



A-Z about elections in your country and the world.

The Business Of Vote Buying In Nigerian Elections

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Since General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the June 12, 1993, election, citing, among other reasons, the use of money to undermine the electoral process, Nigeria's election process has been riddled with accusations of vote-buying. Vote-buying happens when political office contenders offer money (or other incentives) in exchange for political support of voters. The idea of vote-buying seems like a simple economic exchange, where the voter sells and the candidate (or their agent) buys.

The Law

Vote buying is frowned upon in democracies, and Nigeria is not an exception. Article 130 of the Electoral Act 2010, as amended, states that:

A person who – (a) corruptly by himself or by any other person at any time after the date of an election has been announced, directly or indirectly gives or provides or pays money to or for any person for the purpose of corruptly influencing that person or any other person to vote or refrain from voting at such election, or on account of such person or any other person having voted or refrained from voting at such election; or (b) being a voter, corruptly accepts or takes money or any other inducement during any of the period stated in paragraph (a) of this section, commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of N100,000 or 12 months imprisonment or both.

The practice however continues to influence the outcome of elections in Nigeria.



How Much Is A Vote Worth?

A report from a **2007** [1] survey shows that most Nigerians (**58%**) believe it is wrong and punishable for politicians to buy votes, yet the cost of votes has steadily increased. The median price of a vote payment in **2003** was **N1750**, and it rose to **N2250** in **2007**. In **2018**, it was between **N3000** and **N5000**, and during the **2019** general elections, the price stood between **N250** and **N14000**, where some voters were alleged to have been paid between **N10,000** and **N20,000** for the procurement of their PVCs [2]. Although money is the dominant means of vote-buying transactions, commodities, such as foods and other gifts are also incentives used to 'convince' voters to chose certain candidates.



Prepaid And Postpaid Vote Buying

There are two common means by which vote-buying transactions are carried out in Nigeria: Prepaid or Post-Paid.

Prepaid Vote Buying

tagged 'Cash for Vote', prospective voters are offered money with the agreement that they would vote for who was paying them. This was popular in the 2018 gubernatorial election in Ekiti state, where the state government was reported to have paid N3000 into the account of state government workers[3]. However, with prepaid buying, seller compliance is uncertain, as some voters may defect to a higher bidder or vote for their choice candidate.

Postpaid Vote Buying

tagged 'vote for cash' was the dominant strategy in the 2019 elections[4]. In this system, voters are paid after showing evidence of their vote, it was called 'See and Buy' during the 2018 Ekiti state governorship election.

Conditions Politicians Attach To Vote-Buying In Nigeria's Electoral Process

- Snap a picture of the ballot
- Swear to go by the contract
- Use a ballot already thumb printed
- Spoil your ballot
- Death threat

Where Does The Money Come From?

1

Budgetary Misappropriations

Even before the 2016 budget padding scandal, accusations of budgetary misappropriations have been rife in Nigeria. Although it is difficult to calculate how much money has been embezzled by public officials, the public procurement sector, which is responsible for 70% of the budget is believed to be implicated in 60% of corruption cases[5].

2

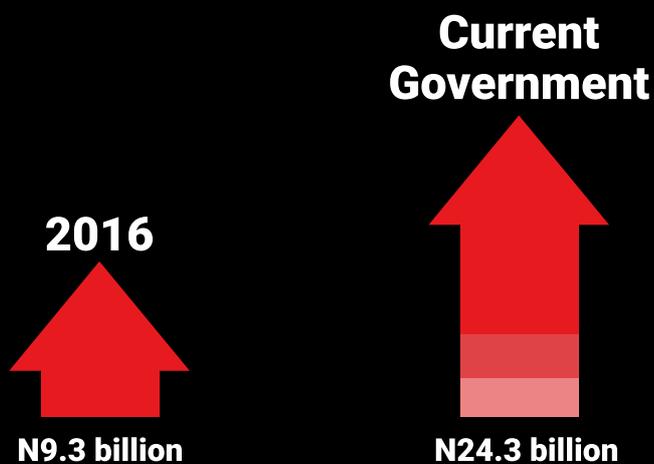
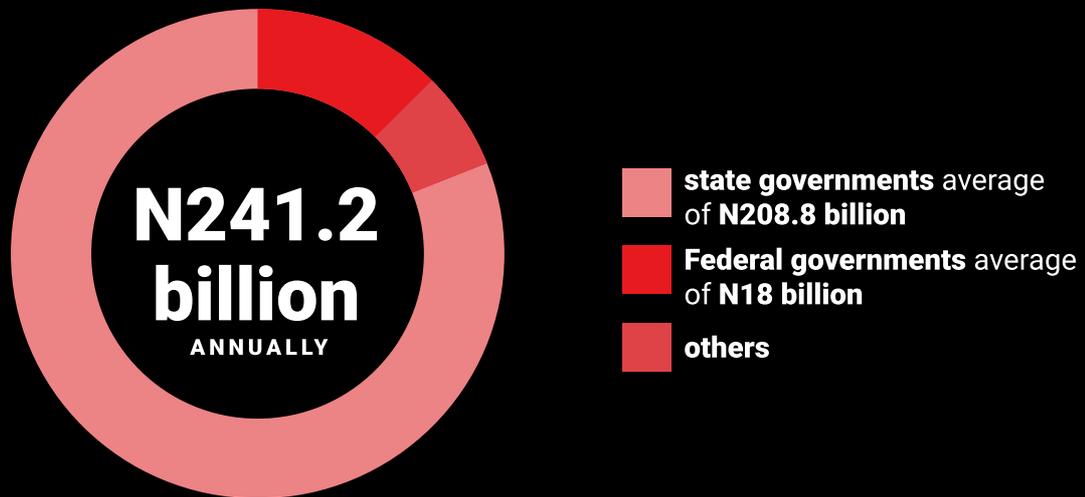
Security Votes

Security votes may be defined as extra-budgetary allocation received by the President, Governors and Local Government Chairmen ostensibly for security. The disbursement of these funds is at the discretion of the head of government who is not under any legal obligation to disclose how it is spent. Described as opaque funds, the lack of accountability for these funds have led them to be seen as one of the major means of financing political activities.

Transparency International Defence and Security (TI-DS) estimates that over **N241.2 billion (\$670 million)** is earmarked annually for security vote, which exceeds the annual budget of the Nigeria Army, and the combined annual budget of the Air Force and Navy. **For state governments**, an average of **N208.8 billion (\$580 million)** in total each year is spent on security votes while the Federal government security votes averages over **N18 billion (\$50 million) annually**[6].

Where Does The Money Come From?

Under the current government, the size of security votes has expanded. It increased from **N9.3 billion** (\$46.2 million) in 2016 to **N24.3 billion** now (\$63.7 million).



Increase in size of security votes

Where Does The Money Come From?

In an expose[7] detailing how elections are rigged in Nigeria, former cross-river state governor, Donald Duke paints an illustration of how security votes are used for electioneering

The REC now goes down and says, 'we need to conduct a training programme for the presiding officers and em, headquarters hasn't sent us any money yet, you know.'

And the governor is like: 'How much would that cost?'

REC replies: 'N25million for the first batch, we may have about three batches.'

Governor: 'Ok, the Chief of Staff will see you.'

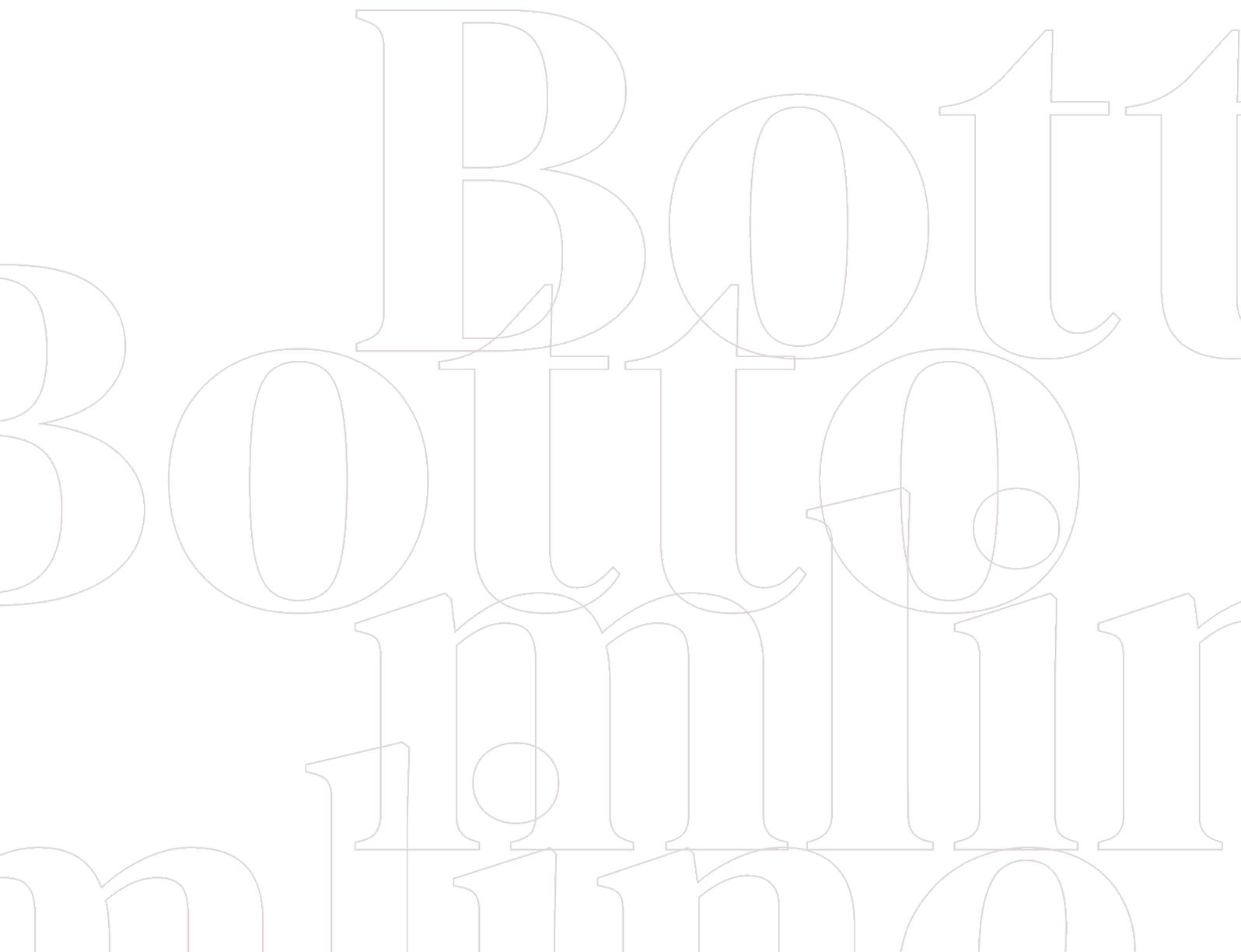
Now, the Chief of Staff, you call him: 'Make sure, that we arrange N25 million this week and in two weeks time another N25 million and Seventy-Five million in all.'

Chief of Staff: 'Your Excellency, how do we do it?'

Governor: 'Put it under Security Vote.'

Bottomline

Elections as an auction where the highest bidder takes the vote leave no room for policy debate neither does it allow citizens choose the best candidate to champion their issues, just the ones willing to pay the most. To curtail this, calls for electoral reform must include targeting the issue of vote-buying. It is also important to have a culture of demanding clean elections, and institutions that uphold this. Moreover, the nature of security votes also makes them suspicious siphons for funding political illegalities. To nip this, there needs to be transparency as regards how all budgetary allocations are spent. While money is important for running political campaigns and elections, it should not be used as a tool that threatens free and fair elections, and democracy. The consequences of this are lasting - a corrupt election sets the stage for a corrupt government.



References

[1] <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/wp99-vote-buying-and-violence-nigerian-election-campaigns>

[2] <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2020.1788762>

[3] <https://doi.org/10.1515/openps-2018-0005>

[4] <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2020.1788762>

[5] <https://www.stearsng.com/article/in-nigeria-corruption-starts-with-the-budget>

[6] <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/01/camouflaged-cash-how-security-votes-fuel-corruption-in-nigeria-pub-77297>

[7] <http://saharareporters.com/2010/07/18/must-read-how-governors-rig-elections-donald-duke-guardian>