



## Article

# **Democracy for Sale in Nigeria: Evidence from the Dollarization of the 2022 Primary Elections of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)**

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## **Abstract**

Democracy cannot effectively be practiced without money be it domestic or foreign currencies owing to the fact that the people and their needs are the central focus of the system. This accounts for why this study attempts to look at the dollarization of Nigerian politics with particular evidence from the 2022 APC and PDP primary elections and its implication on Nigerian Democracy. Dollarization as a coinage in this paper means the use of dollar as a foreign currency in Nigeria to buy votes as against the Nigerian Naira which was the usual norm in Nigeria's electoral process. Methodologically, the paper applies qualitative method through the use of secondary sources of data such as journals, textbooks, periodicals and newspapers. It reveals that due to the selfish interest of the elites in various spheres of Nigeria's political space, doubts appear to have been cast in the minds of ordinary citizens as to whether or not, democracy is the best system for a state like Nigeria. The paper reveals further that the relationship between money and politics in developing democracies such as Nigeria has called to question, the issue of whether democracy is for sale to the highest bidder in the country or not? Utilizing the elite theory as its theoretical framework, the paper concludes that money politics has created a non-elite exclusion in Nigerian politics in particular and democratic system in general. It therefore recommends among others: the need for political education particularly of the electorate on the need to make better choices of political leadership recruitment during elections and to understand the implications of monetizing their votes and conscience to incompetent and corrupt candidates aspiring to various political offices.

## **Keywords**

Democracy, Dollarization, Money Politics, Primary Elections, Party Politics.

## **Introduction**

The phenomenon of the dollarization of politics in Nigeria is not new as the history of electioneering processes in the country, especially after independence could be said to be largely influenced by the buying and selling of votes. The dollarization of Nigerian politics is speedily shrinking the political space, thereby becoming a key variable in determining who participates in electoral politics in the country. As a result of this, fees for obtaining nomination and expression of interest forms to participate in political parties' primaries for members seeking elective post in the two major political parties under interrogation have become so high that only the rich can participate in the process. Study such as that of Victor (2008) shows that the monetization of politics in Nigeria was also witnessed during the 1992 campaign exercise as it was alleged that 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 the 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 the use money for political

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influence has persisted to date. Women and youths are the most vulnerable in this situation because of their limited or complete lack of access to wealth (Victor, 2008).

The 'industrialization and dollarization' of politics in Nigeria has enabled 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 manoeuvring the electoral behaviour of the poor. This has jettisoned politics of ideology and creativity to the extent that political parties and candidates no longer bother to outline manifestoes while vying for elective positions. Today, money draws votes and voices in Nigeria as 'political godfathers' openly confess about shady deals of funding or sponsoring elections for 'godsons' and purchasing electoral victory. Although every 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 the socio-economic development of the country. Despite the regulation of political financing in the electoral act, its application has been observed more in the breach. Politicians spend lavishly during electioneering campaigns and this enhances vote buying and selling as rightly observed by Ojo (2008).

This new norm of the dollarization of the politics of Nigeria has disrupted and distorted some of the unique ideals of democracy in the country when compared to its counterparts like the United State of America (USA). Democracy as a system may not be strange to an overwhelming percentage of Nigerians; what may bother their minds is the brand of democracy that invests, first and foremost, in human and material resources for the purposes of political stability, economic viability, scientific advancements, technological breakthrough, educational development and life-enhancing social services. No wonder, Bernard Crick in *Defence of politics* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964:56), described democracy as the most promiscuous word in the world of public affair.

Abraham Lincoln in his *Gettysburg Address* gave what has since become the famous definition of democracy. In the address delivered at the dedication of the soldiers National Cemetery on 19 November 1863 in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Lincoln asserted that 'all men are created equal' and defined democracy as 'government of the people, by the people and for the people'. This definition implies that democracy should be a substantial degree of equality among men both in the sense that all adult members of a society ought to have, so far as is possible, equal influence on those decisions which affect the important aspect of the life of the society. In this sense, inequalities of wealth, social status, access to education and knowledge, etc. should not be so considerable as to result in the permanent subordination of some groups of men to others. According to Darl (1971:1), in every democratic state, the citizens are politically equals.

Unfortunately, the meaning attributed to the concept of democracy and its universal practice in some democratic countries of the world may be different to the way and manner it is operated in Nigeria. There is no gainsaying that, Nigeria's democratic system has been characterised by cyclical crisis of militarism, ethnic conflict, religious intolerance, political thuggery, instability, violence, money-politics and indeed vote buying (Adebayo, 2011; Alfa and Marangos, 2016; Ekanola, 2011; Karim (2006), Karim and Albert, 2011 and Owasa, 2014). Money has been portrayed as an indispensable tool in democratic elections (Ukase, 2016; Alfa and Marangos, 2016; Walecki, 2006; Quentin, 2005; Omenka and Apam, 2006; Owasa, 2014; Best, 2006; Ojo, 2006; Aiyede, 2006; Dung, 2006; Kura, 2011; Ibrahim et al, 2015; Adetula, 2006; and Gillon, 2000).

In addition, Alfa and Marangos (2016), Gillon (2000) and Quentin (2005) have argued that money matters for democracy because of its importance in campaign activities and the execution of elections. Ojo (2006) described money as an instrument used by political parties or candidates in election campaigns to secure votes. In the same vain, Adetula (2006) argued that the relationship between money and politics has a powerful implication for democracy. In a democracy, the concept of people is very critical in the measurement of the indices of its survival, growth and sustainability. Above all, the

electoral process, which is a spring-board for choosing public office holders is more significant in that its success reinforces the effective functioning of the process of governance in no small way. When there is a smooth conduct of election as an important feature of democracy in Nigeria, then national stability, strength, probity and accountability is therefore assured.

### **Conceptualizing Democracy, Dollarization, Money Politics, Political Party and Primary election.**

This section of the study deals with the conceptualization of the basic terms under interrogation for the purpose of clarity. Such concepts include democracy, dollarization, money politics, political party, and primary election which form the cornerstone of the paper.

#### **Democracy**

The concept of democracy is fluid and has received many interpretations by a number of scholars both of classical political studies and contemporary political science. To former American president, Abraham Lincoln, democracy portend “government of the people, by the people and for the people”. However, this definition has faced a lot of confrontations by many scholars who would rather see it as outmoded. Their reason being that democratic ethos have practically been mismanaged by agents of state through the instrumentalities of coercion and brutal use of force, so much that the people are now alien to the very values and dictates of the principles of democracy (Odojin, 2007; Bako, 2007; Akisanya and Erunke (2010). Similarly, Appodorai (1974) define democracy as the system, either of government under which the people exercise governmental power directly or indirectly through representatives elected by them. By this standard, a state could be termed democratic if it provides institutions for the expression and supremacy of the popular will on basic questions of social directions and policy.

#### **Dollarization**

The term dollarization is a concept coined in this paper from the word “Dollar”, a currency that is used in America but enjoys global appeal and acceptability. The word dollarization as used in this study, refers to the dominance of the American dollar in Nigeria’s political context and its usage as a means of vote buying or exchange for vote by politicians seeking for various offices, particularly, the presidency of the country. Dollarization occurs when the United States’ dollar is used in transacting businesses in a country instead of the domestic currency. In other words, it is also refers to a substitution of currency and the implication of this is that the country substituting its currency for dollar loses its usefulness and value as a medium of exchange due to instability or inflation as it is the case with Nigeria.

Experience has shown that dollarization occurs usually in underdeveloped and developing nations which are often referred to as Third World Nations with weak central monetary policy and unstable socio-economic environment. This can happen in some cases as an official monetary policy or as a de facto market process and Nigeria is not an exception. Suffice it to say, that the Nigerian political space has been monetized, commercialized, commodified and marketized through the use of dollar which informed the choice of the concept of dollarization in this paper.

#### **Money Politics**

Money politics simply connotes how politics is financed. The issue of how political parties fund their activities from registration, sale of nomination and expression of interest forms, administration of campaign during elections and how parties propel their ideologies have become very topical. In like manner, candidates finance campaign via sourcing of fund 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).

Meanwhile, the contention in the conception of money politics influences (Walecki’s, 2008) view to be narrowed down to any money spent for any electioneering or campaign purposes. According to him,

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. It is therefore, observed that money being spent by politicians while contesting for political office is too outrageous and that signals the low level of political culture in the country. The political malady is so pervasive to the extent that all tiers of electoral contests are characterized with the notion 'share the money'.

Paradoxically, money itself has become a determining factor in virtually everything. Money seems to have taken the centre stage in the political process in most countries of Africa and particularly in Nigeria where it is sadly playing an increasing critical role. It even appears to be so pronounced 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 (Davies, 2006). Similarly in a speech presented at a forum by the former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, his lamentation was on the dangers associated with uncontrolled use of money during elections. So much resources are being deployed to capture elective offices which makes it not difficult to see the correlation between politics and the potentials 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 machineries to intimidate, manipulate and manoeuvre the 2007 general elections to favour his anointed candidates at national and state levels. The candidature of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan joint ticket of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) during the Presidential election of 2007 attested to buying and selling of votes both at primary and general elections' exercise. In fact, the 2007 general elections 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-shirts, 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 a 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 into the fabrics of Nigeria's electoral context and also poses danger to the political system. This informed the notion and perception of many in Nigeria that high level of money in circulation is usually witnessed during electioneering processes.

### **Political Parties**

Political parties may be conceptualized as political associations whose members have values, ideals and aspirations in common and at least, participate in the organized contest/struggles for political power. Coleman & Rosenberg in Smith (1996:199) defined political parties as 'association formally organized with the explicit and declared purpose of acquiring and to some extent, maintaining legal control, either singly or in coalition or electoral competition with other associations over the personnel and policy of government of an actual or perspective sovereign state'. This agrees with the views of Henig & Pinda (1969:11) who earlier defined political parties in terms of the group of people acting together to achieve some political goals, which is usually control of government. Parties are simply organised or loosely organised groups under a recognised label with so much intent of controlling power through elections

(Epstein, 1967). In a similar vein, Sartori (1976:63) gave one of the world's cited definitions of political parties. For him, a political party is "any political group identified by an official label that presents at election, and is capable of placing through elections (free or non-free), candidate for public office". However, Catto (2000:59-74) conceived parties in terms of their place in the legislature, as membership of organisation, in the electorate, in government, in bureaucracy, and parties as systems. This has further complicated the idea of having a working definition for the study of political parties, especially in emerging democracies like Nigeria. For example, party as membership of organization constitutes the 'focal and rallying point of citizens actively interested in politics' and 'also a community taking care of many needs ranging from social protection in education, to leisure activities and even to personnel relationships' (Catto, 2000:63). According to Lawson (1976:3-4), a political party is an organisation of individuals that seeks continuing electoral and non-electoral authorization from the public (or a part thereof) for specified representative of that organization to exercise the political power of particular government offices, claiming that such power would be exercised on behalf of that public'.

However, despite the above postulations, political parties are defined by Kura (2005) as formally recognized organizations whose members share certain common values, ideals and aspirations about how society should be politically, socio-culturally and economically organised for the common good and aspire to translate these ideals and values through the control of government by placing their representatives in competitive free, fair and honestly conducted elections, without harassment, intimidation and threat of violence. This definition captured the broad nature of political parties especially in developing democracies such as Nigeria.

### **Primary Elections**

Aluoma et al (2014:2) defined party primaries as "the initial electoral contest amongst candidates for the purpose of winning the nomination of their parties for the general contest". He also categorized the types of party primaries into closed, semi-closed and open system. While in the closed system only registered members of the party are allowed to vote, registered members and independent members are allowed to vote in the semi-closed system. The open system thus allows the party members and also members of the rival party to vote, which may thus be subject to abuse and contradictions. Olaifa (2011), explained the importance of party primaries when he asserted that they serve as a litmus test for the political parties and are also expected to ensure the elements of democracy propagated. Political party primaries are provided by law to serve the purpose of candidate selection, which is one of the most important activities of party organisation through which clientelistic networks are strengthened.

In addition, it is an important area which if handled well can aid party institutionalization. Fisher and Eisenstadt (2004) argue that ironically, despite extensive studies on virtually all aspects of parties, political primaries, albeit parallel primaries seem to have eluded and escaped the attention of academic researchers. In fact, such studies rarely exist on the nexus between political parties' parallel primaries and implication to political development in Nigeria. Yet there is substantial evidence in reality that party primary is potentially a relevant area that undermine and/or strengthen party organization. Nevertheless, political parties' primaries or candidate selection and nomination procedure differ among democracies and among typologies of political parties. There are two categories of candidate selected and/or nominated by political parties. Candidates are selected for manning party offices across all the branches and chapters of political parties. Candidates are also nominated to contest general elections.

However, Katz (2001:277) noted that candidate's selection "is a vital activity in the life of any political party. It is the primary screening device in the process through which the party in office is reproduced. As such, it raises central questions about the ideological and sociological identities of the party as a whole "The methods which a party employ in candidate selection and nomination has incontrovertible implication on those selected or elected and indeed how they behave in either party or public office (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Mainwaring and Shugart, 1997). Importantly, Katz and Mair (1995) argued

that the techniques of a party's candidate selection explain and provide adequate information on (i) how the party functions internally and (ii) the location of political power in particular country. Methods of candidate selection include primaries (either restricted to party caucuses only or extended to ordinary party members), internal party elections, centralization, consensus, etc.

That is to say, the differences in candidate selection procedures among parties is explained partly by the nature of a political party, and partly by "national laws, intra-party decision-making and the electoral fortune of parties" (Pennings and Hazan, 2001:269). However, the extent to which parties democratize their candidate selection procedures, despite its generic importance depends on the national laws and internal party rules, as well as the extent to which party leaders adhere to these laws.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that political party primaries designed to actuate candidates' selection are important activities of political parties. In this instance, not only that they are part of the general crises and challenges affecting contemporary political parties (especially in developing democracies), but they are also significant as they could strengthen and/or undermine the capacity of any political party. Nevertheless, in developing democracies, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa these, activities are interwoven. They are virtually two sides of the same coin, the major political actors of the party (the godfathers/incumbents) while funding the party also wields enormous influence in candidate selection, albeit imposition. The All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) provide relevant examples in the case of Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For the purpose of this study, the Elite theory was adopted as its theoretical underpinning. The elite theory was majorly attributed to the works of Vilfredo Pareto (1842-1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858-1936) and Robert Michel (1876-1936). These classical elitists were influenced by the thoughts of early philosophers like Aristotle and Plato. They were concerned with the activities of man in the society and how it relates to statecraft. Pareto (1935) an Italian sociologist, contributed to the elites, and circulation of elites and their nature. In his opinion, men are born unequal everywhere and unequal physically and mentally in respect to their abilities and capacities. Stratifying the society on the basis of psychological trait such as "Superior class people as elites and the inferior one as non-elites", he sees the elites as a small number of individuals who are found in the commanding heights of the society in various professions. They are the best and occupy higher positions on the basis of certain attributes and marked qualities. The elites in Nigeria are a conglomeration of individuals who occupy and/or once occupied strategic positions in all the political, economic and social institutions in the country. These individuals collectively make policies that affect the life chances of every Nigerian (Ogbeide & Aghahowa, 2005: p.222).

Ogbeide and Aghahowa (2005), identified these political elites to include the president, vice president, state Governors, Deputy Governors, Local council Chairmen and Vice Chairmen, Federal and State Legislators, judges of the High Judiciary, Officers Corps (both serving and retired in the armed forces), the police, political party leaders. These set of personalities listed by Ogbeide & Aghahowa, (2005) are those Mosca (1939) in his work "the Ruling class" described as members of the ruling class in the society. They are differentiated from the non-elites who are the ruled class. He further argued that the elite class is always "less numerous, perform all political functions, monopolises power and enjoys the advantage it brings". This assertion by Mosca 1939, is empirically evident, having Nigeria as a country with an estimated population of over 200 million people whose political rights are vested on the shoulder of the few political elites.

Another way of understanding the relevance of the Elite theory to the political setting of Nigeria as a developing democracy is when the question of how power is distributed arises. Political elites in Nigeria have mechanisms either directly or indirectly which they adopt to protect their self-interests. They mobilize human and material resources to win elections. For instance, they demand financial return from those they install into positions of public confidence in form of stolen money, falsified contract from

political office holders and grossly inflated government contracts handed over to the elite. These elites do not occupy formal leadership positions, rather, they choose and sponsor the leaders who may act on their behalf and by extension, of others. With this they prevail over others.

The behaviour of elites in Nigeria's political parties especially the conduct of party primaries has indeed polluted the principle and unique ideal of the term democracy. Their actions are in line with the words of Karl Mannheim (1883-1947) in the development of the Elite theory, where he argued that the elite theory proposes the rule of few and a microscopic minority which is opposed to democratic form of government. He argued further that though the nature of the society is democratic, the policy and decision making is in the hands of chosen elites. This is so because the people cannot take direct part in the government but can make their aspirations felt at certain intervals which is sufficient for the system and government.

In addition, he proposed that the gap be narrowed between the elite and the masses for stable government (political stability). This can be done through the selection of elites on the basis of merit and shortening the distance between the elites and the masses to ensure compatibility between the elite rule and government. For instance, in accordance with the time table set by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) all the registered political parties in Nigeria held their party primaries and produced candidates for the 2023 general elections.

Onyishi (2007:199) was pungent in his affirmation that, the inordinate quest to acquire and retain state power by the political class implies the deployment of "resources of the state in the struggle to retain it". He submitted further that the elites "block every democratic tendency...and continue to use all kinds of means to capture State power in order to protect themselves against the vagaries of politics". Hence, in view of the foregoing, it is quite clear that the Nigeria political elites irrespective of party affiliations constitute a group interest whose common objective and goal is to exploit the resources of the country to their advantage using public office as a conduit. Such corruptive tendencies as, 'budget padding, 'constituency projects,' bogus allowances and privileges (vehicles, accommodation, impress) etc., are means of 'legitimizing corruption' under official cover. Wastages and bogey projects are initiated without actual implementation. Hence 'rituals' like 'review of budget performance' often indicates 70% recurrent expenditure as against 30% capital expenditure in previous years.

### **Causes of the Dollarization of Politics in Nigeria**

The ugly trend of money politics in Nigeria's political setting did not start and exist in a vacuum. There are factors responsible for it. 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 contrary, in a polity like Nigeria where politicians are so engaged to the ideology of money politics, rarely will an aspirant with low financial power triumph.

No wonder, Majeed (2022) has this to say: 2023: the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) has fixed the cost of its presidential expression of interest and nomination forms at 100 million Naira, for the governorship ticket, APC NEC approved N50 million for both nomination and expression of interest forms, while Senate and House of Representatives aspirants were made to pay N20 million and N10 million respectively. Aspirants for state legislative seats paid N2 million for both forms. Meanwhile, the NEC approved a percentage discount for candidates less than 40 years of age and free forms for women and persons living with disabilities. That is to say, the political contest in Nigeria on the platform of the major political parties has been monetized, marketized and dollarized thereby making it very difficult for those without financial capacity to participate in the process. But on the contrary, in advanced democracies for instance, arrangements are usually made to structurally and procedurally create an enabling environment and easy access to nomination forms for

many, irrespective of their social, political and economic backgrounds to aspire for political office so as to serve the people.

Based on the above principle, most countries practicing democracy limit the cost of electioneering campaigns and the electoral process. Although it has been a very challenging task to implement such financial restrictions as there have been several attempts to limit campaign spending in Nigeria all to no avail. The amount of money expected to be spent on elections in Nigeria by aspirants do not reflect the reality of the economic conditions in the country or the basic principles of financial restriction in elections which many considered exorbitant and only the wealthy could afford it, thereby denying average Nigerians who have the zeal, capacity and the ability to serve in various capacities but cannot afford the parties' nomination forms, the opportunity to participate in their primaries.

On the other hand, Ayoade (2008) affirms that candidates' ignorance of their own political parties' programme is embarrassing. As rightly observed above, 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.

However, poverty and illiteracy also contribute to most of the unfortunate trends 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 to be deployed in hoodwinking the people. As a matter of fact, majority of the poor are ready to submit their mandate for monetary benefits. 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, as well as lack of political education as a mechanism for political consciousness and rational political behaviour. Not only that, political cynicism among the electorate also supports the spread of money politics in Nigeria. The impression that political office holders are incurably corrupt, self-centred and lack competency has made people to view politics as a dishonourable enterprise as politics is often seen as 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. However, in a report by NIGERIAN TRIBUNE, *The Dollarization of Party Primaries: A New Normal*, June 1, 2022, "all eyes are focused on the two major political parties, APC and PDP due to the use of dollars by the contestants to secure the parties' ticket. Peter Obi, formerly of the PDP resigned his membership of the party and now flying the flag of the Labour Party as its presidential candidate. The primaries of the Labour party went smoothly and not much was heard of open display of moral decadence by the delegates.

Unfortunately, that cannot be said to be the case of the APC and PDP that held their primaries across the country for aspirants who were vying for the offices of the President, governorship and other elective positions. News from the various states of the federation were that of vote-buying and capture of delegates with the use of the United State of America dollars. In fact, the Nigeria naira wept while the dollar rain in Abuja and other states of the country. To the discerning, it was obvious that the politicians (probably in connivance with dishonest bankers) had mopped up enough dollars preparatory to the party primaries. The actions of the APC and PDP during their party primaries accounts for why scholars such as Ikeanyibe, (2009:70) posited that, political parties in Nigeria's fourth republic are "lacking in organization, discipline, focus or souls. Their membership is filled by corrupt, unpatriotic and undisciplined political elite that sees election more as an investment than a call to serve people".

Report has it that even though the officials of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) were on ground at the venues of both the APC and PDP primaries, unfortunately, nothing has been heard of any arrest in spite of the fact that the primary elections of the two major political parties (APC & PDP) were seriously "dollarized" by the major contenders. The general public expected the anti-graft agencies to arrest, investigate and prosecute such offenders and to know how the aspirants were able to acquire



huge foreign currencies for the purpose of winning primary elections and how much tax they have paid to justify possessing such amounts of dollars.

The Money Laundering Act ought to be put to proper use. If the dollarization of Nigerian politics is not checked, it will ruin the already stagnated economy due to the fact that the monies are not invested in productive ventures. Another implication of the dollarization of politics in Nigeria is that it will make it very difficult for the common man to vie for elected positions and be elected. In fact, for one to be appointed as delegate one must have political godfather as most of the delegates were just handpicked by godfathers. So, the role of the delegates in leadership recruitment in Nigeria going by the recent political parties' primaries confirmed that the delegates are part of the educated elites, the wealthy and enlightened.

Regrettably, these same set of elites sold their conscience and the future of their children just for a pot of porridge. What moral justification will they now have to criticise the candidates that bribe them if they win the general elections and end up being worse? If this class of persons can easily be swayed by monetary gratification, then Nigeria's future is very bleak as the country seems to have more thieves outside waiting to take over from those in power and already looting the treasury, so that they can continue looting and mismanagement of the economy. Suffice it to say that both the leadership and the followers have connived to complete the ruining of Nigeria as good governance can hardly come from such a jaundiced process.

### **Implications of the 'Dollarization' of Politics on Nigerian Democracy**

It is an established fact that the business of vote buying and selling is detrimental to political development as it questions the country's readiness to embrace ideal democracy. One of the cardinal effects of this is the promotion and acceptance of money over merit, ideology and capacity. Thus, a level playing ground would be jettisoned 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 interest of the masses. Buying and selling of votes is only a form of political entrepreneurship where investment comes from the former party. As argued by Danjibo and Oladeji (2007), money politics makes 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. As the 2023 general elections draw nearer, critical stakeholders in the election process have advocated for prosecution of electoral offenders, as a mechanism for electoral accountability and prevention of offences by educating and sensitising stakeholders, especially parties, candidates and supporters, as well as electorate. In the opinion of Adeyemi, (2022 in the Guardian, May, 1) "2023: Experts seek creation of electoral commission to Prevent, Punish Offenders". In addition, 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 financially strong political party can be ensured. The political domination of the APC and PDP with their incumbency powers is as a result of strong financial base. In addition, money politics has dented the image of Nigeria's political system in the comity of nations. Within the international system, Nigerian politicians do not enjoy integrity.

Lastly, monetizing politics may engineer another military intervention due to legitimacy crisis being suffered by the current democratic experiment. In a situation whereby dividends of democracy are not feasible; the military can seize such opportunity to hijack the political system. The current structural features of Nigerian politics appears to be the bane of national development and security in the country. Curiously, money bag politicians, special interest individuals, godfathers and political machines have hijacked the electoral process to the disadvantage of the citizens. For the most part, this menace appears to be responsible for the emerging regime of insecurity threatening the stability of the country due their affection for money and self-interest.

However, Adedayo (2011) has argued that politicians who bought their way to power see themselves as not liable or accountable to the people. In other words, they are political entrepreneurs who see governance as a business because they bought their votes to get to power. So, governance, to them, is all about avenue for recouping money spent during the elections and for personal enrichment. The fallouts of this are the ethno-religious crisis, militants and herdsmen activities, Boko Haram insurgency, separatist agitations, and dethronement of free, fair and credible democratic process in the country. These to a large extent, are serious threats to human lives and national security. Comparatively, some have rated military regime higher in terms of performance when compared to the current democratic regime. However, military rule is not a solution to civilian flaws at the moment instead, attitudinal reform would place Nigeria's leaders right.\_

## Conclusion

This paper interrogated the role of American dollars in the conduct of political party primaries in the runoff to the 2023 elections in Nigeria. The paper noted that money politics constitutes a threat to sustainable democracy. It has been discovered that money politics has created a non-elite exclusion into the democratic system of Nigeria, whose antecedent was traced to colonial era when certain set of individuals were marginalized due to financial gain. However, the paper did not only discuss the causes of the dollarization of politics in Nigerian democracy but also examined its implications on the future of democracy in the country. However, this paper cannot be complete without giving necessary suggestions that can help in curbing politics of money in general and the use of American dollars in particular. Worthy of note is that money politics vis-à-vis vote buying is an electoral offence and as such, culprits should be brought to book and to serve punishment they deserve. The country's electoral law can take care of this if properly enforced.

In Nigeria the current legal framework requested three reports from the political parties. The first according to section 89 of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended is the annual statement of assets as well as their statements of expenditure. INEC is mandated to publish the report in three national dailies. The other report which is of greater interest to campaign finance expert 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). However, if these provisions are religiously abided by, Nigerian democracy can compete with other advanced democracies in the world. Though, it appears that Nigeria seems to be at a crossroad as the 2023 general elections is around the corner, due to the increasing anxiety and difficult task ahead.

Conclusively, the paper has carefully looked at the issues and challenges of dollarization of politics in particular and vote buying generally by the two major political parties and how their actions can affect the credibility of elections in Nigeria.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this paper, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. There is the need for political education of the electorate to be better informed on the need to support credible candidates than money bag politicians, and most importantly, minimize the pressures put on their elected representatives for financial and material gains and prize for vote.
2. Political parties should abstain from projecting the financial capacity of the wealthy candidates to the parties and electorate. This is because such candidates have the tendency to act and to live up to the image so created by injecting money into campaign than as morally justified and in turn, siphon government's funds meant for development.
3. There is also the need for a robust poverty alleviation programme in the country. This is because, majority of those selling their votes on Election Day are the poor. When the standard of living of the masses is averagely okay, a great number of individuals will find it very difficult to sell their conscience during voting. That is to say, the government should create employment opportunities for the teeming youths and ensure enabling environment for economic growth and development.
4. There should be full disclosure of political parties' income/expenditure accounts; disclosure of election account by candidates for national office; and disclosure by particular donors. If this disclosure policy is strictly adhered to, it would help to reduce the level of political corruption in Nigeria.
5. Concerted effort should be geared towards ensuring that sanctions and penalties are imposed on electoral fraudsters. Sanctions such as: modest monetary fines; larger fines for serious violators; criminal sanctions for significant violations, withdrawal from public funding; and in extreme cases, stripping the party/candidate of their mandate if it is established that campaign finances have been seriously violated.
6. The conduct of political party primaries should not be the sole responsibility of some selected persons (delegates), rather it should be expanded to the inclusion of the general populace or registered party members. That is because any unconstitutional act carried out in the process of party primaries has multiplier effect on the excluded individuals.
7. Finally, Nigeria should jettison the retrogressive menace of money politics in preference for issue-based and ideologically rooted politics and political engineering.

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