

Money Politics and Vote Buying in Nigeria: A Threat to Democratic Governance in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State.

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Abstract

This paper was designed to investigate money politics and vote buying in Nigeria as a threat to democratic governance in Benue State. Four research questions were raised and answered with two hypotheses tested using Makurdi Local Area as a case study. The population for the paper consisted of all the 20,260, civil servants in Benue State, 14 Commissioners in 14 Ministries and 15 Councilors in the 14 Council wards in Makurdi Local Government Area. The sample for the paper was 392 respondents. Data collected for the paper was described using arithmetic mean, and Chi-square statistics was employed to test the hypotheses. Findings of the paper revealed that money politics and vote buying have serious threats to democratic governance in Benue State. The paper concluded that it is necessary to conclude all legislative processes be implemented in time to enable stakeholders appreciate the operating laws for the exercise be made for good governance in Benue State. It was recommended that the Electoral and other institutional reforms should be effective. Anti-corruption agencies need to collaborate with banks and other financial institutions to monitor the movement of cash during elections. Also essential, is a culture of democratic citizenship that begins with a citizenry ready to insist on credible and transparent elections. Voters should be sensible enough to imbibe moral objections to vote buying.

Keywords: Money politics, vote buying and Democratic Governance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Paradoxically, money itself has become a dominant factor in African politics. Money seems to have taken the centre stage in the political process in most countries and in the Nigerian politics. It is, sadly, now playing an increasingly critical role. It even appears to be so dominant in the electoral process to such an extent that 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. Many Scholars such as (Davies, 2005, Walecki 2006, Saliu 2008, Schedler 2005, Ojo 2006) have written on money politics and vote buying in Nigerian politics because of the devastating impact of the phenomenon on the body politics. Money politics can be defined as the phenomenon in the Nigeria electoral process whereby contenders for elective positions use money or money is used on their behalf as an inducement to sow their support which is not based on persuading the electorates to vote according to their wish and conviction but on the force of money that has changed hands. Related to this, is outright vote-buying. Vote-buying in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange (Ovwasa, 2013).

The Nigerian state often experiences governmental instability in the forms of bad policy options and implementation. The basic necessities of life such as electricity supply, water supply, employment and quality education are inadequate in the Nigerian society. Democracy which is adjudged to be the best form of government all over the world is also being constantly assaulted in Nigeria due to the phenomenon of money politics and vote buying.

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. This is because the concept and practice of democracy appears to be at variance in Nigeria. Actually, money and vote buying have vitiated the good qualities of democracy in the country. In fact, the destructive power of money politics has been fingered as one of the factors that undermine good governance in Nigeria.

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. 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 extent that the word, 'money politics' with a pejorative connotation, have crept into the country's political lexicon", (Davies: 2006:5). The problem with this situation is that the electoral process is often compromised resulting in elections not being free and fair. It is pertinent to observe that it is not in any way being suggested that the use of money by political parties or any person or group of persons in politics has inherent corruptive influence. The truth is that, money is needed for sundry services and logistics such as mobilization for political campaigns and rallies, printing of posters and manifestoes, production of party emblems and other symbols etc. The only worry, however, is the noticeable corrupting influence of money and vote-buying, and their negative impact on good governance in Nigeria.

2. RELATED LITERATURE

Money politics can be defined as the phenomenon in the Nigeria electoral process whereby contenders for elective positions use money or money is used on their behalf as an inducement to sway their support which is not based on persuading the electorates to vote according to their wish and conviction but on the force of money that has changed hands. Related to this, is outright vote-buying. Vote buying in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange. According to (Fredrick Charles and Andrea's Schedler, 2005) candidates 'buy' and citizens/electorates 'sell "vote, as they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets". The act of vote-buying by this view is a contract or perhaps an auction in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder. Parties and candidates buy vote by offering particularistic material benefits to voters. Candidates may generally aspire to purchase political support at the ballot box in accordance with the idea of market exchange. For analytical purpose, it is necessary to point out that, the commercial aspirations of vote buyers' may run into two barriers namely: objective and inter-subjective barriers.

On the objective side, seller compliance is uncertain, as vote buying is an illicit business and as such, does not take place within a "normal" market protected by social and legal norms. On the inter-subjective side, empirical accounts of participants' perspective revealed that those electoral practices we described as "Vote-Buying" may carry different meaning in different cultural context. This is so because, in both historical and comparative perspective, vote-buying as a phenomenon is neither system specific nor space bound (Ojo, 2006:5). In all systems, be it developed or developing, medieval or contemporary, vote buying occurs in all regions and climes. The only difference is that it differs in magnitude and manifestation from one polity to the other. Regions or locales where episodic, electorate-related gift giving or favour rendering is common include: Benin, Taiwan, Japan, Northern Portugal and the slums of Metro Minica (Ojo, *ibid*). Moral debts can be created in more efficacious or obliged manner as well.

This practice which rests upon pay offs that are not directly and explicitly tied to reciprocity in the polling booth, is sometimes referred to as indirect vote-buying. This practice was well known in 19th century England and early 20th century in France and is common today in the Philippines and in the squatter settlements of Quito, Ecuador. In Taiwan, vote brokers typically approach relatives, friends and neighbours. A similar tactics is also employed in Thailand. For example, in the 1992 election in Thailand campaign workers for one candidate sought in each village "to recruit the person best placed to deliver support, generally someone with significant social status in the village. Other qualifications include: being respectable, well known, a local leader (either official or unofficial), the candidate's relative or close friends, or some other characteristics that would make people honour their vote promises (Callahan:2000).

The use of money to buy votes does not even stop at election time. It is a common practice in Nigeria as it is in many other countries. For numerous private interest groups and political action committees seek policy goals and legislations to serve their narrow private needs continue to use all the means at their disposal including money, to solidify or expand their influence on the elected officials (Wright: 1985). It is observed that the relative ease with which the elected officials show their gratitude by endorsing the legislative and policy proposals of campaign contributors seems to support the hypothesis that there is a correlation between special donations to political parties and candidates and legislative votes. Consequently, according to Sohner (1973:190) “money has, in fact, been made to become the mothers’ milk of politics, which the political gladiators must drink to remain in business”.

Good governance which suffers because of the phenomenon of money politics and vote-buying can be defined as all the governmental and institutional arrangements in a polity which are operated on the basis of strict compliance with the tenets and practices of democracy. All stakeholders must uphold the tenets of access to quality education, economic empowerment, effective health-care delivery system, rule of law and other necessary social amenities. All seem to agree that democracy is the best and the most civilized method of governance known to man. Consequently, it has attracted much attention from both scholars and statesmen. Regrettably however, there is no known definition of the concept that is universally acceptable. This is, perhaps, due to its atavistic nature.

Vote buying, in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange. Candidates ‘buy’ and citizens/electorates ‘sell’ votes, as they buy and sell apples, shoes, or television sets. The act of vote buying by this view is a contract, or perhaps an auction in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder. Parties and candidates who offer particularistic material benefits to voters may generally aspire to purchase political support at the ballot box in accordance with the idea of market exchange. Though, their commercial aspirations, however, may run into objective as well as inter-subjective barriers.

Broadly speaking, vote-trading propositions may target either electoral choices or electoral participation. They may be intended to persuade individuals to vote in certain ways, or to vote or not to vote in the first place. Strategies to alter turnout may focus on demobilizing active opponents or on mobilizing passive supporters. As the former is often described as ‘negative’ vote buying or “abstention buying”, we may think of the latter as ‘participation buying’. In both historical and comparative perspectives, vote buying as a phenomenon is neither system specific nor space bound. It is common to all political systems, be it advanced or developing, mediaeval or contemporary. It obtains in all regions and climes; it only differs in magnitude and manifestations from one polity to the other. Locales where episodic, 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. As one Filipino observer noted:

Once a candidate has sworn in a registered voter as a partisan poll watcher, he or she can expect that the latter will vote for him or her. Our Filipino trait of utangana loob (debt of gratitude) is evident in this case. Once a person has granted us something, a favour, we would do everything to pay that favour back to him or her, sometimes even at the expense of ourselves. We tend to view persons who did.

2.1 Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, money politics and vote buying is one major challenge that confront democratic governance. The problem of money politics and vote buying has affected development in our country. The money used in the election is often recovered before any other thing is been done. Most politicians who preferred to use money to buy votes from the electorate cannot meet their daily needs, the politician gain their way and buy the conscience of the electorate and thereby bring leadership failure. It is in the light of the above that this paper come up to address the problem of money politics and vote buying in the Nigerian politics.

2.2 Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of the study is to:

1. Identify the causes of vote politics in Benue State
2. Describe the major forms of vote buying politics and related threat to democratic governance
3. Identify the effects of vote buying politics in Benue State
4. Suggest ways of improving our political system.

2.3 Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study.

1. What are the causes of vote politics in Benue State?
2. What are the major types of vote buying politics and related threat to democratic governance in Benue State?
3. How does vote buying politics affect democratic governance in Benue State?
4. What are the ways of improving our political system?

2.4 Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated for the study:

1. There are major forms of vote buying politics and threats to democratic governance in Benue State
2. There is no significant effect of vote buying politics on democratic governance in Benue State

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. The research covers Makurdi metropolis which is the Headquarters of Makurdi Local Government Area and the Capital of Benue State located in the North Central, Nigeria along the Benue River. Makurdi, the State Capital was established in the early twenties and gained prominence in 1927 when it became the headquarters of the then Benue Province.

The town is divided by the River Benue into the north and south banks, which are connected by two bridges: the railway bridge, which was built in 1932, and the new dual carriage bridge commissioned in 1978. The major ethnic groups are the Tiv, Idoma and Igede. Makurdi is predominantly an agricultural catchment area specializing in cash crops, subsistence crops and a variety of potentials.

The Local Government Area lies between longitudes 8°20" and 9° and latitudes 7°20" and 8° North. It has an estimated population of 297,398 (based on 2006/2007 National Population Census figure) and a land area of 804km². It shares common boundary with Guma Local Government Area in the north, it is bounded in the South with Gwer West, Gwer East Local Government Area at the east and Obi Local Government of Nasarawa State in the west.

Data was collected using structured questionnaire. The items of the questionnaire were validated by experts in Political Science Department of the Benue State University Makurdi. A reliability test was conducted for the items using Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient to determine internal consistency of the instrument at 0.93.

The population of the study is comprised of all civil servants, Commissioners and Counselors in Makurdi Local Government Area. There are fourteen (14) Ministries with the population of 20,260; 14 Commissioners and 15 Council wards with 15 Counselors in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State (Office of the Head of Service and Office of the Executive Secretary, Makurdi Local Government Area, 2014). The total population for the study was 20, 289. The sample size for this study was 392 respondents derived from the population of 20, 289 people using Yaro Yamen formula.

In analyzing the data collected for the study, the arithmetic mean was used to describe the data. In order to test the hypotheses, the mean ratings for all the respondents were used in computing the X²-square.

4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Results of the study were analyzed and are presented in table below:

Table 1: Respondents Mean Ratings on the causes of vote politics in Benue State

S/N	Item	SD	D	A	SA	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remarks
1	Ignorance	92	97	99	104	392	2.55	1.11841	Agree
2	Apathy	77	109	101	105	392	2.50	1.08267	Agree
3	Poverty	40	107	111	134	392	2.86	1.00362	Agree
4	Deceit by the politicians	14	82	183	113	392	3.01	.80118	Agree
5	Electoralates on their part see politics especially during election as an opportunity to sell their votes to represent their own share of the national cake	84	90	114	104	392	2.61	1.09580	Agree
6	The inability of many political parties and the contestants to put in place comprehensive and comprehensible manifestoes for scrutiny by the voters	78	54	95	165	392	2.89	1.15967	Agree
7	Focusing on personalities rather than on issues	77	96	115	104	392	2.63	1.07711	Agree
8	The noticeable weakness in a party whip and characteristics of party politics in presidential system	79	79	90	153	392	3.01	.87879	Agree
9	The absence of any legislation that puts any ceiling on financial contributions to political parties and candidates by groups of individual	50	61	86	195	392	3.09	1.07643	Agree

Source: Field survey, 2015

Table 2: Respondents Mean Ratings on the major forms of vote buying politics and related threat to democratic governance

S/N	Item	SD	D	A	SA	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remarks
1	Illegal expenditure	.50	80	99	163	392	2.29	1.24418	Agree
2	Funding from infamous sources	.98	90	100	104	392	2.48	1.13731	Agree
3	Selling appointments, honours, or access to information	.94	98	99	101	392	2.53	1.11682	Agree
4	Abuse of state resources	.56	92	96	148	392	2.86	1.07993	Agree
5	Personal enrichment	.85	88	99	120	392	2.65	1.13017	Agree
6	Demanding contributions from public servants	.55	89	119	129	392	2.82	1.04319	Agree
7	Activities disobeying political finance regulations	.13	90	161	128	392	3.04	.830420	Agree
8	Political contributions for favours, contracts or policy change	.28	91	103	170	392	3.06	.97494	Agree
9	Forcing private sector to pay 'protection money'	.70	51	104	167	392	3.10	.91265	Agree
19	Limiting access to funding for opposition parties	.55	89	119	129	392	2.94	1.12690	Agree

Source: Field survey, 2015

Table 3: Respondents Mean Ratings on the effects of vote buying politics in Benue State

S/N	Item	SD	D	A	SA	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remarks
1	Political instability	.4	3	194	191	392	3.46	.57070	Agree
2	Corruption	.18	54	96	224	392	3.34	.88204	Agree
3	Absence of foreign investors	.72	93	104	123	392	2.71	1.09737	Agree
4	Economic instability	.76	93	104	119	392	2.68	1.10277	Agree
5	Unemployment	.86	93	106	107	392	2.59	1.10835	Agree
6	Poverty	.70	92	118	112	392	2.69	1.06953	Agree
7	Crime (stealing and armed robbery)	.76	89	96	131	392	2.72	1.12304	Agree

Source: Field survey, 2015

Table 4: Respondents Mean Ratings on the ways of improving our political system

S/N	Item	SD	D	A	SA	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remarks
1	To ensure that every vote count	92	97	99	104	392	2.55	1.11841	Agree
2	Ensuring the integrity of the voter register	77	109	101	105	392	2.59	1.08267	Agree
3	Introduction of Electronic Voting System (EVS)	40	107	111	134	392	2.86	1.00362	Agree
4	Building adequate capacity for election management	14	82	183	113	392	3.01	.80118	Agree
5	Implementing voter and civic education intensively and on a large-scale to empower citizens to exercise their franchise	84	90	114	104	392	2.61	1.09580	Agree
6	Improving the transparency of the vote counting process and the transmission and tabulation of result	78	54	95	165	392	2.89	1.15967	Agree
7	Enabling a process of election observation that helps to build confidence in the electoral process	77	96	115	104	392	2.63	1.07711	Agree

Source: Field survey, 2015

Test of Hypotheses

Table 5: X²-Square Result on the Major Forms of Vote Buying Politics and Related Threat to Democratic Governance

S/N	SD		D		A		SA		N	X ² -cal	X-tab	Df	Remarks
	O	E	O	E	O	E	O	E					
1	50	(31.8)	80	(45.2)	99	(57.8)	163	(71.5)	392	75.27	40.11	27	Significant
2	98	(31.8)	90	(45.2)	100	(57.8)	104	(71.5)	392				
3	94	(31.8)	98	(45.2)	99	(57.8)	101	(71.5)	392				
4	56	(31.8)	92	(45.2)	96	(57.8)	148	(71.5)	392				
5	85	(31.8)	88	(45.2)	99	(57.8)	120	(71.5)	392				
6	55	(31.8)	89	(45.2)	119	(57.8)	129	(71.5)	392				
7	13	(31.8)	90	(45.2)	161	(57.8)	128	(71.5)	392				
8	28	(31.8)	91	(45.2)	103	(57.8)	170	(71.5)	392				
9	70	(31.8)	51	(45.2)	104	(57.8)	167	(71.5)	392				
19	55	(31.8)	89	(45.2)	119	(57.8)	129	(71.5)	392				

Source: Field survey, 2015

Table 6: X²-Square Result on the effects of vote buying politics in Benue State

S/N	SD		D		A		SA		N	X ² -cal	X-tab	Df	Remarks
	O	E	O	E	O	E	O	E					
1	4	(21.2)	3	(27.2)	194	(42.9)	191	(53.0)	392	51.7	28.87	18	Significant
2	18	(21.2)	54	(27.2)	96	(42.9)	224	(53.0)	392				
3	72	(21.2)	93	(27.2)	104	(42.9)	123	(53.0)	392				
4	76	(21.2)	93	(27.2)	104	(42.9)	119	(53.0)	392				
5	86	(21.2)	93	(27.2)	106	(42.9)	107	(53.0)	392				
6	70	(21.2)	92	(27.2)	118	(42.9)	112	(53.0)	392				
7	76	(21.2)	89	(27.2)	96	(42.9)	131	(53.0)	392				

Source: Field survey, 2015

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results of Table 1 shows that respondents rated item one with mean ratings of 2.55, two with 2.50 three with 2.86 as well as four with 3.01 and item five with 2.61, six with 2.89, seven with 2.63, eight with 3.01 and nine with 3.09. This means that there are the causes of vote politics in Benue State. In Table 2 above, item number one had a mean rating of 2.29 while item two had a mean rating of 2.48, three had 2.53, four with 2.86, five had 2.65, six had 2.82, seven had 3.04, eight had 3.06, nine had 3.10 and ten had 2.94. This implies that the major forms of vote buying politics have posed threats to democratic governance.

The results in Table 3 revealed that respondents rated all the items with mean ratings of above 2.50 which is the bench mark. Item one had 3.46, two had 3.34, three had 2.71, four had 2.68, five had 2.59, six had 2.69 and seven with 2.72. This is an indication that vote buying politics has effects on democratic governance in Benue State. Table 4 revealed that all items received mean ratings of above 2.50. Item one had 2.55, two (2.59), three (2.86), four (3.01), five (2.61), six (2.89) and seven (2.63). This implies that politicians have ways of improving our political system in Benue State.

In Table 6, the test of hypothesis revealed a X²-calculated value of **75.27** and X²-tabulated value of **40.11** (P = 75.27 < 40.11). This implies that there are major forms of vote buying politics and related threat to democratic governance in Benue State.

The result in Table 10 shows a X²-calculated value of **51.7** and X²-tabulated **28.87** (p = 51.70 < 28.87). This implies that vote buying politics have negative effects on democratic governance in Benue State.

The findings of this study are similar to a study conducted by Owasa (2013) on the topic 'money politics and vote buying in Nigeria: the bane of good governance'. He noted that, money politics and vote buying have taken the centre stage in our political activities. This is because parties and candidates have shown by their conducts during political campaigns, that good party manifestoes and integrity of candidates jostling for public offices are no longer sufficient to guarantee electoral success; thus, they resort to Vote-buying. On the other hand, the electorates too have obviously demonstrated cynical electoral behavior by the readiness to sell their votes to the highest bidder. This uncharitable behavior or practice constitutes a blemish on public policy and on the electoral process. In fact, it portends dangers to the democratic process of electing officers and in turn prevents good Governance. While it may be difficult to eliminate the phenomenon of Money Politics and Vote-buying, its negative consequences on the Nigerian Polity can be minimized by the various recommendations that are made at the end of this paper.

The findings of the study also confirm with a study conducted by Bratton (2008) on vote buying and violence in Nigerian election campaigns. The author noted that vote buying and political intimidation is important, if epiphenomenal, dimensions of Nigerian election campaign, according to survey-based estimates, less than one out of five Nigerians is personally exposed to vote buying and fewer than one in ten experiences threats of electoral violence.

But when, as commonly happens, campaign irregularities are targeted at the rural poor, where the effects are concentrated. These effects are as follows: violence reduces turnout; and vote buying enhances partisan loyalty. But, perhaps because most citizens condemn campaign manipulation as wrong, compliance with the wishes of politicians is not assured. Defection from threats and agreements is more common than compliance, especially where voters are cross-pressured from both sides of the partisan divide.

A similar study carried out by *Ologbenla and Waziri (2012)* Money-Bag Politics, Rent-Seeking and Flawed Elections in Nigeria: A Theoretical Statement. The history of Nigerian politics is replete with money-bag politics. Although, there is hardly any country in the world where instances of bribery or political corruption are not present in their national politics, researches on Africa's postcolonial history, have however shown that, in Africa, corruption is an institutionalized and a systemic practice affecting not only the postcolonial state itself, but also the majority of the citizenry. Using Nigeria, as a case study, this paper argues that since the 1964/1965 Western Region elections to the 2007 general elections, there has hardly been any election conducted in Nigeria without associated cases of corrupt practices such as vote buying, ballot snatching, election rigging, election violence, political and legislative lobbying etc.

The aftermath of this or its cumulative effect, is better seen when the number of years spent by Nigeria under the military is weighed against the number of years it spent under civilian administration. Using the peripheral political economy approach, this paper opines that the problem of flawed elections in Nigeria should be traced more to the nature and character of the Nigerian colonial state, prebendal politics among Nigerian politicians, imperial capitalism, and primitive accumulation of capital as well as the nature and character of class contestations among various interest groups in contemporary Nigeria. The paper adds that, the fierce struggle for state powers and the accompanying prosecution of elections with illicit money is an indication of the peripheral nature of Nigerian politics. He concluded that Nigeria leaders need to be sincere to their followers, work on the welfare of the citizens, localize governance and improve the conditions of the economy such that an average Nigerian can live comfortably. The presence of the foregoing has a lot of implications for the stability of the country and our democracy.

6. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that vote buying politics has a great setback on democratic governance in Benue State. It is critically necessary to conclude that all legislative processes be implemented in time to enable stakeholders appreciate the operating laws for the exercise be made for good governance.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings in the paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. Electoral and other institutional reforms should be effective.
2. Anti-corruption agencies need to collaborate with banks and other financial institutions to monitor the movement of cash during elections
3. Also essential is a culture of democratic citizenship that begins with a citizenry that is ready to insist on credible and transparent elections.
4. Democratically elected leaders should ensure good governance, and improve the conditions of the ordinary people.
5. Voters should have moral objections to vote buying.
6. Thus, there is less need for voter education than for a system of incentives and capabilities that will allow ordinary people to resist these misguided efforts to appropriate their votes
7. The Government should establish a National Commission on Electoral Offences with the responsibility of investigating and charging electoral offenders to court.
8. Enforcement of the existing electoral regulations on party finances including campaign programmes should be implemented

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