

# The Politics of Poverty in Democratic Participation: Nigeria in Perspective

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## Abstract

Our focus here is to interrogate the subject of poverty as a threat to democratic (political) participation. The decline of participatory democracy and fizzling of the euphoria that accompanied what may be described as the third wave of democratization (that threw Nigeria into what is erroneously described as the Fourth Republic and an aborted Third Republic) informed the choice of this topic. To explicate the intricacies of this discourse, we shall place reliance on the understanding of the concepts of poverty in its relation to democratic (political) participation as provided for by the political economy approach/framework. Guided by the class analysis of poverty, we expose that political apathy, one of the current emblems of our democratic experiment, is a creation of the ruling class. The political behaviour of the ruling class can therefore only be understood within the context of the contest for power as access to accumulation other than for service and; those of the poor class understood within the context of their exclusion which has caused a mass political culture of apathy towards the political system. No doubt, the emancipation of the majority lies in their hands. Our recommendations amongst others are that, the poor must consciously rise above the mosaic of ethnic, primordial and sectional sentiment; fight for power; and build a people democracy anchored on social justice. In essence, demanding right and achieving positive change.

**Keywords:** Politics, Poverty, Democracy, Democratization, Democratic Participation.

## 1. Introduction

Human beings must be made citizens before they can be made men, but in order that they be made citizens government must give liberty under the law, must provide for material welfare and remove gross inequality in distribution of wealth. (Rousseau, 1762 cited in Alan & Conway 1998 : 143).

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country with over 153million people (FGN, 2006). It is home to one-sixth of the world's black population (Chukwuemeka, 2009:405). A country naturally abundantly bless with human and natural resources. As at 2004 the International Monetary Fund reported that the country has an estimated crude oil reserve of 24 billion barrels (See USAID, 2007:1), with over ₦ 29.8 trillion in revenue from sake of cruse oil only (Tell,2008). Paradoxically, over 70% of its population lives in abject poverty (Sanusi, 2011). It is classified by UNDP as 141 poorest nations on the Human Development Index. Poverty in Nigeria from all empirically verifiable fact is a deliberate creation of the Nigeria's political class; it acts as a clog in the wheel of the country movement to a true, people's democracy. Thus state poverty in Nigeria is compounded by the widening class polarization politically and economically, where over "95% of the country wealth is controlled by about 0.01 percent of population" (Oshewolo 2010:267).

Transition to the Nigeria's current democratic dispensation referred to as the Fourth Republic began in 1998. This transition to what could properly be described as civil rule evoked and was facilitated by the massive mobilization of "the rich" and "the poor". This was evident in the enthusiasm and pomp which the transition was received. Sooner than expected, there emerged a post honeymoon effect of the entire process; which "effect" is premised on the failure of the democratic government to deliver on its promised democratic (goods) dividends. It was the hope of the people that democracy not only provides liberty, but it also improves social and economic condition of the people. These are the motivating factors of democratic participation. Rather than improving the socio-economic well-being of the people, Nigeria's democracy has turned a burden on the poor. But rather than providing democratic good, poverty is further created and corruption almost institutionalized, the net result being the receding of the euphoria that earlier accompanied the country's democratization and a sharp decline in

democratic participation. Mass poverty is a mechanization of the political class to exclude the majority of the people from the political process and shrink the political space for their selfish interest. Doubt therefore remains about how firm democracy's root can become entrenched in a country where over 70 percent of the population are poverty personified. It is our position that mass poverty poses a threat to democratic participation and democratic consolidation than all other variables put together. While there is a seemingly general consensus that mass poverty undermine democratic participation, the 'how' is not much less clear. This is the task of this undertaking.

## 2. Conceptual Clarifications

### 2.1. Politics

In demystifying the concept of politics, especially within the context of this paper, two classical definitions easily run to mind. One is the Eastonian notion of politics as "authoritative allocation of values" (See Easton cited in Nwosu, 2006:2). The other is "Who gets what when and how", (Laswell, 1958). Concise as these definitions may be, they capture Nigeria's political class understanding of politics. No doubt, the geopolitics of Britain as at the time Easton, influenced his political thought, hence turning him inward to how scarce resources and values could be shared. In like manner; the prebendalist, clientelist, myopic-, kleptocratic and crass materialistic character of the Nigeria's political class defines their understanding of politics as unrestrained accumulation of societal values to the exclusion of the majority. Politics is essentially to the Nigerian political class a game of "who gets what, when and how" by which means values are authoritatively allocated by the managers of the state. A zero-sum game of winner takes all and loser loses all. The 'how' in the game is *amorally immaterial* for the political and ruling class. The fact, however, is that politics is pervasive. Indeed, I agree with Adebayo and Ogunleye in their submission that politics (especially in Africa) "is a matter of life and death, a game of human survival or perdition" (Adebayo and Ogunleye 2008). This is also well stressed by Deustch (1974: 6). He clearly asserts thus; "*if civilization should be destroyed and most of mankind killed within the next twenty to thirty year, we shall not be killed by plague or pestilence; we shall be killed by politics*". In the main, the broader conception of politics as "who gets what, when and how" shall guide our discourse here.

### 2.2. Poverty

Poverty as a concept is difficult to definitely encapsulate. Caught in the web of different connotations, pundits are comfortable with its description than its definition. Some view it as absolute level of deprivation or relative social condition of individuals. In Galbraith relative view says "people are poverty stricken when their income, even if adequate for survival, falls markedly behind the average obtainable in their immediate communities (Gilbrath, 1955). Using the purchasing power parity, the UNDP defines those living below 1USD per/day as living in absolute poverty and those living below 2 USD per day as living in relative poverty (Sach 2005:20). There is a subjective definition, which is the function of how an individual/group perceive/ perceives himself/ themselves as against description by others.

Today poverty refers to the consequences of the rule of money. Poverty is seen as "moneylessness and powerlessness" ( Yakubu and Aderonmu 2010: 192) ; deprivation, insecurity, voicelessness, lack of power, and all other human right conditions that are produced and reinforced by poverty (Khan, 2009:9). The World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 broadens the concept of poverty and the captures cross- cultural-natural aspect of poverty when it says:

Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environment and social discrimination and exclusion. It is characterized by lack of participation in decision making and in civil, social and cultural life... ( see Mattes et al 2003:2).

While mass poverty in Nigeria grows at a geometric proportion, the effort to fight it is at an arithmetic

progression, the gargantuan appetite of the Nigerian political (ruling) class also grows at a geometric progression. This is evident in the paltry sum given to civil servant on grade level 04 as minimum wage., when Nigerian Senator takes home a whopping ₦15.8 monthly and an annual pay of ₦182million (for details on the cumulative Gross Salaries and allowances, see RMAFC 2010; Meribe & Adeniji 2010). This is astonishing. Stretching the above, the civil servant on Grade level 04 whose salary is 0.13% of a senator cumulative pay will have to work for 842years and 6months to earn ₦182 million. This is so for the civil servant where a 13month salary is paid as leave bonus. (Leaves bonus is no longer paid in loom sum). It is worth noting that while such staffs' promotion and its attendant financial benefit remain at an arithmetic rate and meager the increase of the class income is at a geometric increase. Multiply ₦182 million by 109 senators and you will understand why nothing is left for infrastructural development, social services and welfare of the majority. We have not added the Executive, the House of Representative and all the retinue of political foragers at the state and local government level including undisclosed allowances, kick-backs, loots and brazen embezzlement.

The poverty profile/ incidence in this country have been abysmal. In 1980 we had 72.8 % non-poor and 27.2 % poor, in 1985, 53.7% non-poor and 46.3% poor, in 1992 57.3% non-poor and 43.7% poor. This was a period of military interregnum. During the civil rule, the trend changed. In 2004, Nigerian poor stood at 55.4% and non-poor 43.3%, 2010, the poor stood at 69% of the country population, while the non poor is 31%. In 2012 the percentage of the poor stood at above 70% (NBS 2012; Sanusi 2011). The trend is continuously appalling, especially in a democracy that promises improving the people's standard of living. It has indeed increased the standard of living but for the minority who are in the political (ruling) class and their cronies.

### **2.3. Democratic (Political) Participation**

Democratic practice is commonly understood as an adversarial process characterized by competition, conflict, and power struggle. It is often connected to a notion of citizens' participation that primarily includes voting, contesting election as candidates, demonstration, campaigning, joining and working for political parties etc. Meanwhile, political participation and democratic participation are given same connotation. They are used interchangeably here. Trying to pin down the concept, Goel (1977:2) defined political (democratic) participation as "those action of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and its policies". With a seemingly slight modification, Krishma, Verba and Nie (1992:42), sees it as "those legal actions of private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/ or actions they take". Krishma and his colleagues only introduced the phrase "-legal actions" implying that only those democratic activities allowed by law qualifies for democratic participation. Looking through the lens of Margaret Conway, we see political (democratic) participation as "those activities that attempt to influence the structure of government, selection of government officials and authorities or the policies of government; these activities may be supportive of existing policies or structure or they may intend to change some or all of these"( Conway 1991: 3- 4) For our purpose, we adopt Margaret Conway's definition to guide our discourse.

Fundamental to democratic (political) participation are:

- i. it involve active activities. Merely watching television or listening to/reading political headlines in the media do not qualify for political participation. Though they provide the necessary social capital for active political participation.
- ii. It involves the activities of citizens as free agents; and
- iii. It is aimed at government policies, programmes, structures and personnels.

Unless citizens engage in political decision making and governance either directly or indirectly, democracy might end up being no more than death letters devoid of substance. This question the objective reality of what is practiced in Nigeria democracy. Does it qualify to be so called? We shall find out. There is a categorization of democratic participatory activities as conventional and unconventional. The rules governing the political system which is a product the political culture of the dominant political class determine such categorization.

### **3. Theorizing the Politics of Poverty in Democratic Participation**

Social science inquiry takes the society as its social laboratory. Its beauty is further enhanced by the examination of concept by way of contextualization within a chosen theoretical formulation that brings out the vignettes of

the issue for discussion. Accordingly, Marxist political economy provides a better theoretical guide for this work. The main source of poverty and its effect on the political system/superstructure finds its root in capitalism. Meanwhile liberal democracy is from the womb of capitalism. The ownership of the means of capitalist production is restricted to the few; the hoi polloi who are without means are forced to sell their labour power for subsistence. Marx observed that:

The man who possess no other property than his labour power must in all conditions of society and culture, be slave of other's means, who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labour. He can only work with their permission, hence only live with their permission (Mukherjee and Ramswany, 2007: 360).

The outcome of this relation is the reproduction of mass poverty. The Nigerian capitalist state is the owner of the means of production, the primary allocator and distributor of social and economic values. For the Nigerian political (ruling) class, the state is nothing but an instrument of accumulation. This informs its centrality as the locus of struggle for material resources for personal advancement and class security. The aftermath is the Hobbesian character in the struggle for political power (state power so to speak). Inherently politics has become an investment and political power the organized power of the political (ruling) class for suppressing the other class. The lumpen- proletariat and peasant class equate the other class, the class of the poor. It is the brazen exploitation of the working class (proletariat and lumpen proletariat) and the oppression of the peasants that produce the "poor class" as used in this work. Alienation, exploitation and suppression are tool for the impoverishment of the poor class. For example, the operators of the state also through the Lockean principle of eminent domain (Garner 1981:52) alienate the people of their wealth, pretend it has become public property, and in-turn accumulate same again as private property for selfish and prebendal ends.

It is in the context of the dominance of the state in the economy that we find the desperation of the Nigerian political class in their bizarre quest for state (political) power as evident in the brazen manipulation of the electoral process, alienation and exclusion of the majority from the political process through the creation and maintenance of poverty. Consequently, the poor are forced to remain in a position that will ultimately serve the social, political and economic interest of the (political) ruling class (Nkrumah 1970:17). In the face of the monetization of politics, the political (ruling) class therefore sees poverty of the majority as conditionality for the realization of its class interest. In a way inequality in production relations now translates to inequality in political relations. Foreclosure of the poor from reaching consciousness of their exploitation and suppression is also employed. "The Trickle-down Theory" modicum and sometime "religion" act as soothing balms employed to keep the poor at bay. The principle of equality in liberal democracy remains a farce that does not translate to real political power. Impliedly, active democratic participation especially standing for elective position and shaping public policies is a function of social class and dependent on the financial muscles of an individual. Inversely, for the poor, participating as voter or demonstrator is also weighed on a scale of the opportunity cost of doing so. Poverty hinders effective democratic participation of the economically exploited and disempowered.

### 3.1. Class Analysis of Poverty

Most of the definitions and explanations of poverty earlier provided see poverty as a:

- (i) result of inherent individual attributes, thus blaming the victim. From this line of thinking, people are poor because they individually suffer from some inherent flaws generally linked to genetic inferiority complex affecting their intelligence;
- (ii) bye-product of contingent individual characteristics. This sees the central causes of poverty in the various contingent attributes of the individual which render them incapable of effectively functioning in contemporary society. This attributes are not inherent in the individual; they are bye-product of various social and cultural process. The poor are poor because they lack the right values, have flawed motivation and therefore unable to delay gratification. They have low self-esteem. For Lewis cultural approach (see Oscar Lewis Culture of Poverty, 1963). The suggestion here is that problem of poverty requires changing the value orientation and motivations; changing the people themselves.

- (iii) bye- product of social causes. This finds currency among the liberal social scientist. For them while the individual attributes may play some role in explaining, the more explanation is sought in the nature of the opportunity structure that disadvantaged people face. With this diagnosis of the causes of poverty, the solutions are generally seen in two folds. First is a massive effort at skill formation and education so that the disadvantaged can be equipped to participate actively in the labour market. The other is a massive job programme.

The paucity of the above thinking in concretely explaining the cause of poverty suggests considering an alternative approach hence, the **class analysis of poverty**. This orientation finds currency among scholars of the Marxist tradition. Prominent among them in this line of thinking are Miliband (1969) and Wright (1994). The class analysis finds poverty in contemporary capitalism as generated by its core value of maximization of profit which in turn results in exploitation of one class by another. Poverty is not an accident; it is not a bye- product. It is an inherent and crucial feature of a society whose economic structure is grounded in exploitation. Miliband (1969) used the term structural poverty to describe it, pointing to capitalist structure that creates and recreates conditions of poverty. The pivotal idea is that there is a powerful and dominant class that has great interest in maintaining poverty, “it (poverty) is an essential condition for the realization of its interest” (Wright, 1994: 38).

According to Wright (1994:10) class exploitation is built on three principal criteria viz:

- (i) The inverse interdependence welfare principle: where the material welfare of the exploiters usually depend on the material deprivation of the exploited. The welfare of the exploiter is at the expense of the exploited.
- (ii) The exclusion principle: the causal relation that generate principle (i) above involve the asymmetrical exclusion of the exploited from access to and control of certain important productive resources.
- (iii) The appropriation principle: the causal mechanism which transfer (ii) exclusion into (i) differential welfare involves appropriation of the fruit of labour of the exploited by those who control relevant productive resources (for our case those who control the state).

The asymmetrical expression above is meant to exclude fair competition. That exclusion has been transferred to the political landscape. For instance, in Nigeria, the state provides access to resources, so denying access to state power translates to exclusion from access to resources. Nigeria as a petro-dollar rentier economy relying on the Lockean principle of eminent domain uses the 1976 Land Use Act, to alienate Nigerian from their means of sustenance. Anikpo in an apt contribution shed light on Wright’s view. Anikpo opined that:

Poverty is the historical process of individual or groups being forcefully eliminated from control of the decision making machinery that determines the production of resources in a society. It manifest in various forms as hunger or lack of food, lack of money, cloth, shelter, good health or poor education in national context, poverty becomes a euphemism for under-development or absence/ perversions of democracy (1995:13).

Our interest in Anikpo’s observation is in the underlined sentence. It resonates with Wright use of the concept of oppression. Akeredolu-Ale uses the “Power theory of Poverty” to explain class and poverty. His power theory posits that the structure of the political economy in any society determine the extent and distribution of power among the population. In this case, the ruling class constituted by the law, establish and legitimize an exploitative property system, through which it determine the allocation of opportunity, income and wealth, relying on the use of state power, including the use of oppressive state agents (Akeredolu-Ale, 1975). The poverty of the majority of the people is caused by exploitative and oppressive relations. While oppression occurs when one group illegitimately excludes another from access to those resources, exploitation occurs when such exclusion from resources gives the controller of the resources the capacity to appropriate the fruit of labour

of others.

#### **4. Situating the Politics of Poverty in Nigeria's Democratic Participation.**

According to the Hierarchy- of- need and Oscar Lewis "Culture of Poverty" (1963), Poor people make poor democratic citizens. It is only when individual leap out of the vicious cycle of poverty that they begin to demand a role in and provide support for democracy by way of active participation. Thus alleviation of mass poverty is essential to inculcate within the population attitudes and behaviours that are supportive of democracy. Poverty, insecurity and ignorance do not produce descent democratic citizens.

In response to the obvious flaws and tension in the present Nigeria's democratic (civil) rule, public dissatisfaction and discontent blatantly emerged immediately after the 1999 elections. This was when people began to feel that existing democratic forms were not serving the interest and the expressed opinion of the public. Overtime political structure and culture emerged that excluded the majority from the democratic process.

From our discourse so far, there is no doubt that the economic (material) and social welfare of the individual and the society is the epicenter of democracy. Aside the socio-economic status of the individual defining their level of participation, they also weigh the decision for democratic participations on a cost- benefit scale (Ikelegbe 1995:82; Down 1957, Alapiki 2004:160-166). Meanwhile it is worthy of note that the material condition of an individual's life is the constant determining variable for democratic (political) participation, every other variable or determining factor revolves around it.

What is truer, the substructure determines the superstructure and the dominant culture (including political) is determined by the dominant class in the economy. The Nigerian state in the hand of its managers has manifestly failed in keeping up with its statutory obligation of bettering the life of the citizen. The poor now resort to observing Maslow's psychology of the "Hierarchy of Need", devoting their time to their unmet needs than the "luxury democratic participation" that would not put food on their table nor give them shelter. The deliberate mechanization and maintenance of poverty now narrows the political space to the selfish advantage of the ruling class. It is by money, in a way the material condition of life that the cultural and material resources required for effective democratic participation can be accessed. For instance, money (material) provide the individual quality education which in-turn raises ones consciousness and to process and interpret political information for informed political choices. With no education for the poor and sometimes an appalling and dysfunctional educational system producing uncritical minds, majority of Nigerians are left in a state of "false consciousness" of their existence. They lack the capacity to "understand and work with complex, abstract and intangible subject like politics" (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). For limited time and space we briefly look at the impacts of poverty on democratic participation under the following manifestations:

##### **4.1. Political Apathy**

The character of the Nigerian state and its political system act as a demobilizing force for democratic participation and creates an attitude of apathy towards the system. The skewed Nigerian political system and its political class build structural and political barriers/ limitation to effective democratic participation. Its high monetization of politics denies majority active democratic participation as a situation of a political market and market relations emerges. In capitalist rationalization, the political and ruling class only target, mobilize and seek the political aids of richer citizens and sometimes clinching to political godfathers who can contribute the political finance needed for the political investment which have as its target high economic returns not service delivery. This leads the political class into not addressing issues that touches on the welfare of the poor. The people are disempowered, and the cumulative effect of their disempowerment is the emergence of a political culture of apathy and disinterestedness. As Aminu (2003) also observed:

this business about the man on the street... does not really matter too much in these things... this has to wait till after three, four or five elections, when the man on the street becomes the centre, and then democracy will be assured. Now what seems to happen is that so long as

the political baron and the baroness can agree at the top that is all. That is what matters.

This position is further accentuated by Pye definition's of political culture as the "aggregated experience of the people over a period of time particularly in the recent, which shape(d) their psychological and objective disposition to politics" (Pye 1972:128). What is more, the aggregated experience of majority of Nigerian has been an experience with poverty created by the political system and its operators.

The issue of apathy in Nigeria democracy has been accepted by the apex electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission. In announcing the result of the 2011, it observed that the election was characterized by poor voters turned attributed to apathy. It categorically said, the apathy is caused by poverty. This position was stressed by Lai Olurode, INEC Commissioner. He remarked:

That there exists voter's apathy in Nigeria is no longer contentious. Voters turnout of the just concluded general election (2011) has provided a scientific and empirical evidence of voter apathy and disinterestedness of a sector of the electorate, the ugly scenario has implication for popular participation and government (CODER [Pollwatch2011@pollwatch2011.com/report](mailto:Pollwatch2011@pollwatch2011.com/report); see also Leadership Newspaper April 5, 2011).

It is obvious that free and fair election as well as active mass democratic participation is a threat to the political investors in the Nigerian political market. For quick and secured return on such investment all obstacles standing in its ways must be crushed, the masses must not be freely involved. They people are kept away from the polling booths. It is worthy of note that political apathy caused by mass poverty hinders and stifles the growth and development of vibrant civil society as well as the cultivation of appreciable democratic values and civic culture.

#### **4.2. Political / Electoral Violence**

Poverty constitute a hindrance to participatory democracy, and coupled with the blurred consciousness has made the poor instrument of political manipulation, political thuggery and violence. Meanwhile, Political/ Electoral Violence refers to any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail or abuse political stakeholders in seeking to determine, delay or to otherwise influence an electoral process( Jeff 2002:22). They take place during elections but also in period leading to elections, and in post election period such as during the counting of ballots and after announcement of results as well as during registration of voters. The spate of political and electoral violence is attributable to deepening poverty, unemployment, hunger; commoditization and monetization of politics; and the high premium on financial benefit accruable to political office holders (see Albert 2007).

The creation and maintenance of poverty and aside from causing political apathy has also provided the dominant political class a reservoir of human tools for heinous political assignments. This also poses a challenge to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Electoral violence is perhaps the most deadly form of electoral fraud. Electoral fraud further deepen others social and economic irregularities and deny the citizens the right to choose and control their leaders (Oko, 2008:16). For Olarinye (2008:67) Electoral violence has become prevalence in Nigeria in a context where elections are turned into a highly competitive zero sum games. Poverty provide a class individuals that makes unconventional form of democratic participation such electoral violence, rigging, political assassination, ballot boxes and papers snatching thrive as they used for the electoral advantage of their sponsors. Cases of the political class arming poor hungry youths to perpetrate political and electoral violence, as well as the number of casualties is well documented. There are also cases of incumbent leaders using state force (armed state security) to intimidate opponents and voters in order to gain electoral advantage. For instance, the International Crisis Group (2007) reported that 200 persons were killed in the 2007 elections. The carnage of terrorist killings in North-East Nigeria is also aftermath of the 2011 general elections.

Most electoral and political violence are caused by unbridled and desperate politicians who deliberately create

violence and for its escalation. In Niger Delta during the 1999 -2007 elections, the militant groups were believed to be sponsored by over ambitious politicians for their political advantage and expediency. Poor unemployed youths become cannon fodders of violence. As violent and heinous assignment provide sustenance, the streams of poor unemployed youths who are willing to take up the “criminal and violent political job” is quite understandable. Hence politically induced violence has being at epicentre of politicking in Nigeria and has foreclosed the development of the required democratic values and civil culture necessary for participatory democracy. It has rather promoted what Lindberg describes as *electoral authoritarian regimes* with limited or no space for opposition parties (Lindberg in Omotola 2008b:53).

#### **4.3. Crisis of Legitimacy.**

The return to democracy in Nigeria in 1999 and the acceleration of poverty present to us an opportunity to test how democracy can thrive in a poverty ridden Nigerian environment. (See, Barigbon 2006; Barigbon 2013). It is the people’s participation that gives substance to democracy and governance. The same people have been alienated and politically excluded from the political process, hence apathy. Rousseau (1762) has describes a government as “lost it create political apathy, where citizen believe that public decision do not significantly affect their interest and holds disgust with the political process for failing to serve the public”. Their deliberate disenfranchisement questions the legitimacy of our democracy. David Croteau (1995) holds the same position, “that a government that excludes and dis-empowers the *majority* leaves the legitimacy of its democracy at best in question”. As such, the current crisis of legitimacy of Nigeria’s democracy can only be overcome by an urgent and extra- ordinary commitment on the part of the poor to push for the strengthening of the country’s political institutions.

No sooner than Nigerians begin to aggressively question the legitimacy of her democracy, for the fact that it has not helped the many that are poor, than the political and ruling class will find themselves in danger. Such aggressive questioning will only come when Nigerian becomes politically conscious and get politically organized to take their destiny into their hand.

#### **4.4. Vote Buying and Vote Selling**

The monetization of politics has given rise to the phenomenon of vote selling and vote buying. Vote buying and selling is literally an economic exchange. The act of vote selling “is a contract or perhaps an auction in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder” *for pecuniary advantages* (Frederic and Scheddler 2005) (italics mine). Vote selling and buying is more manifest at party primaries especially where are made open. Delegates simply converge to sell their votes to the highest bidder. Poor people sell their votes for money, foodstuffs, wrapper, farming implements and tools etc. Sometimes on promise of jobs or scholarship that are not forthcoming. This was very prominent between 1999-2007. Vote selling has become a dominant political behavior of the poor- a behavior conditioned by stomach politics. Craig Dosanto assert that “the rich people, the privileged among us do not sell their votes (2006); thus identifying vote selling with poverty. When power and money determine electoral choices, constitutional guarantee of democratic freedom, equality and democratic participation turns to dead letters. It is in this light that Ake (1993) describes “African democracy as un-emancipatory for it offer right that cannot be exercised and voting that never amounts to choosing, freedom that is patently spurious and political equality that disguises highly unequal power relation”. This is why concern about clientelist control for the vote of the poor therefore arises whenever electoral competition unfolds. In the face of glaring socio-economic inequality, the resultant effect become wrong choice been made. Meanwhile, if votes can be stolen and bought with impunity, then one cannot take seriously the fight against political corruption. These festering problems plaguing our democracy can only lead to deep disaffection, apathy and cynicism.

#### **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the foregoing, it is pertinently clear that the phenomenon of poverty in Nigeria is not a recent reality but one tied to the nature and character of the booty, capitalistic Nigerian state, and its criminal elements with modern manifestation of the culture of impunity growingly wildly among the political and ruling class. It therefore a tested and proven thesis that democratic participation cannot effectively thrive in an environment

infested with mass poverty. Perhaps the only exception to this thesis is India. Poverty creates a general disorder, disinterestedness and apathy that put the legitimacy of our democratic (civil) rule at grave risk. The state and its ruling class have undermined the development of the class consciousness of the poor through “religion” and the “trickle -down theory”. This lack or blurred consciousness of the poor causes further causes on the part of the poor, an undermining of the enormous democratic power in their numerical strength. Finally, the manifest destiny of the poor lies squarely in their hands. It lies in them rising above stomach politics, ethnic- mosaic and primordial sentiments, prebendalism to asking decisive question about the real cause of their poverty. Their reaching sophisticated consciousness is a key. With it, they can build up a bottom-top organizational structure (perhaps a worker’s party) with great organizational strength, “*vote with their feet*”(Fukuyama, 2012:4) for a people- driven and inclusive political and economic reforms, empower the excluded and open the political and economic space. With it also, it can push the state into criminalizing corruption and money politics and making them capital offences as in India. Push for option A4 for all elections and under the peoples’ security. By that time “the man on the street will matter”. This is the crux of the matter.

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