

# Oil Corrupts Elections: The Political Economy of Vote-Buying in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The extant perspectives on vote-buying have produced three central arguments around its causes, which are the factors of poverty, the electoral/voting system, and the nature of politics in the state. Going beyond these perspectives, this study presents the argument that vote-buying can also be explained by considering the nature of the political economy of a state, especially when the state is oil-dependent. The Nigerian case study demonstrates this argument. We employ the “oil-impedes-democracy” framework, which is a strand of the resource curse theory, to argue that the incidence of vote-buying in Nigeria’s contemporary elections is prevalent because of the oil wealth associated with politics and elections in the state. This is because abundant oil wealth intensifies elite competition, which explains the use of all strategies to win elections including vote-buying. This is also facilitated by the fact that the political elite, especially the incumbent, have adequate access to oil wealth and spend it to “buy” elections and hold on power. Voters, on their part, also prefer to sell their votes during elections to have a share of the “national cake” given their perception of the wealth associated with politics in Nigeria and the poor service delivery by politicians after assuming state offices.

## Introduction

“[In Nigeria], political parties budget to bribe security and INEC officials. This is a very serious challenge to our democracy.”

The above remark was made by Attahiru Jega, the current chairman of Nigeria’s electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to lament the sorry state of elections in that country.<sup>1</sup> This revealing statement corroborates the many narratives of fraud and malpractice in the successive elections held in Nigeria since its return to democracy in 1999. Clearly, a significant part of the problem with Nigeria’s electoral process, especially in light of Jega’s statement, has been the prevailing incidence of vote-buying (exchange of cash or gifts for votes), which has almost become a norm during elections. Indeed, vote-buying in its different dimensions has been a common and recurring feature in the reports of observers on Nigeria’s elections. The reports are usually characterized by statements such as: “a politician...was alleged by voters to have distributed money to people who queued to vote as well as electoral and security officials at a polling

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<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v15/v15i2a1.pdf>

station.”<sup>2</sup> A number of empirical studies have also demonstrated the prevalence of vote-buying in the Nigerian elections.<sup>3</sup> For example, a 2007 survey conducted by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and Practical Sampling International shows “that more than seven out of ten Nigerians believe that vote-buying happens either ‘all of the time’ or ‘most of the time’ in the country’s elections.”<sup>4</sup>

A close observation of the phenomenon of vote-buying in Nigeria suggests its potential to enrich the existing literature on vote-buying and electoral fraud. Existing theoretical perspectives have only produced three dominant arguments to explain the foundations of vote-buying in elections. First, it is argued that socio-economic factors, especially poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy, play a major role in promoting the market for votes in democracies.<sup>5</sup> Second, it is argued that the voting methods in a particular electoral system may also guarantee the predominance of vote-buying during elections.<sup>6</sup> The third explanation is predicated upon the belief that vote-buying is a product of the nature of partisanship and party organization in a particular state.<sup>7</sup> What is however uncommon in the literature is an understanding of the incidence of vote-buying from the lens of the political economy of a state. It was only in 2011 that a useful study by Pedro Vicente surfaced, which establishes a connection between vote-buying and an oil-dependent economy with the case of Sao-Tome and Principe.<sup>8</sup> This particular study was a follow-up to his earlier research, which discovered a notorious rise in corruption following the discovery of oil in that small West African country.<sup>9</sup>

The present study aims to contribute to the argument on the relationship between oil-dependent state and vote-buying with the illustration of the Nigerian case study. It is no news that Nigeria is an oil-rich and oil-dependent state. It is currently the largest oil exporter in Africa given its production of 2.525 million barrels of crude oil per day, and its contribution of 2.7 percent supply to the world’s oil market.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, oil has been a major source of the country’s revenue, currently accounting for 70 percent of its total revenues. While vote-buying has been observed as a common occurrence in oil-dependent Nigeria, it is difficult to find a systematic study that has demonstrated a possible link between oil wealth and vote-buying in the country. The oil wealth phenomenon in Nigeria has been more popularly employed as an analytical framework to explain resource conflict in the Niger Delta region, revenue allocation politics and conflicts, and corruption and underdevelopment in the country.<sup>11</sup>

Our study works within the framework of the resource curse theory with special emphasis on its “oil-impedes-democracy” strand. The study argues that the predominance of vote-buying in Nigerian elections reflects the nature of politics and elections produced by its oil-dependent economy. Nigerian politics constitute a highly and fiercely contested process among the elite given the fact that the control of state power is clearly equivalent to direct access to the state’s oil riches. It is against this backdrop that elections are overly monetized as politicians heavily spend oil money on elections, especially on vote-buying, in order to have (or continue to have) a strong hold on power. For their part, voters also willingly offer to sell their votes given their belief of receiving a share of the national oil wealth. We attempt a validation of this hypothesis by illustrating contemporary issues around the political economy of Nigeria and the electoral process since democracy returned to the country in 1999. Within these parameters, we further present empirical evidence from a fieldwork conducted on electoral fraud in Ekiti State in south-western Nigeria, which provides more support for our argument on vote-buying in Nigerian elections.

The article is structured as follows. The first section provides a review of the theoretical perspectives on the relationship between oil and democracy, presenting the extent and dimensions of the debate on that topic. The second section provides an explanation of the tragedy of democracy in Nigeria's oil economy, especially in contemporary times. The third section provides an analysis of the debilitating consequences of oil wealth on the Nigerian elections in light of the prevalence of vote-buying in the country. In the fourth section, we present empirical findings of the outcome of fieldwork conducted in the southwest region of Nigeria. Finally, the fifth section provides a summary and conclusion.

### **Oil Wealth and Democracy: Theoretical Perspectives**

The "oil-impedes-democracy" perspective represents a major component of the resource curse theory. Its proponents are chiefly of the position that dependence on natural resources (oil in particular) not only undermines growth and development in a state but also negatively affects its democratic processes. With illustrations from many oil-rich Middle East and African states, the arguments of its proponents are centered on the idea that oil wealth sustains autocracy, and thereby frustrates democratic transition and consolidation. This thesis is mostly anchored on the concept of "rentierism" in oil-dependent states.<sup>12</sup> Rentierism is symptomatic of a state with over-reliance on revenues from external rents on natural (oil) resources and where the government is the principal recipient of the rent, which permits the control of the economy by a few political elites. In addition, the state operates an economy where only a few create the wealth, while the majority only engages in its distribution and utilization.<sup>13</sup> As a result, rentierism is argued to have negative influence on democracy for the following four reasons: taxation, spending, social structure, and external support.<sup>14</sup>

The proponents of the taxation factor suggest that rentier governments may strategically use oil proceeds to either eliminate or reduce the tax burden on their citizens and hence occasioning limited pressures for accountability and democratization.<sup>15</sup> Studies have observed this phenomenon in many oil rich countries including Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, and a host of other Arab countries.<sup>16</sup> The second argument, the spending factor, indicates that enormous wealth from oil resources increases the capacity of the government in rentier states to spend excessively on patronage and to continue to have a hold on power.<sup>17</sup> In addition, governments have the capacity to spend heavily on internal security with the aim of repressing domestic demands for democratization and the formation of interest groups that could call for democratic transition.<sup>18</sup> The social structure argument suggests that rentierism limits the possibility of the emergence of a social class that could possess the capacity to oppose the status quo. This is against the backdrop that the middle class created in oil-dependent states lacks independence from the government, and eliminates the chances for an effective labor class because rentier states often discourage sustainable industrialization.<sup>19</sup> The external support thesis is derived from the work of Gregory White and Scott Taylor based on Nigerian and Algerian case studies. They argue that "key actors in the international arena—notably, former colonial powers, international financial institutions and transnational corporations—are inclined to undemocratic, military regimes that supply oil, while simultaneously offering rhetorical support for ongoing transitions."<sup>20</sup>

As presented above, the oil-impedes-democracy perspective in its current forms focuses more on the connection between oil dependence and authoritarianism. Furthermore, it offers a theoretical explanation of challenges to democratic transition because of the oil factor. Yet,

it is scarce within this theoretical framework to find a reasonable consideration of the consequences of oil resources on existing democracies, especially for democratic consolidation. However, the work of Jenson and Wantchekon on this subject is exceptional.<sup>21</sup> These two scholars advanced the position that oil wealth has the possibility of negatively affecting democratic consolidation. This especially occurs in a democracy where the state is weak, allowing for incumbent politicians to control and distribute oil rents, and encouraging the promotion of patron-client networks. In this situation, elite competition for state power is extremely intense which may lead to democratic breakdown.<sup>22</sup> We find this postulation particularly instructive for this study. We present the argument that democratic development in Nigeria is impeded because of its oil-dependent nature. A major reason for this is the immense wealth associated with state power in Nigeria because of the influence of incumbents on oil wealth, which intensifies elite competition. This process creates a seriously contested electoral process where the political elite employed all strategies, including violence and fraud. In this instance, vote-buying becomes one of the major winning strategies, which is facilitated by their access and control of the state's oil wealth. In addition, voters characteristically sell their votes given their perception of the oil riches associated with politics in the country.

### **Oil Curse and Democracy in Nigeria**

Although oil resources have been a component of the Nigerian economy since the 1950s, it was certainly in the period of the 1970s oil boom (occasioned by the world oil crisis in 1973) that the state fully developed the traits of rentierism given the massive oil earnings it realized during the period, and of course, the increased state control of the oil industry. Oil revenues rose sharply from ₦4,733 billion to ₦15,234 billion by 1980 (an estimate of about 222 percent increase.)<sup>23</sup> These huge earnings increasingly occasioned over dependence on oil resources to the detriment of other revenue sources, especially agricultural exports. Between 1970 and 1980, the percentage of revenues from oil exports against the others rose sharply from 57.6 percent to 96.1 percent, and it was as high as 99.2 percent in 2005.<sup>24</sup> The oil factor has since been a central issue in all facets of the Nigerian state and society including its democratic trajectory. The phenomenon of oil wealth has indeed accounted for democratic breakdown, frustrated the democratic transition process, and been a major challenge to the path of consolidation of the contemporary democracy in Nigeria.

Extraordinary levels of corruption immediately accompanied the influx of petrodollars. The first democratic regime in the era of the oil wealth phenomenon increasingly experienced the rise of super-corrupt politicians who looted state resources with much cruelty and impunity. In this regard, Michael Watts noted that "Nigeria 'lost' US\$16.7 billion in oil income owing to fraudulent activities and smuggling of petroleum between 1979 and 1983."<sup>25</sup> It certainly became fashionable for politicians and civil servants to stuff stolen money in Swiss bank accounts and torch government ministries to prevent account audits. This high level of corruption greatly accounted for the Buhari/Idiagbon military coup that aimed at saving the country from that generation of political elite. Many high-ranking politicians were prosecuted following enough evidence of embezzlement of public funds at the special tribunal established by the military government in 1983.<sup>26</sup>

A democratic transition as well became arduous and almost impossible upon the military's assumption of power, especially during the regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. This was largely the result of the allure of oil money.

Babangida earned the sobriquet “Maradona,” as he kept changing the timetable for the democratic transition.<sup>27</sup> At the inception of his reign, he promised to complete the transition on 1 October 1990 before it was suddenly postponed to 1 October 1992. From 1992, it was again deferred to 2 January 1993 before Babangida finally arrived at the 27 August 1993 date.<sup>28</sup> Despite all these changes and the incredibly expensive transition exercise, the 12 June 1993 presidential election staged afterwards was suddenly cancelled by the regime despite the general claims of freeness and fairness in that electoral process. In an attempt to truncate the transition program, Babangida spent huge amount of oil money for patronage and to find legitimacy for himself; hence the labeling of the regime as “government by donation.”<sup>29</sup> Many civil associations, such as the Association for Better Nigeria (ABN), Committee of Patriots, Third Eye, and the Committee of Elder Statesmen, sprang up and were sponsored by the regime to frustrate democratic transition.<sup>30</sup> At the end of this regime, an investigative panel, otherwise known as the Pius Okigbo Panel commissioned in 1994, discovered that Babangida’s government spent a total of US\$12.4 billion of the Gulf War oil windfall on “extra-budgetary expenditures” that “neither the president nor the Governor of the CBN [Central Bank of Nigeria] accounted to anyone.”<sup>31</sup>

The same story goes for Sani Abacha’s military regime, which took over power from the short-lived Interim National Government created after the 12 June 1993 political crisis precipitated by the presidential election. Contrary to Babangida’s Maradonic approach, Abacha never pretended to support a democratic transition. His aim was to transform himself from a military head of state to a civilian leader in the fashion of other leaders in West African countries—Burkina Faso (Blaise Compaoré in 1991), Ghana (Jerry Rawlings in 1992), Niger (Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara in 1996), and the Gambia (Yahyah Jammeh in 1996). Abacha was indeed fiercer in his own approach. With oil money at his disposal, he spent heavily on internal security to clamp down on the opposition.<sup>32</sup> Individuals who seemingly opposed his political ambition were assassinated, detained, or forced into exile. On the other hand, Abacha spent excessively on political mobilization and patronage to actualize his succession bid. All the five parties registered for the “transition” exercise nominated Abacha as their presidential candidate, making him unopposed for the anticipated election. Besides, many civil groups were established solely to mobilise support for him. The most prominent was the Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA), which organized a Two Million Man March to “persuade” Abacha to contest the presidency.<sup>33</sup> After Abacha’s death, which naturally collapsed his authoritarian regime, a series of unimaginable figures amounting to billions of US dollars were reported to have been stolen by Abacha and his family members. Officially, Obasanjo’s government pragmatically struck a deal with the Abacha family whereby the government only recovered about US\$1.2 billion while the family was left with US\$100 million and par bonds worth US\$300 million.<sup>34</sup>

The post-1999 democratic dispensation has also experienced serious challenges following a series of conflicts around oil wealth. Democracy ostensibly opened up the space for the expression of grievances and expanded the opportunities for renegotiation of nationhood, which gave rise to increased agitation for resource control by the peoples of the oil-rich Niger Delta. The 2005 National Political Reform Conference (NPRC), therefore, created a good platform to redraw the revenue allocation formula in which the oil-producing regions could be better positioned to benefit from the allocation of oil wealth in the country. The outright rejection by the Northern delegates of the proposed 25 percent sharing formula on the principle of derivation by the Niger Delta delegates at the conference has since been argued as a major reason behind the transformation of peaceful protests into



violence in the Niger Delta. This is because the event was immediately followed by the proliferation of militant groups and increased violence in the Niger Delta region.<sup>35</sup> It was after the introduction of an amnesty offer for the militants by the Umar Musa Yar'Adua's government in 2009, upon the failure of a military approach, that a "fragile peace" has been recorded in the region.<sup>36</sup>

While the amnesty policy was being offered to the ex-militants of Niger Delta, there emerged another notorious terrorist group in the northern region, the Boko Haram group, whose destructive activities are unprecedented in the history of Nigeria.<sup>37</sup> Albeit clamoring for the Islamization of Nigeria, many are of the belief that the group emerged to express its grievance over marginalization of the northern peoples in response to the existing structure of allocation and spending of oil money in the state. This is especially in response to the huge amount of money involved in the rehabilitation of the Niger Delta ex-militants in light of the amnesty policy framework. For example, former Head of State and prominent leader of the opposition Muhammadu Buhari argued: "What is responsible for the security situation in the country [Boko Haram terror activities] is caused by the activities of Niger Delta militants."<sup>38</sup> As such, many in the North believe that amnesty in the fashion of that offered to the Niger Delta militants should be extended to the members of Boko Haram. In fact, some northern political elites employed the means of the Boko Haram crisis to resume talks on the renegotiation of the terms for revenue allocation in the country. On behalf of the nineteen governors in the North, Aliyu Babangida (governor of Niger State) proposed in the early days of the Boko Haram uprising in February 2012 that: "The revenue allocation formula should be looked at. We are hoping that within 2012, there would be discussions and review of the allocation formula."<sup>39</sup> It was against this backdrop that the Federal Government offered to "appease" the north with the payment of 13 percent derivation on solid minerals, which was hitherto exclusively enjoyed by oil producing states.<sup>40</sup>

Another area that has not received enough scholarly and empirical attention in connection with Nigeria's oil wealth and the state of its democracy is the implication of oil wealth for the electoral process and how this contributes to the explanation of vote-buying in contemporary Nigerian democracy. This is especially so against the backdrop of the new phenomenon of oil windfall in Nigeria since the early days of the present democracy, which coincides with consistent increases in world market oil prices until the drop beginning in late 2014.

### **Oil Wealth, Political Money, and Vote-Buying in Nigeria**

In line with the foregoing section, the thesis advanced in this section is that the struggle for power has been more intense in the present Nigerian democracy owing to the attractions of national wealth largely derived from oil and gas resources. It is for this reason that politics, especially elections, has not only been a fierce process but also an incredibly expensive venture in the country. Political elites characteristically use oil money to fund elections and buy votes from the electorate. As for the voters, who are generally poor, an increasing awareness of the huge money politicians amass in politics and the poor service they deliver upon their assumption into office leads them to prefer selling their votes to have a share of the "national cake." The foregoing statement supports the theoretical argument that "an abundance of natural resources increases competition for the control of the state, which is linked to high levels of political violence and the use of resource rents by ruling parties to maintain their hold on power."<sup>41</sup> In this light, politics is rather "dominated by issues

concerning the distribution of oil rents, not ideology.”<sup>42</sup> This process offers a meaningful explanation of the prevalence of vote-buying in the country.

It is noteworthy that Nigeria’s earnings from oil sales quadrupled following soaring oil prices in the world market. For instance, the country’s savings of surplus profits from crude oil sales rose sharply from US\$5 billion to US\$20 billion between 2005 and 2008.<sup>43</sup> It is for this reason that the government of Olusegun Obasanjo established the Excess Crude Account (ECA) in 2004. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), ECA was established “with the primary objective of protecting government budgets against shortfalls arising from volatile crude oil price.”<sup>44</sup> It was basically funded from surplus revenues derived from crude oil sales, Petroleum Profit Tax (PPT) and royalties above the budgeted benchmark of the government for each fiscal year.<sup>45</sup> Established with this clearly stated objective, ECA has constituted one of the major sources of intergovernmental suspicion and conflict in democratic Nigeria as the political elite see the account as a goldmine to be exploited under the guise of using the money to address budgetary deficits.

Shortly after the government of Obasanjo in 2007, the thirty-six governors in the federation constituted a major political force to pressure the federal government to begin distribution of the ECA funds amongst the tiers of government while declaring the account unconstitutional. Following consistent pressure, Yar’Adua’s government began sharing money in the account amongst the tiers of government. The CBN in its 2008 annual report reported that the sums of ₦841.5 billion, ₦795.4 billion, and ₦77.9 billion, were respectively withdrawn at different times from the ECA and shared amongst the three tiers of government.<sup>46</sup> In 2010, the sums of ₦450 billion, ₦873 billion, ₦502 billion and ₦30.5 billion were withdrawn at different times in a similar manner.<sup>47</sup> Under the presidency of Goodluck Jonathan, reports show that the following amount of money has been withdrawn thus far between 2012 and 2013 and shared among the governments: February 2012, ₦187 billion; March 2012, ₦158 billion; July, ₦35 billion; October 2012, ₦35.5 billion; November 2012, ₦35.5 billion; February 2013, ₦3.5 billion; March 2013, ₦173 billion; and April 2013, ₦721.5 billion.<sup>48</sup> Against the backdrop of these consistent withdrawals, there have been consistent concerns by economists about the wastage by the regimes and for the country’s future. For instance, Oby Ezekwesili (former minister of education and former vice-president at the World Bank) argued that: “The present cycle of boom of the current decade is much more vexing than the other four that happened in the 70s, 80s, 90s and 2000s.” She further revealed that the governments of Yar’Adua and Jonathan had squandered \$45 billion in foreign reserves and \$22 billion in ECA after Obasanjo’s government.<sup>49</sup>

The ECA phenomenon provides one of the many examples that could demonstrate the rationale behind the “do-or-die” philosophy of politics in Nigeria. All strategies, especially fraudulent ones, are characteristically employed during electoral contests to acquire power for the distributive politics in the state. In this process, the huge monies amassed by government are, in turn, used to fund and purchase elections. For example, the conflict between former President Obasanjo and his vice-president, Atiku Abubakar, came with the revelation of how they diverted money from the Petroleum Technology Trust Fund (PTDF) to fund their re-election in 2003, as well as an account of how the former used money from the Fund to execute his failed tenure elongation ambition (the third term agenda). In another instance, it was widely reported that the governor of an oil-rich state (James Ibori) in the Niger Delta region significantly funded Yar’Adua’s presidential campaign. Ibori was popularly known as the “Oil Sheikh,” owing to the stupendous wealth he made during his tenure as the governor of oil-rich Delta State. In April 2012, he was convicted by a United

Kingdom court for having admitted to stealing £50 million in state funds and for other related charges on money laundering.<sup>50</sup> Other politicians with little access to state wealth or “money bags” resort to selling their landed properties and investments to fund elections with the expectation that their investment will be ‘recouped’ once they get into power.<sup>51</sup>

Consequently, elections in Nigeria are among the most expensive in the world. In a special report by Nick Thompson of CNN on international campaign finance, Nigeria is listed among the six countries with the most expensive elections even though clear data on election financing in the country are not easily available. With reference to Nigerian elections, Magnus Ohman, the Political Financial Advisor for International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), remarked: “It’s an electoral system where you need to spend.”<sup>52</sup> Clearly, one of the reasons for the huge finances associated with elections is the special budget used for vote-buying by parties and politicians. For example, it was widely reported, and confirmed by a delegate at the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) January 2011 presidential primaries that the sums of US\$3,000 and US\$10,000 were budgeted for each delegate to buy their votes by the competing camps of Atiku Abubakar and Goodluck Jonathan, respectively, at the primary election.<sup>53</sup> Given that 8,500 delegates were reported to have attended the primaries, it can be estimated that the Atiku camp would have spent US\$25.5 million while Jonathan’s camp would have spent US\$85 million on vote-buying alone at the preliminary stage before the general elections. Interestingly, Reuters reported that a substantial part of the money used by the incumbent was withdrawn from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) account, which affected the forex (foreign exchange) market.<sup>54</sup>

Besides the direct buy-and-sell transaction as illustrated above, it is also popular for parties to bribe electoral officers for them to manipulate votes in their favor. In a personal interview with the researchers, a presiding officer for INEC who carried out his assignment in Osun State in the 2011 general elections narrated his experience in the following statements:

Bribery was introduced in one form or the other; financial gratifications to all officers with the hope that the presiding officers will be manipulated in their favor. I can specifically speak of the PDP, a total of ₦1.1 million were given to us at our first meeting. We were told, “If they catch you, you cannot mention us.”...They wanted us to inflate the number of accredited voters.<sup>55</sup>

Interestingly, the officer clearly admitted to having collected money from politicians. His attitude towards the bribe money is quite consistent with our argument on the general attitude of Nigerians with regards to elections and politics because of the oil factor. Nigerians do not necessarily see it as immoral to accept monetary offers from politicians in exchange for votes, although they might occasionally defect at the point of voting.<sup>56</sup> When asked about his motivation for collecting the money, the electoral officer enthusiastically responded that

I am happy to collect the money. Maybe I should tell you this: I have spent 30 years of my life in that country, I never received anything substantial from that country. If for once in 30 years I see someone as being part and parcel of the ‘national cake’ offering me money, I would be so happy to collect the money because ordinarily the money should have been used to provide basic amenities.... I wish several other youths had the opportunity to collect that kind of money from the politician. The money was in a ‘Ghana Must Go’ bag



with a CBN bond on it (₦1000). It tells you: 'this money is Nigerian money, spend it!'.... If it happens over and over again, I will still collect the money.<sup>57</sup>

In the same spirit, the officer willingly offered to share the experience of his colleague in the eastern region. His colleague who served in Owerri in Imo State told him that no voting took place in his polling unit during the presidential election because:

... at the INEC distribution center, as early as 8am in the morning, they told them everyone had agreed that the PDP would win the presidential election. But for coming, you should all [the presiding officers] have ₦25,000 each. So I am not surprised at the bogus number of votes in the East.<sup>58</sup>

### **Empirical Data on Ekiti State Elections, 2007-2011**

In the classification of states in Nigeria, Ekiti State in the southwestern region represents one of the states with absolute dependence on federal allocations (basically from the oil wealth).<sup>59</sup> This is because the state lacks any meaningful alternative sources of revenue except for the federal allocations. For example, the peer review report of the Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) in January 2013 indicates that the state's capacity for internally generated revenue is weak. It constituted only 9.8 percent, 7.9 percent, and 7.6 percent of its total revenues, in 2009, 2010, and 2011 respectively.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the economic life of the state has always been more determined by the "vagaries of the fluctuations in world oil prices."<sup>61</sup> Reports show that federal allocations to the state constituted almost 80 percent of the state's revenues between 2005 and 2007. This statistics excludes some other revenues from excess crude sales at the period.<sup>62</sup> Given this condition, economic activities in the state are more centered around the public sector. Many people are engaged in the civil service and teaching professions (in public schools). Worse still, the highland nature of the geography of the state also does not encourage agriculture, although many of its rural population engage in farming.<sup>63</sup> This sufficiently accounts for the high-rate of poverty in the state. The National Bureau of Statistics show that Ekiti State has the second highest level of poverty in the South West Region, with a 59.1 percent figure.<sup>64</sup>

The state's economy, as presented above, occasions increased attraction to state power because money obviously flows from the corridors of the government. Politics has therefore been a major issue in the state since its creation in 1996. Certainly, this explains the controversies and violence that have followed elections in the state, especially the 2007 gubernatorial elections and their rerun in 2009. Elsewhere we have presented findings on the dimensions of electoral fraud in the states elections.<sup>65</sup> In this study, we present findings on the incidence of vote-buying in the state's elections within the context of the rentier nature of the Nigerian political economy. The findings on the phenomenon in the state are basically derived from a series of in-depth interviews (both personal interviews and focus group discussions) with the categories of people that surround the elections held in the state between 2007 and 2011. These categories include politicians (from the dominant parties in the state), voters (basically youths, some under the voting age), election observers, election officers, and party thugs. We were able to interview thirty people to elicit information from them ostensibly about electoral fraud in the state. It was in this process that we were able to make sense of the phenomenon of vote-buying in the state's elections. Given the sensitivity of the topic under investigation and the manner of their responses, we have deliberately kept the identity of respondents confidential.

*Politics is “Chop and Go”—Politics is about Looting and Money Making*

In a series of discussions with our interviewees, it is clear in their perception that politics in Nigeria represents a viable means for personal enrichment, especially because it guarantees absolute access to state money. In a focus group discussion with youths who have had considerable experience, as voters or as party followers, in the recent elections in the state, the following were some of their responses when asked about their understanding of politics in Nigeria:

“Politics is chop and go. You just have to get there and make your own money at the expense of the masses”; “Politics is a serious business. They [politicians] are just there amassing wealth for themselves and their own family”; “Politics in Nigeria is a dirty business. Politics is about struggle for power and wealth and not in the interest of the masses”; and “Politics is everything in Nigeria. You want to get political power and have access to everything you need in life.”<sup>66</sup>

Given the above manner of response, it makes sense to argue that voters are motivated to easily accept money from politicians given their perception of the abundant monetary benefits in politics. In addition, it could be inferred from the narrative provided by a politician that politics is so important in the state because of the spoils it provides. In his explanation of the 2007/2009 crisis in the gubernatorial elections held in the state, the interviewee narrated that:

In 1999, the whole of southwest voted for AD. Our friends in the ruling party were not preparing that they will once be out of government. They thought they will be in government for over ten years. Councilors will settle down in a beer parlor and kill fresh fish. They were buying many vehicles—Toyota, Mercedes Benz, Nissan, just name it. They never anticipated any economic shortfall. Suddenly, they lost in 2003 but they thought by 2007, they will be able to reclaim power. When they lost again in 2007, then there was increased aggression from them because most of them sold their properties to execute the 2007 elections.<sup>67</sup>

The above narration clearly confirms the popular perception that politics is about self-enrichment in Nigeria. Certainly, this reason provides an explanation for the extent to which politicians would go in order to acquire power. As mentioned in the interview, politicians spent excessively on the elections and sold their properties in desperation for power. In this process, vote-buying becomes one of their major spending on elections. The following illustrates the many forms vote-buying took in the state elections.

*“Logistics”*

The gathered evidence clearly indicated that political parties created separate budgets for vote-buying at electoral periods under the label of “logistics.” This revelation has earlier been made by a former governor of a state, Donald Duke, while giving a personal account of how governors rig elections.<sup>68</sup> In the case of Ekiti State, a party executive narrated that it is the normal practise for politicians to have an all-night meeting a day before elections with the purpose of strategizing to bribe electoral officers and buy votes from voters. According to him:

... most of the electoral officers will come and collect money [at the meeting]. Even if you don't call them, they will come. I was told it is a normal practice. It is called logistics. I was told other parties have done that. At the end of the day, we had to give them something. In fact, the money came from the state.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to the money provided to electoral officers prior to voting, there are also special monetary allocations for each polling booth in the state. Our informant informed us that the amount of money allocated to each polling booth varies depending on the population and location of each booth. "We budgeted ₦100,000 for each polling booth," he stated. "There is money for presiding officers and provision for security officers for each polling booth. [In estimation], that is about ₦300,000 for each polling booth and we have about 177 wards in Ekiti. Each ward would have about five to six polling booths."<sup>70</sup>

#### *"Door-to-Door Campaign"*

According to an election observer with the Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), there is also the method of vote-buying popular among all the political parties, which is done under the guise of a "door-to-door campaign." As the term symbolizes, politicians and their agents move from one house to the other, ostensibly to campaign and solicit for votes, only to offer people cash or other gift items (such as tins of milk, clothing materials, detergents, bags of salt, etc.) in anticipation of their votes at the polling booth. Although old-fashioned in Nigeria, the method is apparently more favored because of the high rate of poverty in the state. Politicians see it as a better strategy to negotiate with voters at their homes because of the advantage of negotiating with the whole of the family, rather than an individual voter only. Narrating his experience, a politician informed us that:

I was telling my aunt to vote for our party because I helped her daughter to get a job when we were in power. She responded that the other party has done well than our own party because they gave her ₦2000 as against the ₦500 provided by our own party. The children were given ₦1000 each.<sup>71</sup>

#### *"Voter Card"*

Realizing the importance of voter registration to elections, political parties pay potential voters to register to vote at the elections. In this process, many people are mobilized in preparation for the elections. A university student informed us that:

There was a time when I was on campus, the party came with buses to mobilize students to go and register. A friend came to inform me that the president of the town union told him that ₦500 will be provided for people willing to vote. I told him about the warning made by the new INEC chairman on fraudulent registration, but my friend said I should just forget about that.<sup>72</sup>

It is also interesting to note that it is not really in the interest of the parties to ensure that the registered voters are present on election day, but what actually matters in this instance is the voter card. Someone else may use the voter card to cast a ballot. In such instances, there are voter cards for sale to candidates who are in desperate need of votes. In the words of one of our interviewees, "There are politicians who have more than fifty votercards. They sell it on the day of elections."<sup>73</sup>

*"See and Buy"*

This marks a new trend of vote-buying in Nigeria. It was introduced in the 2011 elections by politicians to prevent defection by voters having paid for their votes. Our informants narrated that this came as a new method after politicians realized that voters in most cases do not comply after payment for their votes. Therefore, politicians (in connivance with electoral officers) influence the creation of congested polling centers that would allow for monitoring of how people vote regardless of the fact that Nigeria operates a secret ballot voting method. In this regard, political thugs are hired and placed at strategic locations very close to ballot boxes to see which party a voter has voted for before payment. In the words of an election observer, "On election day, someone will be watching the pattern of vote and give signal to another party agent to pay at the back, if the voter fails to vote for the party, there is also a signal."<sup>74</sup> We were also informed that "after voting, you [voters] will go to the queue and write names" in order to receive their payment after voting for the party.<sup>75</sup>

**Conclusion**

The main objective of this paper has been to explain the predominance of vote-buying in Nigerian elections within the context of the oil dependent nature of the state. To this end, we demonstrated that elite competition has been fiercer in the current democracy in Nigeria given the new age of oil windfall the country has experienced in recent times. Politics has, therefore, been consistently driven by the distribution of rents because of the general attitudes towards elections by both the elite and the masses. In this process, the oil money to which the political elite, especially the incumbents, have abundant access has mostly shaped the market of votes in the country. To further buttress our argument, we present evidence from a fieldwork conducted in a state in the South West Region that absolutely depends on oil revenue allocation. This structure of the economy of the state apparently shaped the character of elite competition and the incidence of vote-buying in the state's elections. While studies in the field of economics and political science have contributed immensely to the resource curse theory, especially its relationship with democracy, this study has attempted to offer a contribution to the extant literature by employing the Nigerian case to argue that oil resources constitute a potential variable for consideration in explaining the apparent challenges facing democracies in oil-dependent states, especially the newly democratized ones. Also importantly, this study has proven to be relevant to the existing literature on the theoretical perspectives on vote-buying. As much as we certainly agree with other scholars that the factors of poverty, electoral systems, and the nature of politics are truly related to vote-buying in electoral systems, based on the Nigerian case we also argue that the political economy of states also matter in the discourse on the incidence of vote-buying.

**Notes**

- 1 Umoru 2012.
- 2 Transition Monitoring Group 2007. p. 83; also see National Democratic Institute 2007; EUEOM 2007, 2011.
- 3 IFES 2007; Danjibo and Oladeji 2007; Bratton 2008; Jensen and Justesen 2012.
- 4 IFES 2007
- 5 Kitschelt 2000; Schaffer 2002; Bratton 2008; Jensen and Justesen 2012, 2013.

- 6 Cox and Kousser 1981; Hicken 2007; Lehoucq 2007; Birch 2007.
- 7 See Molina and Lehoucq 1999; Schaffer 2002.
- 8 Vincent 2011.
- 9 Vicente 2010.
- 10 See CIA profile and Revenue Watch Institute.
- 11 On the resource conflict, see for example, Osaghae 1995; Ukeje 2001; Watts et al. 2004; Omeje 2005; Ikelegbe 2006; Oyefusi 2007; Obi, 2010; Obi and Rustad 2011. On revenue allocation and political conflict, see for example, Naanen 1995; Suberu 2001; Uche and Uche 2004; Anugwom 2006. On studies related to corruption and underdevelopment, see for example Khan 1994; Osoba 1996; Ades and Tella 1999; Shaxson 2007.
- 12 Mahdavy 1970; Beblawi 1990; Yates 1996.
- 13 Beblawi, 1990, pp. 87-88.
- 14 On taxation and spending see Ross 2001, p. 332) on social structure, Sandbakken 2006; and regarding external support, White and Taylor 2001.
- 15 Anderson 1987; Luciani 1990.
- 16 For Kuwait and Qatar, see Crystal 1990; for Jordan, see Brand 1992; and for other Arab countries, Schwarz 2008.
- 17 Lam and Wantchekon 2002.
- 18 Ross 2001.
- 19 Sandbakken, 2006, p.139.
- 20 White and Taylor 2001, p. 323.
- 21 Jenson and Wantchekon 2004.
- 22 Ibid. 2004, p. 821.
- 23 CBN 1983 cited in Olukoshi, 1995, p. 139.
- 24 CBN 2006.
- 25 Watts 2003, p. 215.
- 26 Osaghae 1998, p.154; Watts 2003, p. 215.
- 27 See Momoh 1995, p. 16. The reference is to Argentinian soccer star Diego Maradona.
- 28 Osaghae 1998, p. 223.
- 29 Momoh 1995, p. 45.
- 30 Ibid., p. 47.
- 31 Osaghae 1998, p. 279.
- 32 Reports indicate that Abacha and his Chief Security Adviser, Ismail Gwarzo, characteristically withdrew money from the national treasury to spend on security. In fact, that became a major means to siphon oil money. For example, it was reliably reported that “between November 1993 and June 1998, Abacha directed his National Security Adviser, Alhaji Ismail Gwarzo, to withdraw from the Central Bank of Nigeria a total of \$1.6 billion and £417 million for security purposes. Interestingly, only £250,000 and \$195 million went for that purpose.” Egbo et al. 2012, p. 9, note 30.
- 33 Mustapha, 1999, p. 280.
- 34 *The Guardian* 2002.
- 35 Ukiwo, 2011, p.23.
- 36 Many are of the opinion that the amnesty offer has only temporarily doused the tension in the Niger Delta region. This is against the backdrop of the belief that the government only introduced the amnesty offer to enhance oil production that was negatively affected



- by violence in the region. As such, the underlying issues of environmental degradation and development of the region that drive the crisis have not really been dealt with.
- 37 For details on Boko Haram, see, for example, Abimbola 2010; Onuoha 2010; Onapajo and Uzodike 2012; Onapajo, Uzodike and Whetho 2012; and Agbiboa 2013.
- 38 Isenyo 2013.
- 39 Bello 2012.
- 40 Udoh 2012.
- 41 Jenson and Wantchekon 2004, p. 818.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 CBN 2012, p.14.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 CBN 2009.
- 47 CBN 2011.
- 48 The information on withdrawals from the ECA come from *Economic Confidential* 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2012e, 2013a, 2013b, and 2013c.
- 49 Iriekpen 2013.
- 50 Tran 2012.
- 51 Amuwo 2009, pp. 47, 50; also, Ojeifo 2006.
- 52 Thompson, 2012.
- 53 Personal interview with PDP member in Ado-Ekiti, July 2012.
- 54 Lazarus, 2011.
- 55 Personal interview with electoral officer after the 2011 general elections in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, March 2012.
- 56 See Bratton 2008.
- 57 Personal interview with electoral officer after the 2011 general elections in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, March 2012.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 This is contrast to some states with sufficient economic activities that could create alternative revenues for them besides the federal allocations. In a 2008 report, the following states were identified as having substantial levels of financial independence on the basis of their capacity for internally generated revenue: Lagos (63.5 percent), Sokoto (46.6 percent) and Ogun (27.5 percent) States. Other states that recorded over 10 percent capacity for generating revenue internally included Osun, Oyo, Borno, FCTA, Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Kogi, Anambra, Kwara, Gombe. Edo, Abia, and Rivers States. Others including Ekiti State fell into the category of states with absolute dependence of the federal oil allocations (see *Thisday* 23 July 2009).
- 60 NGF 2013, p. 20.
- 61 Ekiti State Planning Commission 2004, p. 30.
- 62 Ibid., p. 31
- 63 Personal interview with Taiwo Owioye, Lecturer, Department of Economics, Ekiti State University, in Ado-Ekiti, July 2012.
- 64 NGF 2013, p. 10.
- 65 Onapajo 2014; Onapajo and Uzodike 2014.
- 66 Focus group discussion, Ado-Ekiti, July 2012.

- 67 Personal interview, July 2012.
- 68 At an occasion in July 2010, former in Cross River State Governor Donald Duke gave a detailed insider's account of how governors perpetrate fraud in the electoral process. Interestingly, he narrated that that the whole process begins with the "courtesy call" the INEC's Resident Electoral Commissioners (REC) pay to state governors. It is at this point that the governor creates some sort of unholy relationship with the officer. According to him, "When the Resident Electoral Commissioner comes before the elections are conducted- of course when he comes to the state, usually, he has no accommodation; monies have not been released for the running or conduct of the elections and all that because we always start late. He pays a courtesy call on the governor. It's usually a televised event you know, and of course he says all the right things: 'Your Excellency, I am here to ensure that we have free and fair elections and I will require your support.'" See *Sahara Reporters* 2010.
- 69 Personal interview, Ado-Ekiti, July 2012.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Focus group discussion, Ado-Ekiti, July 2012.
- 73 Personal interview, Ado-Ekiti, July 2012.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Ibid.

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