

Wet Underwear: The Perils of Vote -Buying and Bad Governance in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *It was anticipated that the re-emergence of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999 after a long interregnum of military dictatorship would usher in good governance in the country. However, after over two decades of democratizing, the negative bargain whereby citizens sell their votes (mandate) lured with vote-buying by politicians seems to have conspired to democratically “imprison” the masses to poverty in a serial display of bad governance by ruling mega parties. This paper examined the outstanding issues that facilitate vote-selling by citizens and vote-buying by candidates in the country. The paper is qualitative and descriptive in nature, and relied on secondary sources of data. It adopted the dialectical materialism approach, generally referred to as the Marxian political economy framework to guide data collection and analysis. Data were gathered from libraries and the Internet. The contents of the secondary data collected were dialectically analyzed in line with the objective of the paper. It was found that the retention of the inherited colonial state structure coupled with the economic disadvantageous position of the masses exposed citizens to collide in selling their mandate which gave the ruling elite the impunity to tactically institutionalize bad governance. To this end, among others, the paper recommended and concluded that only a simultaneous structural reform of the state and a deliberate robust human development programme can reverse the peril of vote-buying, which is reflected in the serial bad governance in the Nigerian system.*

KEYWORDS: wet underwear, peril, vote-buying, bad governance.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the term “governance” and its derivatives “good governance” and “bad governance” are being progressively used in development practices and literature. The perception of “bad governance” is to a greater extent, being regarded as one of the primary causes of all the ills within all societies. Commonly, good governance is associated to a free society based on the rule of law while bad governance is used to portray a society under autocratic, dictatorial rule such as the erstwhile military regimes in Nigeria. Thus, with increasing international pressure from the United Nations (UN), major donors and international financial institutions are insistently basing their assistance and loans to countries on the prerequisite that necessary reforms that guarantee “good governance” are put in place. The umbrella or major reform canvassed by the international community to ensure good governance is democratization of national systems, essentially along the lines of liberal democracy which is derived from the

capitalist mode of production popularly called globalization (Ake, 1996; Ekekwe, 2009 & 2015; Keping, 2017; Sheng, 2020).

However, some scholars (Ake, 1996; Ekekwe, 2009 & 2015; Nwaorgu, 2014; Saliu & Ifejika, 2016) have opined that the contemporary world is not a favorable environment for democracy. The central argument of these scholars is that, because it is based on the capitalist mode of production, while (liberal) democracy spreads, our world is more repressive and exploitive, because, democracy has been trivialized and is now a tool by a select few to dominate the rest of the majority of society. Even so, Africa particularly Nigeria, is a special case of the problems of democracy. To begin with, the self-appointed agents/agencies of democratization in Nigeria are absurd or contradictory. They are not so much supporting democracy as *using* it. For instance, the Nigerian elite support democracy only as a means to state power; the international development agencies support it as an asset to structural adjustments (for smooth access to the Nigerian economy by foreign capital); and, the Western governments support it vaguely torn between their growing indifference to the largest country in Africa and their desire to promote their own way of life.

Furthermore, these scholars argued that what is being foisted on Africa generally and on Nigeria in particular, is a version of liberal democracy reduced to the crude simplicity of *multi-party elections* – which is devoid of any form of ideological debate. This type of democracy is not in the least emancipatory particularly in African/Nigerian conditions because it offers the people rights they cannot exercise, voting that never amounts to choosing, freedom which is deliberately spurious, and political equality which disguises highly unequal power relations between the very few who grab state power and the masses of the people.

Consequently, democracy in Nigeria (especially since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999) has been characterized by vote-buying amidst multi-party elections in an ideological void. Just like the commercial nature of Nigeria's capitalism (which is buying and selling of goods without a solid industrial base), the country's democratic experiment has been one of buying and selling of votes during elections. Those who are buying the votes are the few elites spread across the various political parties jostling to grab state power and those who sell their votes are the masses who are so pauperized to sell their franchise and mortgage their welfare till the next election for another round of vote selling.

Meanwhile, in the interval between general elections the citizens moan and mourn under excruciating hardship as a result of bad governance by the ruling elite who swim in stupendous affluence with their families and cronies. Hence, the serial vote-selling or selling of franchise by the masses has come to be seen as their wet underwear which keeps them perpetually cold and as it were, concealed by their outer clothing as if all is well just like the democratic institutions (the National Assembly, the Presidency, and the Supreme Court at the federal level) conceal the bad governance of Nigeria's paper democracy. On the other hand, vote-buying or buying of mandate by the very few elite who dominate one or two parties at any given time in a country with well over fifty political parties, has become the "legal" basis for the impunity being exercised by those who grab state power to perpetuate acts of bad governance. The syndrome of selling and buying votes has become a miserable vicious cycle for the masses who seems to be hypnotized while conversely, it has created and entrenched an elite club of re-

cycled, senile and “fantastically corrupt” politicians/leaders whose trademark is bad governance. Curiously, one may be inclined to ask, is there any hope for the masses? How can the syndrome of vote-buying and bad governance be curtailed, if not eliminated? What are the key factors that aid or encourage the serial cycle of selling and buying of votes in Nigeria? These are the salient questions that this paper attempts to resolve. In

Objective

This paper tries to examine, dialectically, the implications of mass self-disenfranchisement through selling of votes and the corresponding vote-buying by the ruling elite as the basis of the prevailing impunity for acts of bad governance in Nigeria. The objective of this kind of analysis is to demonstrate what this situation portends for Nigeria’s democratization and hence, for the country’s human development index.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this paper is essentially qualitative and descriptive. Data is derived from documents accessed from libraries, including e-libraries as well as from related Internet resources. Fundamentally, documents here refer to reports, Journal articles, textbooks and other printed materials that were originally intended for other purposes other than for the purpose of this paper. According to North (1963) and Obasi (1999), it is pertinent to highlight this point when relying mainly on past records and documents as sources of data in order to underscore the objectivity of the present research. Consequently, the content analysis method becomes the most preferred in an inquiry of this nature (Obasi, 1999). Thus, the contents of the documents gathered were dialectically analyzed in line with the adopted theoretical framework to rationalize the objective of the paper.

Theoretical Paradigm and Clarification of Terms

Theoretical Paradigm

The theoretical framework employed in this paper is dialectically materialism. Essentially, dialectical materialism or generally referred to as the Marxian political economy is a philosophical approach to the study of reality derived from the teachings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. For Marx and Engels, materialism meant that the material world, perceptible to the senses, has objective reality independent of mind or spirit. They did not deny the reality of mental or spiritual processes but affirmed that ideas could arise, therefore, only as products and reflections of material conditions (Ekekwe, 2009 & 2015). In dealing with the variables in this paper, the idea of exchange between selling of votes by citizens and vote-buying by politicians is derived, on the one hand, from the appalling and dehumanizing material (living) condition of the masses who see the selling of votes as an immediate source of survival, and on the other hand, the undemocratic nature of the Nigerian state and the corrupt economic benefits derivable from the state, spur political candidates to trade and invest in vote-buying. The material result of this exchange is extreme poverty on the part of the masses and bad governance that facilitates corrupt practices on the part of the ruling elite (Nwaorgu, 2014; Adadu, 2016; Ohale, 2018).

For Ake (1981), dialectical materialism possesses very unique characteristics which gives it an edge over other contending approaches in understanding the complexity and dynamics of social life or society (either past or present). According to him, the first is that it is a framework which gives primacy to material conditions, particularly economic factors, in the explanation of social life. Economic need is man's most fundamental need, just as economic activity is man's primary activity. The primacy of work, that is economic productivity, is the corollary of the primacy of economic need. Man is first and foremost a worker or a producer. It is by man's productive activity that he is able to obtain the economic means which he needs to sustain life. The practical implication of this for the student of society is that he must pay particular attention to the economic structure of society and indeed use it as the point of departure for studying other aspects of society. Once we understand what the material assets and constraints of a society are, how the society produces goods to meet its material needs, how the goods are distributed, and what types of social relations arise from the organization of production, we have come a long way to understanding the culture of that society, its laws, its religious system, its political system and even its mode of thought.

Thus, anyone who makes an empirical study of historical societies, including our contemporary societies, will find the following: 1) Those from the economically privileged groups tend to be better educated, 'more cultured', to have higher social status, to be more 'successful' professionally and politically. This means that economic inequality is extremely important, tending to reproduce itself endlessly in a series of other inequalities; 2) Those who are economically privileged tend to be interested in preserving the existing social order; and those who are disadvantaged by the social order, particularly its distribution of wealth, have a strong interest in changing the social order, particularly its distribution of wealth.; 3) In so far as there is economic inequality in a society, that society cannot have political democracy because political power will tend to polarise around economic power. Also, a society where a high degree of economic inequality exists must necessarily be repressive. This repression arises from the need to curb the inevitable demand of the have-nots for redistribution. We see here economic conditions not only setting the tone of politics but also defining the role of coercion in society; 4) The morality and values of a society tend to support the preservation of the existing division of labour and distribution of wealth in that society (Ake, 1981; Ekekwe, 1986; 2009 & 2015).

These propositions show the importance of economic conditions in understanding society. In looking at vote-buying and bad governance in Nigeria, this paper has given due attention to economic conditions. As we shall see, economic conditions help us to understand why vote-buying is possible, why bad governance is perpetuated with impunity in the country, and how this has chained the masses in a supposedly democratic dispensation.

The second major characteristic of dialectical materialism according to Ake (1981) is its particular emphasis on the dynamic character of reality. It is a framework which refuses to look at aspects of the world as simple identities, or discrete elements, or as being static. The framework encourages us to think of the world in terms of continuity and interrelatedness and with a keen awareness that this continuity is essentially very complex and also problematic. In a nutshell, the framework looks at the world dialectically.

Furthermore, Ake (1981) posited that the third distinctive feature of this framework is that it encourages the student to take account systematically of the interactions of the different elements of social life, especially the economic structure, social structure, political structure and the belief system. It assumes the relationship between all these social structures. Indeed, it emphasizes the relatedness of the different elements of societies. According to this assumption, it is the economic factor which is the most decisive of all these elements of society and which largely determines the characters of the others. Thus, if knowledge of the economic is available the general character of the social system, the political system, the belief system, etc. of the relevant society can be reasonably inferred. That is not to say that the economic structure is autonomous and strictly determines the others. All the social structure are interdependent and interact in complex ways. Each one of them affects the character of every other one and is in turn affected by it. But our framework assumes that it is the economic factor which provides the axis around which all the movement takes place, and imparts a certain orderliness to the interaction.

From the foregoing, some advantages of this framework are that it gives insight into the dynamics of the social world. In this work we will see how the contradictions of selling and buying votes have given impulse to bad governance in Nigeria, how the contradictions of bad governance has led to political domination by the ruling elite, and how these contradictions are shaping the general course of democratization and human development of the Nigerian society. Also, this framework is developmental in outlook. It allows us to see social phenomena in the context of their development, that is, how they started and grew. It is a framework that encourages a comprehensive view of society. The fact that this framework emphasizes the relatedness of social phenomena, particularly the economic structure, the social structure, the political structure and the belief system, gives it advantages as a tool for the study of society. Hence, one of the most important advantages of the framework used here is that it encourages us to treat problems concretely rather than abstractly. This helps to expose false assumptions and biases in explanations (Ake, 1981; Ekekwe, 1986; 2009 & 2015).

Wet Underwear

Conventionally, an underwear is usually a clothing that is worn next to the skin before other clothes are put on. An underwear is typically not seen by others, it is the private cloth that covers and protects one's private parts. It is like the foundational cloth of one's dressing. Therefore, the suitability or comfortability of an underwear is accorded high priority because of its health and ease of movement implications. Thus, for hygiene reasons and comfortability, naturally, an underwear is supposed to be the cleanest cloth of one's dressing; it is meant to be dry and well fitted (Merriam-Webster).

Conversely, a wet underwear will not only stain the outer clothing but will lead to irritations on the skin and cause other health challenges. If worn for a long period of time, it can even emit foul odor from the person wearing a wet underwear.

By implication therefore, an underwear is the primary or first action of any form of dressing. It is like the foundation of a building. A dry, clean and comfortable underwear is vital for any form of smart dressing. In this connection, while the suitability or otherwise of an underwear is of primary importance, all other clothing can be regarded as secondary dressing. The

dialectical materialism of a wet underwear in this paper is that, the poor economic condition of the masses which is regarded as the primary concern of the masses, can be said to be the primary factor that consciously or unconsciously created the “marketplace” for selling of votes and vote-buying, and either wittingly or unwittingly, laid the “democratic” bedrock for bad governance in Nigeria since 1999. As the masses sell their votes, they retain their poor economic condition which becomes their wet underwear. On the other hand, vote-buying by the ruling elite seems to have given them the moral right to do everything possible to preserve the existing inequality in order to maintain its hegemony. This appears to be a misnomer of democracy where power, both political and economic power, resides with the people. In a representative democracy, the people dictate through their votes and their representatives execute the wishes of the people. However, vote-buying by the ruling elite seems to have put “paid” to the power of the people and transfer power to those in government as sole proprietors of the country’s commonwealth (Nelson & Saka-Olokungboye, 2019).

Peril

Simply, peril means a threat or danger to something or someone. Usually, the danger or risk involved is quite real, immediate and grave. Graphically from the above, it can be seen that a wet underwear is a peril not only to one’s dressing but a potential source of stain on other outer clothes, coupled with skin irritations and allied health challenges which can constrict one’s movement and emit bad odor. The danger or peril posed by a wet underwear is both instantaneous and quite life-threatening (Merriam-Webster).

According to the Nigerian constitution, power belong to the people and all authority of government shall be derived from the people and that the primary purpose of government is to ensure the welfare and security of all citizens. Conversely, as a life-threatening risk, the peril of vote-buying has given absolute power to the ruling elite to “institutionalize” bad governance (Nwaorgu, 2014; Ekekwe, 2015; Ndu, 2016; Adadu, 2016; Ohale, 2018).

Vote-Buying

To vote implies the power to elect or choose representatives, that is, persons to act on behalf of others or those to manage the commonwealth of a group of people. Thus, voting connotes a democratic dispensation and it is the mandate that is given to those who will govern in society. Accordingly, it is a fundamental or primary right of every eligible citizen to appropriately express their choice to decide those who will steer the affairs of the state and manage the economy. Voting, therefore, presupposes a contest where qualified candidates will compete for the votes of the people in a general election to choose those competent to be in government. Consequently, the outcome of governance, that is, good governance or bad governance is largely a reflection of the caliber of persons chosen to govern and the manner of the voting process. In other words, when credible and competent candidates are chosen to be in government the likely output will be good governance while on the other hand, when inept persons find or buy their way into public offices the result is bad governance which visibly manifest in the absence of the rule of law and low standard of living of the people (Nwanegbo, 2016; Nelson & Saka-Olokungboye, 2019).

In Nigeria, since the return of democracy or rule of law in 1999, vote-buying or buying the franchise (mandate) of the people by candidates to capture state power has been the wet

underwear of the masses that has led to the serial bad governance being witnessed in the country. Put differently, selling of votes by citizens to incompetent candidates is a major factor of Nigeria's bad governance since 1999. In a vicious cycle, the selling of votes by citizens and vote-buying by politicians which are indeed two sides of a coin, has become the invisible wet underwear in Nigeria's democracy posing a grave danger to rule of law and human development index (Chukwurah et al, 2019; Nelson & Saka-Olokungboye, 2019; Yakubu, 2020; Nwagwu et al, 2022; Hoffmann & Patel, 2022). Although it has been implied, it is apt to end this section by briefly outlining what constitute governance and what makes it either good or bad.

Governance: Good versus Bad

Fundamentally, the term "governance" as used here denotes the manner in which decisions are made and are executed in a society or in any given socio-economic formation. Two groups of actors are usually involved in this process at the national level. These are the state actors which include government officials, political office holders and the military; and the non-state actors comprising of "kitchen cabinet", the media, local business people, transnational corporations and global donor agencies. This later group often sponsor candidates during general elections who will support their parochial interests and/or influence public policies that will benefit them. This group is capable of manipulating state affairs to its factional advantages in countries like Nigeria and other developing countries where the constitution is inadequate and ambiguous (Ake, 1996; Ekekwe, 2015; Jacob, 2016; Nelson & Saka-Olokungboye, 2019).

The foregoing infers that there is good governance and there is bad governance. Thus, as opposites, an analysis of good governance will automatically reveal what bad governance is. There are certain major characteristics of good governance that can be identified universally. The following is an outline of the 8 major elements of good governance globally (Sheng, 2020).

Rule of law: good governance entails that all persons are equal before the law and that there is an independent judiciary in place to ensure that those who make laws conform to the constitution and that those who execute the laws do so impartially and in the common good of society.

Participation: effective participation by all segments of society in the decision-making process is a vital element of good governance. This can be done through direct democracy where all the people are directly involved or through their elected representatives.

Transparency: good governance ensures that all processes of law making, law implementation and adjudication are open, free and fair to all. It also ensures that all public information and policies are made available and accessible to all citizens in easy and understandable manner.

Responsiveness: good governance is a system that responds to the needs and aspirations of citizens in a dignified and timely manner.

Consensus building: good governance ensures that all the different and often competing interests in society are carefully harmonized and balanced so that no segment is left out in development.

Inclusiveness and equity: good governance ensures that the welfare and security of every member of society is guaranteed by giving all persons a sense of belong and fairness.

Efficiency and effectiveness: good governance ensures the protection of the environment and the judicious use of natural and material resources in timely and result-oriented manner in meeting the basic needs and services of citizens.

Accountability: a hallmark of good governance is that it is answerable to the people who elected those in power. Essentially, government institutions and officials must give regular and open account of their stewardship and how public resources are rationalized and utilized.

From the above, it thus appears that good governance is an ideal to aspire to. It is expedient that government institutions and officials work towards improving their respective policies and actions in all the 8 key elements of good governance mentioned above. The essence of advocating for good governance is to curtail parochial interests and corrupt practices and to ensure that available resources are utilized for the common and sustainable good of society (Enoja, 2016). Accordingly, in contrast, the absence of one or more of the 8 main characteristics of good governance in a society signifies a tendency towards bad governance. The experience of most African countries like Nigeria portrays the absence of most of the key elements of good governance (Nwaorgu, 2014; Ekekwe, 2015; Saliu & Ifejika, 2016; Ndu, 2016).

Remarkably, following from the above is that, good governance is indeed a function of a well democratized society. It follows therefore that an ill democratized society can hardly experience good governance as highlighted above. Conversely, an ill democratized system is a breeding ground that facilitate vote-buying by politicians or put differently, selling of votes by citizens (Ake, 1996; Ndu, 2016).

Major Outstanding Issues That Facilitate Vote-Buying in Nigeria

Since 1999, one of the most remarkable features of democratization in Nigeria is that it is totally indifferent to the character of the state. At intervals, general (“democratic”) elections are being held to choose who will exercise the powers of the state without regards to the character of the state which has critical implications for democracy. The character of the state in Nigeria is so critical that elections in the country give the voter only a choice between oppressors. This is largely because Nigeria retains the colonial state structure which is inherently anti-democratic, being the repressive apparatus of a foreign occupying power. Strangely, this state structure has survived, reproduced and rejuvenated by the legacy of military rule and mega-single-party rule syndrome in the country since 1999: (the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, from 1999 – 2015; and the All Progressives Congress, APC, from 2015 – date; “September, 2022”). The colonial state structure is surviving because of the reduction of democracy to mere multi-party elections in a vacuum of development ideologies. So, what is happening in Nigeria now by way of democratization is that self-appointed civilian dictators are being replaced by other elected dictators (Ekekwe, 2009 & 2015; Nwanegbo, 2016).

Traits of bad governance (the opposite of good governance) characterizes Nigeria’s democracy which seems to be a replay of the colonial experience and the practice under erstwhile military regimes. There is no rule of law with all power vested in an imperial presidency. There is hardly any form civil society participation in governance. No transparency and accountability by

government institutions and public officials. The government is not responsive to the yearnings of the people and there is total absence of consensus building in the system. There is no equity and justice with ultra-high level of corrupt practices and ineffectiveness in providing basic welfare and security services in the country (Enoja, 2016; Jacob, 2016; Nelson & Saka-Olokungboye, 2019).

One pertinent question here is: what is the point of choosing “democratically” those who will control a state structure which is fundamentally undemocratic? Obviously, the Nigerian state need to be transformed structurally before elections can become a meaningful exercise in democracy. Sadly enough, from government policy directions, there is no agenda for the democratic transformation of the state structure in Nigeria (Ekekwe, 2015; Saliu & Ifejika, 2016).

Nigeria’s state structure is detrimental to democracy in yet another sense. Due to the nature of the state, politics is basically about the capture and control of state power. The character of the state portrays “politics as a dirty game” in Nigeria. The all-pervading power of the state makes it prone to abuse and becomes a source of corrupt self-enrichment. The nature of the state does not encourage a politics of ideology and development but a politics of lawlessness, fanaticism and extremism. The winners in the competition for state power win everything and losers lose everything. This politics is not conducive to the rule of law and political stability because it is a disguised warfare. Nigerian politics is not a lawful contest to select those to manage the country’s commonwealth but a fight to capture and privatize the enormous state resources. So, sadly, politics is viewed as a business by both politicians and majority of the masses (Nwaorgu, 2014).

So, democracy in Nigeria has huge challenges. Democratic political contest is about choosing the managers of a common enterprise for the common good of all concerned. Thus, democratic participation is about being involved in making decisions for the highest good of the common enterprise. But in Nigeria, there is no common enterprise or state structure in practice. This is because politics has been reduced to a business competition between ethnic, religious and party factions for capture and control of the common enterprise or state structure for the benefits and reproduction of its members and supporters to the detriment of the masses and the society. This is what Ekekwe (2015) aptly implied as: *“Between Power, Parties and Principalities, Where Are The People?”*

It is bad enough that the process of democratization in Nigeria is blind to the nature of the state. It is worse still that it is also blind to its social context as it has taken the human content for granted. Fundamentally, democracy is more typically and more importantly about the people, about improving the lot of the masses of the people. And who are these people? This question surely portrays Nigeria’s democratic experience as being so abstract and superficial. The supposed beneficiary of democratization in Nigeria is typically a subsistence farmer toiling daily for an unjustifiable existence. He or she has no education or very little, no access to basic amenities – safe water, health services, sanitary facilities or leisure. He or she has not mastered the grammar of politics and he/she does not speak the language of power. He/she does not quite understand his/her link with all these strange people so far away in the Federal Capital Territory

(Abuja) and State capitals who are supposed to be sharing a common destiny with him/her and nobody is really talking about anything that is important to him/her.

With low economic power and weak political awareness, it is therefore, diversionary and unfair to interpret the democratic incorporation of such persons in terms of being able to vote and be voted for in elections. Like the state structure, the masses have to be transformed before democracy can be relevant and feasible. They have to be transformed economically and socio-politically to be objective, to be able to secure a good life for their present and future. Agreed, it is absolutely appropriate that everyone should be able to vote. But, democratization in Nigeria since 1999 has not been advanced, and is inherently unfair and inequitable by giving the vote to the poor while mysteriously remaining indifferent to the crippling constraints of poverty in the midst of plenty. Poverty disempowers and undermines democracy. The political economy or dialectical materialism implications for the outstanding issues that facilitate vote-buying in Nigeria is that, when society deliberately establishes and protects rights that only a few can enjoy, it crystallizes or concretizes the ascendancy of the few and the marginalization of the many (Adadu, 2016; Ohale, 2018).

The Paradox of Democratic Participation in Nigeria: The Wet Underwear

The concept of wet underwear is an allegory (a symbol or fable) of the irony of the democratic participation by the many in Nigeria. The problems of emancipation for the poor in Nigeria are compounded by the fact that the very process by which they participate in democratization reinforces their disempowerment. The masses are not politically mobilized on the basis of formally equal legal citizens who are negotiating their interests and finding common grounds, but through patron-client chains, leveraging parochial identities, concealed in a subtle and crafty bribery such as selling and buying of votes. In these circumstances, voting becomes a symbol for powerlessness and exploitation. For instance, selling of votes by the masses and buying of votes by politicians for securing electoral victories reproduces and reinforces these social relations which are inimical to democracy and results in bad governance. In accepting bribe for their votes, the masses collude in commoditizing their democratic rights and reinforces their subordination, thus turning election into bondage. By responding to the monetary demand for their votes, the masses are frozen in a “tenure” of misery and obliged to renounce their prospect in sharing in the benefits of democratic consensus building and good governance. Thus, they remain confined to their pitiable conditions, paying in their self-inflicted deprivation, political and economic impoverishment, the price for the political power of the elite (Nelson & Saka-Olokungboye, 2019; Hoffmann & Patel, 2022).

Recommendations

The way forward and what is to be done are obvious. However, presently, the absence of an enabling environment for democratic participation at the grassroots is the greatest contributor to bad governance in Nigeria, just as the lack of transformation of society for the empowerment of the people is the greatest challenge to selling and buying of votes. If there is no supply (selling of votes by citizens), the demand (vote-buying) will be non-existent. Therefore, the empowerment of the people for effective participation in local government democracy is a key starting point. Over time, this will empower the people to move in the right direction for necessary democratization of the state structure – which is currently still colonial in nature, repressive and a tool for domination by a minute few persons who act as aliens.

There is a need to enlighten citizens about the importance of human development over and above the current practice of “white elephant” projects as constituency projects by elected officials. While a few may be relevant to the needs of the people, majority of these so-called constituency projects are mere stand-alone projects without any linkage to the immediate and future needs of the people. Often, these projects are conceived by the ego of politicians and to create contracts for their local client groups.

Fundamentally, there is need to reform the electoral system and simplify the effective use of the recall provision in the constitution. The electoral system should be made more inclusive and transparent by discouraging money-politics while encouraging ideological debates. On the other hand, a simplification of the recall provision will ensure that even after general election, only fit and performing politicians will be allowed to stay in office. In other words, the recall provision will enable those represented to recall their ineffective representatives. This will make votes count and curtail the selling of votes by citizens and more importantly, vote-buying will become an unprofitable option for desperate politicians.

CONCLUSION

So far, this paper has attempted to illustrate that the mere return of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999 after so many years of military regimes is not a guarantee to experience good governance in the country. Good governance is a by-product of a well democratized system where the state structure is democratic, that is, autonomous from the control of any class or a few persons in society, and where the people are socially transformed and empowered economically and politically to independently exercise their franchise. It was noted however that, this is not the case with Nigeria’s democratization. Nigeria has been practicing democracy with the state structure inherited from colonialism which is undemocratic and repressive, prone to be captured and controlled by an advantageous class or by a few persons who have access to power, and fundamentally, without any form of economic and political emancipatory plan for the people.

Thus, after about 23 years (from May, 1999 – September, 2022) of democratic rule in Nigeria, the country seems to have been further driven into the ocean of bad governance which is even worse than was experienced under military dictatorship. Nothing concrete seems to have happened in terms of power to the people and socio-economic change in society which were the twin major aspirations of Nigerians for a return to civil rule in 1999. Rather, what has been transpiring is bad governance by one mega-party to another and instead of human development what has been developing is poverty in all regions of the country. Elections in the country has been turned to a mere ceremony of changing baton from one set of civilian dictatorial leaders to another set of civilian dictatorial leaders. This has been made feasible without any form of nationwide popular uprising because citizens collude to sell their votes for immediate survival due to the poor living condition in the country; while the success of vote-buying by politicians to gain access to an undemocratic state structure has led to the intensification of state treasury looting by the ruling elite in order to amass public funds to enable them buy more votes at next election and retain their positions in office.

Regrettably, the social relation that citizens enter by selling their votes (mandate) has led to a syndrome of wet underwear for the masses; a situation where like the peril of a wet underwear, citizens suffer silently under serial dehumanizing bad governance in a democratic dispensation. On the other hand, the social relation of vote-buying by candidates has ironically, given politicians/parties who “win” (capture) and control the state apparatus the impunity to perpetuate their “umbrella” (symbol of PDP) and “broom” (symbol of APC) bad governance.

Decisively, the surest route to reverse the on-going negative trend in Nigerian politics and enter the “Promised Land” of good governance is to simultaneously restructure the state democratically (make the state autonomous), and empower the masses in a robust human development manner. Unfortunately, the political “Pharaohs” of Nigeria are fully aware of this strategy that is capable of “freeing” democracy and usher in good governance but would rather maneuver and keep luring citizens to sell their votes to them. In this connection, it is therefore not surprising to any keen observer why all the civilian administrations since 1999 have failed to “materially” correct the shortcomings in the Nigerian constitution which was prepared by the erstwhile military regime. This also explains why the electoral laws and their reforms are been manipulated by successive civilian dictators who capture and control the repressive and undemocratic state structure of Nigeria. Like the scripture said; what can the righteous do when the foundation is destroyed? Vote-buying is here seen as the 'wet underwears' impacting negatively on democratic consolidation and good governance in Nigeria.

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