



THE PHENOMENON OF MONEY POLITICS AND NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIZATION: AN EXPLORATION OF THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

It is an established fact that money politics is a global phenomenon, its trend in Nigeria's electoral system is worrisome. Buying and selling of votes has become an accepted norm in Nigeria's political arrangement and which threatens her readiness to embrace democratic virtues. Vying for political posts is left for rich individuals due to the huge amount of money involved in preparation for elective offices. Though the electoral act regulates political finance, its application is not obtainable. The electoral body that is responsible for monitoring and regulating expenses of candidates has not been vibrant in such obligation. This makes it imperative in this study to explore the ugly phenomenon of money politics in Nigeria's democracy via its implication for sustainable development. The paper infers that until Nigerians move from politics of money and adopt politics of ideology and creativity, advancement of the country's democracy might be a mirage.

Keywords: Money, Politics, Election, Democratization, Buying, Selling, Voting.

Contribution/ Originality

This study contributes in the existing literature and also enhances knowledge advancement to the understanding of money and politics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Phenomenon of money politics in Nigeria is not a new concept, the history of electioneering processes in the country, especially after independence, was largely influenced with buying and selling of votes. Money Politics is quickly shrinking the political space, becoming a key variable in determining who participates in electoral politics. As a matter of fact, nomination fees for party members seeking elective post for instance have become so high that only the rich can participate in party primaries. Drawing a reference from the 1992 campaign exercise, one of

the presidential aspirants spent over one billion naira during the primaries while other not -so-rich contenders had about 120 million naira as a budget for primaries. Though the political transition of General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential election which consequently led to the abortion of the third republic, the trend of use money for political influence persists to date. Women and youths are the most vulnerable in this situation because of their little or lack of access to wealth (Victor, 2008).

The industrialization of politics in Nigeria has enhanced the investors (politicians) to pursue selfish monetary benefits and thus politicking has become a marketing avenue where the highest bidders determine, dictate and control the socio - economic and political affairs of the country. It has become a game of the rich maneuvering the electoral behaviour of the poor. This has jettisoned politics of ideology and creativity to the extent that political parties and candidates bother not to outline manifestoes while vying for elective posts. Today, money drowns votes and voices in Nigeria as 'godfathers' openly confess about shady deals funding or sponsoring elections for 'godsons' and purchasing electoral victory. Although political process requires funding in order to operate, the lavish spending for political excuses in Nigeria is antithetical to democracy and poses serious threat to socio-economic development in the country. Despite the regulation of political finance in the electoral act, its application is a mirage. Politicians spend lavishly during electoral campaigns and this enhances vote buying and selling as Ojo (2008) has rightly observed.

However, the thrust of this paper is to explore the phenomenon of money politics in Nigeria's democratization vis - a - vis the consideration of its implication on sustainable development. Also, Nigeria's political system which has placed emphasis on monetary electioneering is worrisome and the code of conduct as an institution which is expected to ensure declaration of assets by individuals vying for elective offices and those on political appointments is yet to ensure compliance. All these, to mention but few, motivate this work and the paper infers that until proper mechanism is placed to control political finance in the country, achieving democratic dividends may be frustrated.

2. ON THE CONCEPT OF MONEY POLITICS

Money Politics is basically how politics is financed. The issue of how parties fund their activities from registration, administration of campaigning during election and how parties propel their ideologies has become very topical. In a like manner, candidates campaign finance via sourcing of funds for campaigns and election expenses (covering pre party primaries, general elections and thereafter) have attracted the attention of academic researchers and political analysts (Jide, 2008). The contention of the concept of money politics influences (Walecki, 2008) view to be narrowed down to any money spent for electioneering or campaign purposes. According to him, this money may be collected and spent by candidates for public office and also by their political parties or by other individuals or organized group of supporters. Meanwhile, it is observed that money being spent by politicians while contesting for political office is too outrageous and which signals to the low level of political culture in the country. The political

malady is so pervasive to the extent that all tiers of electoral contest are characterized with the notion 'share the money'.

Paradoxically, money itself has become factor. 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. It even appears to be so dominant in the electoral process to such an extent the word 'money politics' with a pejorative connotation, has crept into the country's political lexicon. It is now a critical variable when assessing the level of political corruption in the country (Davies, 2006).

Similarly, in a speech presented at a forum by the former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, lamentation was on the dangers associated with uncontrolled use of money during elections. So much are resources being deployed to capture effective offices, it is not difficult to see the correlation between politics and the potential for high level corruption. The greatest losers are the ordinary people, those voters whose faith and investment in the system are hijacked and subverted because money, not their will, is made the determining factor in elections. Can we not move from politics of money and materialism to politics of ideas, issues and development (Obasanjo, 2003).

Unfortunately, despite the beauty of the aforementioned quotation, Obasanjo to the contrary spearheaded the use of money and some other state machinery to intimidate, manipulate and maneuver the 2007 general elections to favour his anointed candidates at national and state levels. The candidature of Yar'Adua and Goodluck joint ticket of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) during the Presidential election of 2007 testified to buying and selling of votes both at primary and main election exercise. In fact, the 2007 election happened to be the worst in the history of electioneering in Nigeria (Sakariyau, 2009).

Put differently, (Ojo, 2008) is of the opinion that money politics is synonymous to vote buying and selling. It is viewed beyond monetary exchange and transaction. Distribution of items such as food stuffs, T shirt, Face caps etc. covering and displaying the pictures of contestants during campaign is another form of vote buying and selling. This practice is a norm in Nigeria's politicking and a situation where candidate fails to comply; withdrawal of support is usually the consequence.

Comparatively, vote buying is common to all political systems, be it advanced or developing, medieval or contemporary. It obtains in all regions and climes; it only differs in magnitude and manifestations from one polity to the other. As highlighted by Ojo (2008) locations of election-related gift giving or favour rendering is common include Benin, Taiwan, Japan, Northern Portugal and in the Philippines. Moral debts can be created in more oblique manner as well. In a nutshell, money politics is a global phenomenon but has eaten deep in Nigerian electoral context and which also poses danger to the political arena. It has now become a perception in Nigeria that high level of money circulation is usually witnessed during electioneering.

3. ON THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRATIZATION

The concept of democratization in Africa and Nigeria in particular has ignited intense debate in both political and academic circles, and has also given rise to a sizeable production of all sorts of texts, some of which are still being collected ⁽¹⁰⁾. The most applicable meaning of democratization to Nigeria is the transition to a more democratic political regime. It connotes how Nigeria's democracy can be sustained and consolidated amidst hurdles. Democratization itself is influenced by various factors including economic development, history and civil society.

Not only that, democratization may be the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic political system. The Nigeria experience from military autocratic system to civilian administration falls in this category. Though, despite the transition to democratically elected government the country democracy still fell some setback and which the menace of corruption is one of them.

What informs democratization in Nigeria today is how to consolidate the new democracy secured? This indicates the need to extend the life expectancy beyond short term of the country's democracy that had witnessed a decade. In fact, democratic consolidation is what actually tempts this paper to explore on democratization hurdles in Nigeria. There is considerable debate about the factors which affect or ultimately limit democratization. A great many things including economy, culture, history, corruption etc. have been cited as impacting on the process.

The Nigeria's democracy is faced with several hurdles which are responsible for the failed system in the country. The electoral system is still subjected to problem of irregularities and manipulations. The worst election Nigeria has ever had was that of 2007 general election, though the 2011 election was better, it also witnessed some lapses. The trend of money politics, vote buying and selling are discouraging attributes of Nigeria political culture. The poverty ratio which is alarming also constitutes hurdle to Nigerian democracy. The unemployment level needs to be tackled and as a matter of fact insecurity may not be easily quenched, if the youths that constitute major population are not usefully engaged. Most of these problems are threats to democratic consolidation in Nigeria and which make it imperative in this discourse to examine money politics as one of the virus that has eaten deep in Nigerian society, thus poses serious threat to the country's democracy.

4. MANIFESTATION OF MONEY POLITICS IN THE NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

The relationship between money and politics is very powerful, but modern democracies have exposed its implication on democratic virtues. The role of money in any political arrangement cannot be over emphasized; its abuse in Nigerian polity is indeed amazing too. Starting with the 2003 civilian-civilian transition programme, money played dominant role in canvassing for votes. Apart from the general elections that witnessed high level of buying and selling of votes, the National Assembly became arena of trading. It was reported that the former Senate President, Adolph Wabara demanded gratification from the former Minister of Education, Fabian Osuji to facilitate the approval of the Ministry of Education budget proposal in the appropriation bill. The

sordid corrupt practice is not limited to the Senate because a Member of the House of Assembly has also confirmed that legislators often demanded money from Ministers and heads of public agencies before getting budgetary approval. Bribery of the legislators to support proposed third term bid of Obasanjo in 2005/2006 and the counter bribe to oppose tenure elongation backed up monetary interest in the legislative function (Dung Pam, 2008). The bribery saga that strained the relationship between the Chairman House Committee on Security and Exchange Commission and the Director General of the Commission, Ms Aruna Oteh who had accused Hembe (the House Committee Chairman) for a N5m bribe and a N44m 'donation' to the committee (The Nation, October 10,2012).

The recent drama between Farouk Lawan, former Chairman adhoc Committee on fuel subsidy, and Femi Otedola, Chairman Zinol oil limited over 620 million bribe offered by the former to the latter is still fresh in our memory. As a matter of fact, it is difficult to pass legislative screening without wetting (bribing) ground at the floor of the National Assembly either at the point of defending budget or nomination for political appointment. The El Rufai fallout with the leadership of the Senate testifies to this over the alleged 150 million naira request by Ibrahim Mantu, former Deputy Senate President, to settle his colleagues before ratifying El Rufai ministerial appointment (Nasir, 2012)

In the 2007 general elections, there were cases of vote buying and selling in the 'do or die' contests .In Imo State, money was given in exchange for voters' card in polling units. Bribery of voters was equally reported in Calabar municipality. In Edo State, officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and party agents were bribed. In Ogun State, the home state of ex-president Obasanjo, voters were bribed with the sum of 200 naira each by party agents in Yewa South Local government. In Osun state, INEC allowed multiple votes and Oyo state witnessed bribing of INEC officials, party agents and observer member of Civil Liberty Organization (CLO) by stalwart of the ruling party in Ward 10, unit 11 of Egbeda Local government Area (Danjibo and Oladeji, 2007) According to a report, there was sharing of money in Benue state during the gubernatorial election. States such as Nasarawa, Kwara, Lagos, Borno and Sokoto were reported of different cases of vote buying and selling (Jide, 2007). These instances buttress the view of Obasanjo in a forum organized by INEC on 27th November, 2003, when he examined the cost of conducting elections thus:

Even more worrisome, however, is the total absence of any control on spending by candidates and parties towards election. I have said that we prepare for elections as if we are going to war, and I can state without hesitation, drawing from my previous life, that the parties and candidates together spent during the last elections, more that could have been needed to fight a successful war. The will of the people cannot find expression and flourish in the face of so much money directed solely to achieving victory. Elective offices become more commodities to be purchased by the highest bidder, and those who literally invest merely see it as an avenue to recoup and make profit. Politics becomes business, and the business of politics becomes merely to divert funds from the crying needs of our people for real development in their lives' (Obasanjo, 2003).

In vote-buying transactions in Nigeria, voters are usually offered money (68 percent of all reported attempts in 2007), commodities (such as food or clothing, 26 percent) or jobs (6 percent).

In the latest and previous Nigerian elections, the modal (i.e., most common) inducement was 500 naira, or about US\$4. But the median price of a vote payment rose between 2003 and 2007, from 1750 naira to 2250 naira, largely because the proportion of large payments (10,000 naira or more per vote) increased over time (Micheal, 2008)

Though the 2011 general election was applauded by both local and international observers on the basis of being free and fair when compared to the previous elections, the interplay of money used in canvassing for electorates by parties and aspirants is worrisome. For instance, over 1,800 groups emerged on the course of supporting Jonathan's presidential aspiration with so much money worth billions of naira disbursed in financing their campaign strategies (Olusola, 2010). Individual financial donors were something to write home about. If the truth will be told, the 2011 general election was the most expensive in the annals of our electoral democracy. Given the resources redeployed by some of the wealthy candidates during the elections, there is no gain saying the fact that the contestants showed scant regards for the provision of section 91 sub-sections 2-5 of the Electoral Act 2010 which placed a cap amount they are to spend on their campaigns. During the party primaries, campaigns and elections, humongous sum of money was deployed by the contestants to outdo each other. Apart from the legitimate spending on hiring campaign offices and staff, procuring office equipment and vehicles, running jungles and adverts, printing bill-boards and posters; there were illegal expenses such as bribery of election officials to manipulate election figures, hiring of political thugs to for met trouble at polling canter as well as outright vote buying (Jide, 2011)

5. FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR MONEY POLITICS

The ugly trend of money politics in Nigeria's political setting did not start in a vacuum it is attached to some predisposing factors. According to Davies (2006), the inability of the political parties and the contestants to put in place comprehensive and comprehensible manifestoes for scrutiny by the voters is aiding money politics and vote buying in Nigeria. Instead of clear-cut manifestoes that would enable the electorate to make a rational political choice, meaningless slogans, demagogic and rabble-rousing speeches are made.

On the other hand, Ayoade (2008) affirms that candidates' ignorance of their own political parties programme is embarrassing .As he has rightly observed, candidates spin the issues they think can attract votes, which may sometimes negate party positions. The picture painted above produces representative but not participatory democracy which consequently encourages money politics vis a vis vote buying.

Poverty and illiteracy also contribute to the unfortunate trend in the society. Poor people are vulnerable and due to the low level of political awareness in the country, intimidation and manipulation become easy tools amidst the people. As a matter of fact, majority of the poor are ready to submit their mandate for monetary benefit. They become blind – folded with token amount realized from business of politics (selling of votes). Although this menace can as well be attributed to the economic depression in the country, education is the mechanism of political consciousness and rational political behavior.

Not only that, political cynicism among the electorates also supports the spread of money politics in Nigeria. The impression that political office holders are incurably corrupt, self-centered and lack competency has made people to view politics as dishonorable enterprise. And that politics is synonymous to fraud and betrayal of public trust (Ojo, 2008). The general perception of the voters that political office holders are corrupt is an excuse for accepting money as voting criteria and those funds realized before election is what they can benefit from the politicians. The argument is that politicians hardly fulfill promises made by during campaigns. Meanwhile, this notion derails Nigeria's democracy.

The nature of Nigerian politics also encourages money politics. The winner-takes-all syndrome deviates moral principle. Nigeria's politicking gives room for mediocrity and discourages morality which poses threat to democratic sustainability in the country. Politics is viewed as a dirty game and allows a 'do or die' electoral contest, this tells on the level of political culture in the country. In as much as the rulers could not lead by example, the ruled cannot be easily cautioned.

6. IMPLICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY

It is an established fact that the business of vote buying and selling is detrimental to political development and which questions the country's readiness to embrace ideal democracy. One the cardinal effects of this is the promotion of money over merit, ideology and creativity. However, a level playing ground would be sacrificed for imposition and intimidation which definitely tells on the legitimacy of government.

Furthermore, money politics denies a society the democratic principle of transparency and accountability because vote buyers are under no obligation to serve the masses interest. Buying and selling of votes is only a form of political entrepreneurship where investment comes from the former party. As argue by Danjibo and Oladeji (2007), money politics make politicians to see themselves as investing in a greater political harvest, thereby encouraging the entrenchment of corruption in the polity which erodes the very basis of democratic governance. Where candidates have invested much before being elected or appointed into public office, simple economic rationality will impel it on them to make the money they have invested in as many folds as possible. Where that is the case, accountability and transparency known to be hallmark of good governance and democracy becomes jettisoned to the detriment of the system (Ojo, 2008).

Also, money politics promotes elitist politics and weakens popular participation. This according to Dung will only place persons with the resources to get access to political offices in Nigeria and will discourage the masses from political leadership due to their financial handicap (Dung Pam, 2008). In essence political affairs become monetized. However, monopoly of power by the financial strong political party can be ensured. The political domination of the People Democratic Party (PDP) with its incumbency power is as a result of strong financial base.

In addition, money politics has dented the image of our political system outside Nigeria's boundary. Within the international system, Nigeria politicians do not enjoy integrity. The political institutions in the country lack democratic virtues. This situation has ultimately been

creating a devastating impact on the legitimacy of such institutions. Lastly, politics of money may engineer another military intervention due to legitimacy crisis being suffered by the present administration. In a situation whereby dividends of democracy are not feasible; military can seize such opportunity to hijack the political system. Even some Nigerians are clamoring for military rule due to the disappointment witnessed from the so called civilian government. Comparatively, some have rated military regime higher to their counterpart, civilian government. Though military rule is not a solution to civilian flaws, attitudinal reform would place Nigeria's leaders right.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper has been able to infer that money politics is nothing but a threat to sustainable democracy. It has been discussed that money politics is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria, its antecedent was traced to colonial era when certain set of people were marginalized due to financial reason. However the paper does not only highlight the manifestation of money politics in the nascent democracy but also emphasizes its implications on the future democracy in Nigeria.

However, this write up cannot be completed without giving necessary suggestions that can help in curbing politics of money to that of politics of creativity and ideology. First and foremost, money politics vis-a- vis vote buying is an electoral offence, culprits should be brought to book. They deserve severe punishment. Electoral law can take care of this. The second matter of urgent national importance is the amendment of these laws to make them more enforceable. The current legal framework requested 3 reports from the political parties. The first according to section 89 of the Electoral Act 2010 is the annual statement of assets as well as their statements of expenditure. INEC is mandated to publish the report in 3 national dailies. The other report which is of greater interest to campaign finance experts is stated in section 92 of the current electoral act. Sub section 3 of the clause says "election expenses of a political party shall be submitted to the commission in a separate audited return within 6 months after an election and such return shall be signed by the party's auditors and counter signed by the chairman of the party and be supported by a sworn affidavit by the signatories as to the correctness of its contents (Jide, 2011). Also, there is need for political awareness of the laws regarding vote buying and selling. INEC, political parties and civil society have to take up this responsibility. If the law is made known to everybody in the society, nobody will claim ignorance of the offence of money politics and vote buying. Even the illiterates can be made to understand the implication and interpretation of such law. This will make them to desist from unlawful political acts. In essence political sensitization can serve this purpose. Also, poverty needs to be tackled seriously in the country. It is observed that poor people are candidates of votes selling. In a situation whereby the masses are better off in terms of standard of living, reasonable person would not be available for such unconstitutional act. The government should create employment for the teeming youths and ensure enabling environment for economic growth. The act of collecting bribe and selling one's electoral mandate is not only ugly but also destructive to the development of the country. Basically, poverty usually serves as hurdle to democracy. Election finance is another area that deserves proper regulation. The outrageous

spending on election during campaign and mobilization of supporters by majority of the contestants need to be regulated. The government through the electoral commission (INEC) must ascertain compliance to the electoral act and ready to enforce disciplinary action on any violator. This would definitely enhance rule of law and create sense of belonging to ordinary Nigerians. And lastly, corruption should be eradicated because money politics is a form of corrupt tendency in the polity.

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