary to the provision of the extant electoral law that prohibits such practice. Instances abound too, when candidates threw some money into the air during campaign rallies, making people to scramble for it and getting injured in the process.
- f. The noticeable weakness in a party whip, characteristics of party politics in presidential system,

when elected members exercise considerable degree of freedom when voting on legislative proposals. Such freedom makes the legislators to be more susceptible to receive gratifications from the private interest groups. The interest groups employ what Shank calls "legalized bribery". They make large donations to some spurious private or community programmes in which the target legislators are interested, and give expensive gifts to the legislators or sponsor their overseas travel etc. all in the name of public relations to secure the votes of the legislators in the legislature

- g. The absence of any legislation that put any ceiling on financial contributions to political parties and candidates by groups or individual (Davies 2006)

It should be added that the 1999 constitution did not say enough in terms of political party finances, as it merely relates to the sources of funds and other assets. Section 225(3) prohibits any political party to

- a. Retain any funds or assets remitted or sent to it from outside Nigeria. The requirement that political parties prepare and submit audited account to the electoral body is only intended to ensure

RECOMMENDATION

Stopping money politics and vote buying is a very difficult issue in Nigeria, partly because of the high poverty level and again due to the mindset of the citizens.

If the individuals 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 services to the acquisition of wealth by unjust means and refuse to be bought at election time or to commit

transparency and accountability. No law exists as of now, that puts any limit to the amount candidates can spend in elections while the National Assembly is yet to issue guidelines to regulate the activities of lobbyist and other political action groups who operate, formally or informally, buying the votes of legislators for their causes in the legislature [7]

Effects of vote buying and money politics in the polity

Vote buying and money politics erode the genuine support of majority to the elected individuals. That is because the electorates perceive those politicians that bought their positions with money to be occupying illegitimate positions that do not deserve recognition and or respect.

Further when vote buying and money politics prevail, there would be little or no zeal to perform. Therefore the incentive to perform would be very weak. Those politicians would equally be preserving their fund which they call profit on investment, with which to purchase votes during next election. The electorate would be waiting for the same election period to get their share of the national resources (national cake). Under this circumstance, the promised dividend of democracy would be a mirage.

[8] had this to say

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.

This calls for attitudinal change and co-operation by the Electoral Commission, the political parties, the candidates, the electorate, the civil society, the judiciary and the press.

The generality of the citizens shown shun politicians displaying ill-gotten wealth. The electorate should exhibit their dignity

and disrespect incompetent but wealthy politicians and public office holders.

Under this situation electorate can vote out those dubious politicians so that the next crop of politicians would learn from the previous ones and would be very judicious in handling public resources.

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