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## **Finance and Electoral Participation in Nigeria, 1999-2007**

Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of  
Political Science (NAJOPS).  
2012, Vol. 3(2)  
ISSN: 2992-5924  
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**NWEKE, Anselem C.**

**Department of Public Administration,  
Anambra State University, Igbariam, Nigeria**

### **Abstract**

This paper interrogates the impact of finance on electoral participation in Nigeria from 1999 to 2007. Using institutional and agency theories of political activism to study the impact of finance on electoral participation in Nigeria, it discovered that while finance impacts negatively on contestants participation, it enhances the participation of voters who seek material and financial incentives in the process as a means of survival. The paper therefore recommends financial empowerment for all citizens as the method of enhancing genuine democracy.

### **Introduction**

The democratization process that ushered in the fledgling fourth republic could be said to have effectively begin with the setting up of the political Bureau in 1986 by the General Babangida regime. Reputed as the most ambitious, imaginative, complex and expensive transition in the world (Diamond, Kirk-Green and Oyediran, 1997:1); it however ended in fiasco with the tragic and arrogant annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election. This was not minding the fact that the election was rated as the freest and fairest in the annals of electoral history in Nigeria (Izah 2003:3). The process was equally funded by the government, which in effect did not allow "money bags" to hijack the process. The election equally witnessed the largest turn out of voters in the history of democratization in Nigeria.

The annulment, the birth of the interim National Government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan, the emergence of the regime of General Sani Abacha and his self succession bid and their associated crisis the ascendancy of an eminent political elite group popularly known as G-34 that established the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), their controversial electoral victories since 1999 changed the political landscape

### **Corresponding Author:**

Nweke, Anselem C. Department of Public Administration, Anambra State University, Igbariam, Nigeria.  
Email: [nwekeanselem@yahoo.com](mailto:nwekeanselem@yahoo.com)

of Nigeria. Accepted that money has been crucial in any democratic process, it took a centre stage in Nigeria politics where in party programmes, activities, elections and candidature are being determined by very small number of millions commonly called "God fathers". They determine the out come of both general and party elections in a manner that has greatly affected peoples participation in the electoral processes. True to expectation, Nigerians have reacted and participated in the entire democratic and transition programmes but in different degrees and forms. These include resistance and resentments from pro-democracy and human rights groups such as campaign for Democracy (CD); National Democratic Coalition (NADECO); Labour Movements etc. However, it is a truism that the rate of participation in these activities or processes have continued to decreased except for the renewed interests exhibited during the last voters registration exercise in January 2011.

A number of reasons have been adduced for this scenario of decreased interest to participate in the electoral process. These include; the cost of nomination forms all through the campaigns and eventual election into office, electoral fraud and the involvement of the electoral management body, the Nigerian police, and incumbent authorities in the perpetuation of the fraud, imposition of candidates against the will of the people and thuggery / assassinations among others.

The country's experience has been that the monetization of the electoral process has resulted in such a situation whereby every candidate sees election expenses as an investment, and should he or she get elected, the immediate objective in office is to re-coup the investments made, thus providing a curiously self-serving justification for corrupt conduct. Past testimonies have revealed that many political office aspirants took loans, or sold their property or relied on the sponsorship of Godfathers and corporations to be able to meet the required high financial outlay of the democratization process only to be forced out of the system by individuals.

Political parties on their side often do not shy away from demanding the equivalent of ransom from candidates, thus this forms part of the total expenditure stipulated by Electoral Act, but almost always, so much money is spent beyond the legal limits. In the PDP example, the state branches collect the nationally stipulated fees from aspirants, but they also add their own charges. For instance, in Anambra State, the request for an additional two percent nomination and expression of interest fee caused a row within the party (the Guardian September 21 2003:5). The aspirant is also required by convention to visit and pay homage to traditional rulers within his constituency, the police Chief, the SSS Director and so on, and every where he goes, he is required to pay some unstated charges.

Adopting a rule of thumb assessment, even formal, public declaration of political interest could cost more than the total amount prescribed by law for that particular position. Thus participating in the electoral process becomes profit for the business centres, thugs, political Godfathers, the party, traditional rulers, market women and others who are given free clothes, food and other household/economic items.

This paper, therefore, evaluate the impact of finance on the part of contestants and voters or masses on electoral participation, with a view to determine its role in the dwindling experiences of mass turn-out during election periods and processes in Nigeria from 1999 to 2007.

### **Theoretical Analysis**

After exploring the theories of political activism, which include institutional theory, agency theories, societal modernization theory and the civic voluntarism theory, this paper adopts institutional and agency

theories as a combined framework to study, comprehend and analyses the topic of inquiry. The proponents of the institutional theory include: Powell (1986) and Jackman, (1987) while that of agency theory include Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), and Putnam (2000, 2010).

The fundamental principles of institutional theory are that state structure sets opportunities for political participation through electoral laws, party systems, party rules, campaign, finances and elections; and constitutional frameworks. These and their changes over time i.e. changes in the rules of the game, such as the expansion of the franchise or electoral reforms, accounts for the level of political participation. On the other hand, the Agency theory holds that political participation is determined by the role of traditional mobilizing organizations in civic society, notably political parties, trade unions, and religious groups in the recruitment, organization, and engagement of activities. On this, Putnam brought in the power of social capital in determining political participation.

These groups can and do simplifying electoral choices, educate citizens, and mobilizing people to vote, as well as articulating and aggregating political interests, coordinating activities, recruiting political candidates and leaders, organizing parliaments and allocating government offices fundamentally influenced and made effective by the incentives they offer.

The resources of time, money and civic skills, derived from family, occupation and associational membership, make it easier for individuals who are predisposed to take part to do so. "At home, in school, on the job, and in voluntary associations and religious institutions, individuals acquire resources, receive requests for activity, and develop the political orientations that foster participation" (Burns, schlozman and verba, 2001:5). Moreover since resources are unevenly distributed throughout societies, these factors help explain differences of political participation related to gender, race/ethnicity, age and social class.

These institutional and Agency theories shall therefore enable us to investigate the role played by (Monetary) incentives in mobilizing the citizens to participate in the general elections held between 1999 and 2007 in order to assess the impact it made on the level of their participation. Secondly, the theories shall enable the paper to look into the impact of structural rules such as party finances and costs of electoral activities on the level contestants' participation in the electoral process.

On the whole, the theories enable us to assess the impact of finance, which the electoral system has played on to mobilize participants through material and monetary incentives, on the level of electoral participation in Nigeria.

### **Finance and the level of electoral participation among contestants in Nigeria's Political process between 1999 and 2007**

Parties trying to fund themselves often rely on financial sources that presuppose inequality and illegality. The search for funds may induce politicians to listen more to those who give to their campaigns than to those who vote for them, or for their party (paltiel 1981:138). The parties have equally resorted to merchandising nomination forms and primaries as sources of gross enrichment.

Nomination fees for parry members seeking elective positions have became so high that only the rich and daring "political entrepreneurs" can participate in party primaries. In 1992, for example, presidential hopefuls spent over one billion naira during the primaries while other not-so-rich contenders had about 120 million naira as a budget for primaries (Adetula, 2008:1).

Ojo (2008) notes that, any aspirant to Chairmanship or councillorship position in any Local Government in Nigeria starts with being an active and dues paying party member. Then there is payment to obtain the nomination form for the position and thereafter the contest at the party primaries. After emergence as candidate of the party, there are payments to be made to the state Independent Electoral Commission.

For instance, Abia SIEC charged N200,000 for a Chairmanship position and N50,000 councillorship position as administrative fees. Like wise, Kano SIEC collected N 100,000 for a Chairmanship position and N50,000 for a Councillorship position while Ebonyi State charged N70,000 for a Chairmanship and N10,000 for a Councillorship position (IFES Local Government Election observation Report 2007). In Anambra State APGA in 2010 charged N1,000, 000.00 for Chairman position and N100,000.00 for councillorship position. By the time these candidates cross the hurdle of SIEC's screening, there are still many other expenses to incur.

A campaign office with staff and equipment, campaign vehicles, billboards, posters, handbills, jingles, flyers and souvenirs all have to be procured. Organizing successful campaign rallies also involve huge costs. All the above are legal spending such as paying for police protection, payment to disrupt opposition campaign rallies and steal ballot boxes and other sundry payments to buy loyalty and support of women groups, youth groups and community and opinion leaders, etc. by the time all these formal and informal; legitimate and illegitimate; legal and illegal spending is incurred, it should be expected the candidate has overshot the ceilings proposed in the Electoral Act Capping the spending of Chairmanship candidate to N5 million and Councillorship positions to N500,000.

Campaign and mobilization expenses are another set of factors that have really affected many aspirants or contestants who do not have enough money for the flamboyant electoral processes prevalent in Nigeria. The use of money and material things in campaigns to secure votes, which has hindered the poor from participating in elections as contestants, is an open secret in Nigeria, popularly called "kayam aiki" this is "the implements for work" in plateau state. An aggrieved and financially handicapped politician reported this in the following manner:

...The intrigues are many as you have candidates who brought in money to the field and were distributing, you have candidates who sent buses to get under-aged school children to vote for them, you had candidates who when they are through with this ward they would get their supporters transported to another ward to stand on line and vote for them and you had candidates who paid off officials ... (women in public life 2003:10).

In a survey conducted by Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternatives (WRAPA), Nigeria on the 2003 elections, 90% of the aspirants reported the lack of finances as a major constraint, which gave their opponents an edge as even delegates to the party primaries had to be paid. Many of such women did not have resources to setup and run campaign structures, offices and for logistics so the "buying of delegates votes was far above their reach even if they wanted to join this murky terrain (WRAPA, 2003:17).

The Transition Monitoring Group a coalition of civil society organizations, in a statement on the conduct of the PDP, ANPP, UNPP and NDP primaries in January 2003, complained, "there was widespread bribery of delegates with sacks stuffed with money to influence their votes" (TMG, 2003). And the then President Olusegun Obasanjo noted that "the parties and candidates together spent during the last

elections, more than would have been needed to fight a successful war". This view of President Obasanjo is corroborated by a perceptive writer who observed, "more than any elections in Nigeria's chequered political history, the 2003 national elections was determined by how much money candidates had. The electoral process has become so expensive that only the rich or those dependent on rich backers can run (Ojo 2004:17). It is regrettable that reliable data on the costs of election campaigns and other related activities in Nigeria is difficult to obtain.

It is therefore, inevitable to conclude here that finance affects negatively on the contestants participation in the electoral process in Nigeria.

### **The impact of finance on voters participation during general elections in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007.**

The general principle of the democratic participation of a mass (public) has to be contextualized in the degree of input as well as output, with investment as well as impact. The different forms of participation available to the general public and its active members can be seen as a continuum. This continuum starts at one end with voting, the form of participation enjoyed by the largest number of people.

Modern democracy the principle of "one person, one vote" coexists with the concept of the legitimate use of money for political purposes. In societies with a broad middle class the tension between these two principles is not as great as it is in developing countries, where it can result in the rich having overwhelming influence. The people may use their right to vote, but sometimes without real choice due to the power of money and because the competition is unfair. These have tended to discourage many voters from participating in the electoral process, and even when they participate, they do so under the influence or inducement of money as a result of hunger and necessities. This is a serious issue because over 100 million Nigerians live below poverty line of less than \$1 per day. The Human Development Report (HDR) of 2001 showed that 70% of Nigerians are poor and 70% of the poor are women (UNDP, 2001). This paved way for unimaginable bribery in Nigeria's electoral processes.

Thus, participating in the electoral process becomes a source of revenue generation for the poor. People bribe and lobby their way into the delegate lists of different political parties for their primaries for the sake of financial incentives accruable to participants. This type of incentives is always unpublicized due to fear of litigation and criminal prosecution. However, it is the driving force for increased and competitive delegate participation in the process. Some electorates expect or demand for compensations in cash or kind as the only opportunity to nibble at the crumbs from what is left of the "national cake". A formal senatorial aspirant under PDP in Lagos during the 2003 elections lamented thus "women accept rice, gairi and other foodstuff from people who now use them to impose candidates on us (women in public life, 2003:18).

### **Voters' registration and turn out, 1999-2007 Table 1: 1999 General Elections**

Items	20 February 1999 National Assembly Election, Senate	House of Representatives	27 February 1999 Presidential Election
Registered Voters	57,938,945	57,938,945	57,938,945
Total Voters	24,386,247(42.1%)	23,573,407 (40.7%)	30,280,052 (52.3%)
Voters' Turn out			

**Source:** local newspaper websites (Guardian and vanguard)

**Table II: 2003 General Elections**

Items	12 April 2003 National Assembly Election,	House of Representatives	19 April 2003 Presidential Election
Registered Voters	60, 823, 022	60, 823, 022	60, 823, 022
Total Voters Voters' Turn out	29,995,171(49.3%)	30, 386, 270 (50*0%)	42,018,735(69.1%)

Source:local newspaper websites (Guardian and vanguard) Table HI:2007 General Elections

**Table III:2007 general election**

Items	National Assembly	House of Representativ	Presidential Election
Registered Voters	71,004,507	71,004,507	71,004,507
Total Voters Voters' Turn out	NA	NA	35, 397, 595 (49.9%)

Source: local newspaper websites (Guardian, Sun and vanguard)

A critical appraisal of the above statistics as presented in tables I, II, III reveals there has been a general decline in the number of voters participation in Nigeria electoral process since 1999. In 1999, 52.3% of registered voters participated in the election, while 69.1% participated in 2003. This increase can be attributed to the great financial inducement and mobilization of the masses (poor) by those who decamped from PDP to challenge Obasanjo's presidency. However, with only 49.9% taking part in 2007, the rate of participation decreased. This decrease can be attributed to some factors of which electoral fraud against popular mandates in 2003 and elitist rigging of elections wherein the masses were not mobilized enough due to concentration on elitist rigging and the activities of political godfathers.

### Conclusion

In the beginning of this study, this paper set to interrogate the relationship between finance and electoral participation in Nigeria. In the course of the inquiry it was discovered that, Electoral participation is a process with many phases and stages. It is a process that requires huge sums of money particularly in Nigeria to administer. The financial needs of the process leave the control of the process in the hands of a very few elites and rich men both before and after electoral processes.

The monetary requirements hinder the participation of many as contestants in Nigeria's electoral process while financial inducement enhances the participation of the people in political processes as the masses especially the poor are materially and financially mobilized by the rich to favour them. Thus, finance, in the form of material and financial inducement, enhances voters participation in Nigeria's electoral process.

Thus, the work recommends that, the government should take over the form and registration fees of aspirants to political positions in Nigeria. A parallel investigative organization should be established to function with INEC to investigate, prosecute and punish electoral fraud preferably drawn from the judiciary. Campaign funds and expenses should be supervised by this organization with the goal of enforcing an approved limit of expenditure. The government should review its provision on limit of campaign expenses and set a more acceptable figure that will allow the masses to participate in politics. Finally INEC should register political parties on the basis of ideology and candidates on the basis of programmes and projects so as to eliminate the monetary incentive structure that has continued to determine the level of people's participation in politics.

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