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PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION MONETIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF KOGI STATE, 2015-2023

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Abstract
This paper titled "Presidential Election Monetization and Democratization in Nigeria: A Study of Kogi State, 2015-2023" critically examined presidential election monetization and democratization in Nigeria with a focus on Kogi State. Specifically, the objectives include identifying key factors driving election monetization and assessing its effect on voter behaviour and electoral outcomes. The paper is anchored on the elite theory. The research adopted a qualitative approach restricted to only the secondary source of data collection. Findings revealed that poverty, weak institutional enforcement, godfatherism, and ethno-religious loyalties significantly promote election monetization. Despite constitutional provisions, the Electoral Act 2022, and efforts by INEC, EFCC, and civil society groups, campaign finance regulation remains largely ineffective due to poor enforcement, limited transparency, and political interference. The paper recommends strengthening campaign finance laws through digital monitoring of political expenditure, empowering INEC and anti-graft agencies for strict enforcement, and enhancing voter education to discourage vote-selling.**Unlike many existing studies that focus on Nigeria generally, this paper provides a state-specific analysis of Kogi, thereby offering localized insights into how election monetization uniquely shapes democratization.**

Keywords: Election, Election Monetization, Democratization, Nigeria, Kogi State

Introduction

Elections are the cornerstone of democracy, providing a platform for citizens to choose their leaders and influence governance. Across the world, democratic elections are expected to be free, fair, and competitive, allowing for the participation of all eligible voters in an environment devoid of coercion, intimidation, or undue influence. However, in many democracies (both emerging and established) the role of money in electoral processes has become increasingly significant. The financing of political campaigns, voter mobilization, and party activities often require substantial financial resources, leading to concerns about the undue influence of wealth in shaping electoral outcomes. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany have established regulatory frameworks to manage campaign financing and curb excessive spending, but challenges persist, particularly in developing nations where weak institutions and political clientelism create opportunities for electoral manipulation through monetization.

In many developing democracies, particularly in Africa, the intersection of money and politics has had profound implications for electoral integrity and democratic consolidation. The prevalence of vote-buying, campaign financing irregularities, and the use of state resources for electoral gains have eroded public trust in the democratic process. Countries such as Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana have witnessed the monetization of elections, where candidates and political parties invest heavily in securing votes, sometimes through illicit means such as direct cash payments, gifts, or patronage networks. This trend raises critical questions about the sustainability of democracy in environments where electoral success is often determined by financial muscle rather than the will of the people. The monetization of

elections distorts democratic competition, entrenches corruption, and limits the participation of credible but financially disadvantaged candidates, thereby reinforcing elite dominance in governance.

Nigeria, Africa's largest democracy and most populous nation, is no exception to this trend. According to Vanguard News, the monetization of politics is not new in Nigeria. It can be traced to the general elections since the First Republic (1960–1966), the Second Republic (1979–1983), and the aborted Third Republic (1989–1992). However, it reached unprecedented levels in the Fourth Republic, particularly during the 2015 elections, which were estimated to have cost the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, and candidates a staggering ₦1 trillion (Vanguard News, 2016).

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the country has witnessed an increasing role of money in elections, particularly at the presidential level. The 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections highlighted the deep-seated influence of election monetization, where candidates and political parties spent billions of naira on campaigns, media advertisements, mobilization of party agents, and sometimes direct financial inducements to voters and electoral officials. According to Bassey, et al. (2023), elections in Nigeria are plagued by numerous irregularities, including the monetization of politics and electoral processes, rigging, thuggery, and delegate anomalies. The growing and alarming influence of money in politics during the Fourth Republic has become a central factor in leadership selection, posing a significant obstacle to democratic consolidation, good governance, people-centered governance, legitimate transitions, and nation-building.Obi, Tochukwu, Alilu, Egwemi-Ugbeda, Mohammed, & Edegbo (2024:22) called it "cash and carry democracy."

Money plays a pivotal role in elections, often undermining electoral integrity. During campaigns, candidates frequently resort to financial inducements to sway voters, compromising the democratic process. Notably, the 2019 and 2023 general elections were marred by widespread reports of vote-buying, a practice that has regrettably become routine. A report by the News Agency of Nigeria highlighted instances where politicians distributed cash and gifts to voters, reducing elections to transactional exercises rather than contests of ideology or policy (Moghalu, 2019; Obi, et.al., 2024).Such practices erode the democratic process, leading citizens to perceive their votes as commodities rather than instruments of change.

Kogi State presents a compelling context for the study of election monetization due to its history of politically charged and often violent electoral contests. As a state with both urban and rural populations, Kogi offers a microcosm of Nigeria's diverse electoral dynamics. The interplay of poverty, political patronage, and socio-cultural loyalties creates fertile ground for financial inducements to thrive. During presidential elections, political actors in Kogi State have been known to deploy significant financial resources to influence voters, mobilize support, and undermine opposition through patronage networks and illicit campaign tactics (International Crisis Group, 2019; Omotola & Eze, 2021; YIAGA Africa, 2023).

The problem, however, lies in the fact that despite multiple constitutional provisions, electoral reforms, and regulatory frameworks designed to curb electoral corruption, election monetization not only persists but appears to be deepening in scope and sophistication. This persistence undermines the credibility of elections, erodes public trust in democratic institutions, and entrenches elite dominance, thereby weakening the prospects of democratization in Nigeria. The Nigerian democratic project becomes especially fragile when voters' choices are reduced to financial transactions rather than genuine policy or governance preferences.

The gap identified in the literature is that while several studies have examined election monetization in Nigeria, most have focused predominantly on national-level dynamics, offering broad generalizations that overlook state-specific peculiarities. There is limited research interrogating how localized contexts—such as the poverty realities, cultural loyalties, and patronage networks that characterize Kogi State—interact with broader national electoral trends to shape democratization outcomes. This study, therefore, addresses this gap by situating Kogi State as a case study to critically assess the persistence, mechanisms, and implications of presidential election monetization between 2015 and 2023, thereby providing a deeper and more localized understanding of the challenge.

Conceptual Clarification

Election

Elections serve as a fundamental mechanism in democratic governance, providing citizens with the opportunity to choose their representatives and influence policy directions. Election has become the most widely accepted mechanism for citizens to choose their leaders within a political system. Beyond this fundamental role, Mohammed and Ibrahim (2021) argue that elections serve as a platform for citizens to express their preferences among various political manifestos, policies, and ideologies presented by candidates. This underscores the participatory nature of democracy, where voters influence governance through their electoral choices. However, while this perspective highlights the role of elections in democratic representation, it overlooks the increasing challenges posed by electoral malpractice, voter suppression, and political manipulation, which often undermine the credibility of elections, particularly in emerging democracies. In essence, Amao (2021) conceives election as the participation and non-participation of the electorate in an electoral process, implying the various ways electorates cast their votes for a given political party or candidate within a state, political system, or country. While this view offers a basic understanding of the electoral act, it is reductionist in nature because it confines elections to mere voter behaviour. Elections are not only about participation or abstention; they are institutionalized processes shaped by legal frameworks, party structures, campaign strategies, the role of money, the independence of electoral bodies, and the socio-economic realities that determine both participation and outcomes. By focusing narrowly on voter action, Amao's perspective overlooks these broader structural and institutional dimensions that fundamentally condition electoral practice.

Elections, ideally, serve as a mechanism of accountability, compelling elected officials to remain responsive to citizens since their political survival is tied to fulfilling campaign promises. Yet, in practice, this accountability function is often undermined. In contexts such as Nigeria, incumbents frequently manipulate electoral laws, exploit state resources, and deploy coercive tactics to maintain power, thereby hollowing out the essence of elections as instruments of democratic control. Ojo (2003) underscores the significance of elections in conferring legitimacy by involving citizens in governance, but this position must also be treated with caution. The mere act of voting does not automatically confer legitimacy, particularly when elections are tainted by fraud, violence, vote-buying, or the absence of genuine competition. Governments may emerge "legally elected" but lack popular legitimacy, reducing elections to rituals that reproduce elite dominance rather than genuine expressions of the people's will.

This tension between the procedural and substantive dimensions of democracy highlights the need for a broader conceptualization of elections. While procedurally, elections are about participation, substantively they are about credibility, inclusiveness, and transparency. Legitimacy cannot be divorced from the integrity of the electoral process and the institutional safeguards that uphold it. Elections that are free, fair, and transparent strengthen democracy,

while those plagued by monetization, manipulation, and weak enforcement erode public trust and foster alienation from the democratic process.

Therefore, elections must be understood not merely as episodic events of casting ballots but as multidimensional processes embedded in political culture and shaped by institutional arrangements. They are arenas where power is contested, identities are mobilized, and governance trajectories are determined. The democratic value of elections lies not simply in their occurrence but in their ability to reflect the genuine will of the people, enforce accountability, and consolidate democratic norms. This expanded conception situates elections within the larger discourse of democratic consolidation, reminding us that what matters is not just holding elections, but ensuring that they are credible, competitive, and inclusive.

Election Monetization

Lessig (2015) and Gilens and Page (2014) argue that the excessive influence of money in elections distorts democratic principles by prioritizing wealth over competence, reducing political competition, and enabling elite capture of political institutions. While their analysis is compelling in highlighting how financial power entrenches inequality in access to political office, it tends to overemphasize structural elite dominance without sufficiently accounting for the agency of voters, grassroots mobilization, and reformist actors who sometimes resist monetization pressures. Election monetization, though pervasive, does not always result in total elite capture; in certain contexts, citizens have demonstrated resilience by rejecting inducements, which suggests that the narrative should not only dwell on distortions but also examine spaces of resistance within electoral processes.

Indeed, the financial demands of electioneering often commodify electoral processes, where votes, candidacies, and political loyalty are bought and sold (Ibrahim, 2021). Yet, reducing election monetization to "vote-buying" alone risks oversimplification, as monetization also includes subtler practices such as campaign over-financing, media capture, lobbying disguised as donations, and the misuse of state resources to secure political advantage. A fuller conceptualization therefore requires situating monetization not merely in transactional exchanges but in the broader ecosystem of political finance that undermines electoral equity.

Zuboff (2019) and Piketty (2014) define monetization as the conversion of assets, activities, or influence into financial gain, raising concerns about ethical implications, economic inequalities, and systemic distortions. Their insights extend the debate beyond elections, situating monetization within wider patterns of capitalist accumulation. While Piketty acknowledges monetization's role in driving economic expansion and innovation, his caution about systemic imbalances provides a useful lens to critique election monetization: financial resources may energize political campaigns but, when unchecked, create oligarchic tendencies that hollow out democratic accountability. However, both Zuboff and Piketty's perspectives remain largely economic, and their application to electoral processes must be critically expanded to include the cultural, institutional, and normative contexts in which monetization operates.

Norris and Grömping (2019) emphasize that election monetization discourages genuine participation by restricting competition to those with substantial financial backing. This interpretation captures the exclusivist nature of monetization but can be strengthened by recognizing that its effects vary across democracies. In contexts with stronger institutional safeguards, monetization may be mitigated by regulatory enforcement and civic activism, whereas in fragile democracies, it entrenches systemic clientelism. Ovwasa's (2013) cross-national perspective reinforces this, noting that monetization is not peculiar to developing

democracies but manifests globally, albeit through different mechanisms and intensities. The comparative evidence from Benin, Taiwan, Japan, Northern Portugal, and Metro Minica demonstrates that the practice is tailored to fit local socio-political and economic conditions, thereby demanding context-sensitive analysis rather than universal generalizations.

Another critical dimension often underexplored in mainstream scholarship is the transnational aspect of monetization. Gunitsky (2018) and Hyde (2011) shed light on the influence of foreign financial contributions, which can distort sovereignty by reshaping political narratives and electoral choices in favour of external actors. This perspective adds depth to the concept by situating election monetization within global power dynamics, where external financing intersects with domestic vulnerabilities. However, these arguments can be critiqued for occasionally presenting states as passive recipients of foreign interference, whereas in practice, local political elites often actively solicit and manipulate foreign funds to advance domestic agendas.

Taken together, the literature reveals that while election monetization is indeed a pervasive phenomenon that weakens democratic accountability, its manifestations are neither uniform nor unidirectional. It is not simply about the corrupting influence of money but about how financial practices intersect with institutional strength, voter behaviour, political culture, and even transnational networks. Thus, the concept of election monetization must be expanded to recognize its multi-layered nature: simultaneously a driver of exclusion, a tool of elite entrenchment, and a site of contestation where reformist pressures, civic resistance, and institutional innovations may still reclaim electoral integrity.

Democratization

The term *democratization* gained significant attention in Political Science literature during the 1990s, a period marked by a global wave of democratic transitions. This movement, often referred to as the "Third Wave of Democracy," by Huntington (1991), led to profound political transformations, particularly in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Africa. Prior to this period, many of these countries were governed under authoritarian regimes, including one-party systems, military dictatorships, and communist rule, which often suppressed political pluralism and civil liberties.

However, as the demand for democratic governance gained momentum, these nations began transitioning toward multiparty electoral systems, institutional reforms, and increased political participation, fundamentally reshaping their governmental structures and political landscapes. According to Jega and Wakili (2005), democracy and democratization are strongly related and mutually reinforcing concepts. This is because you cannot talk of democracy without democratization. While democracy is the state of existence or being, democratization is a process that brings democracy into being and also allows it to take strong hold of the society. There is no universally accepted definition of democracy. Scholars and statesmen have conceptualized it from different perspectives and emphasised different aspects of the concept.

Democracy, as a concept, has evolved over time with varied interpretations and manifestations. Yacob-Haliso (2007) asserts that democracy is as old as humanity itself, emphasizing that its meaning has changed across different historical periods and political systems. Fayemi (2009) traces the etymology of democracy to the Greek words *demos* (people) and *kratia* (rule), defining it as governance by the people. This, in principle, suggests a government that serves the interests of the people rather than one dominated by a despot (autocracy) or a privileged few (oligarchy). However, the practical application of democracy has remained elusive, as debates persist over who constitutes "the people" and the appropriate

mechanisms for their rule. Even in ancient Greece, where democracy was first practiced, direct rule by the masses was not wholly embraced, as concerns about mob rule led to limitations on political participation (Yacob-Haliso, 2007). This historical contradiction highlights a central tension in democratic theory - the challenge of balancing popular participation with effective governance.

Since the early 2000s, the study of democratization has evolved to reflect new global trends, challenges, and complexities. Scholars have moved beyond traditional models that view democratization as a linear or inevitable process, recognizing setbacks such as democratic backsliding, hybrid regimes, and the resilience of authoritarianism. Democratization refers to the transition process from non-democratic regimes, such as autocracies or dictatorships, to democratic governance systems characterized by free and fair elections, protection of civil liberties, the rule of law, and the participation of citizens in governance. This process involves the establishment and consolidation of democratic institutions and practices within a society.

Yahaya (2007:27) writes that:

> Democratization is both a procedural and institutional aspect of liberalizing a previously authoritarian political environment. It would consist of opening up a previously closed authoritarian political system and deepening and expanding of values thought to be necessary for the entrenchment and sustenance of democracy. In essence, it is about the construction of a system that allows for the bulk of the populace to participate in the decision-making process that has direct bearings upon their lives.

All these point to the fact that democratization is a process that takes place over a period of time and that in the process of democratization, the state and the general populace are the major actors who must show commitment to the whole process of trying to allow democracy to take a strong hold of the entire society. While countries that are transitioning are challenged to democratize, it is necessary to say that attaining democratization is not impossible, as western democracies have ably demonstrated.

Schedler (2006) defines democratization as a contested and reversible process, highlighting the rise of electoral authoritarianism, where elections exist but lack true democratic competition. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), in their book *How Democracies Die*, argue that modern threats to democracy often come from within, as elected leaders manipulate institutions to entrench their power rather than through outright military coups. They highlight cases in the United States, Hungary, Turkey, and Venezuela, where leaders have used legal but undemocratic means to consolidate control, limit press freedom, and weaken checks and balances. Bermeo (2016) also examines the decline of democracy, noting a shift from traditional military coups to more subtle forms of democratic erosion, such as executive aggrandizement and the strategic manipulation of elections, and the weakening of judicial independence and press freedoms.

Theoretical Framework

The Elite Theory serves as the overarching theoretical framework for this paper. The theory encapsulates the broader structural dynamics of power concentration, explaining not only the financial aspects of election monetization but also the institutional control and decision-making power held by elite actors. By focusing on the systemic control exerted by a small ruling class, elite theory provides the most comprehensive explanation for the persistent monetization of elections and its impact on democratization in Nigeria.

Elite theory posits that political power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals who control key institutions, resources, and decision-making processes, often at the expense of the wider population. This theory challenges the democratic ideal that power is evenly distributed among citizens, arguing instead that elites dominate governance and policy formulation. Classical proponents of Elite theory, such as Vilfredo Pareto (1935), Gaetano Mosca (1939), and Robert Michels (1911), argue that elites maintain control by influencing political structures, economic resources, and state institutions. They suggest that true democracy is often an illusion, as governance is shaped by a ruling minority rather than the collective will of the people.

Pareto (1935) conceptualizes elites as a small group that continuously rotates between different societal spheres but always retains control over political and economic power. He describes elite circulation, where old elites are replaced by new ones, ensuring that power remains in the hands of a few. According to him, elites use strategic maneuvers, such as economic influence, political alliances, and social networks, to maintain their dominance, thereby preventing meaningful democratic participation from the masses. Similarly, Mosca (1939) asserts that all societies are divided between a ruling class and a ruled class. He argues that elites sustain their power through organisation and strategic control over societal institutions, making it nearly impossible for the non-elite majority to challenge their authority. Mosca contends that political elites justify their dominance through ideological narratives that legitimize their rule, such as nationalism, democracy, or economic stability, thus ensuring compliance from the masses.

Michels (1911) further builds on elite theory with his "Iron Law of Oligarchy," which states that even in supposedly democratic organisations, power inevitably concentrates in the hands of a few. He argues that bureaucracies and political parties, regardless of their initial democratic intentions, tend to evolve into hierarchical structures controlled by a small elite. According to Michels, mass political participation is often symbolic, as real decision-making is reserved for those in positions of power. More contemporary proponents, such as C. Wright Mills (1956), argue that modern political systems are dominated by a "power elite" composed of top government officials, corporate executives, and military leaders who collaborate to shape policies in their favour. Mills contends that this elite group is interconnected through shared economic interests, social circles, and institutional power, reinforcing the exclusion of ordinary citizens from major policy decisions.

Pareto's (1935) elite theory provides a useful framework for understanding the monetization of presidential elections in Nigeria and its implications for democratization, particularly in Kogi State between 2015 and 2023. The theory suggests that political power is concentrated in the hands of a small elite group that controls electoral processes, policymaking, and governance. In Nigeria, this observation resonates strongly, as wealthy politicians, business moguls, and influential party leaders dominate electoral outcomes by deploying vast financial resources. This concentration of power creates an uneven playing field, restricting genuine democratic competition and reinforcing elite dominance.

Building on Pareto, Mills (1956) argues that elites maintain control by dominating key institutions such as political parties and electoral commissions. This institutional capture is visible in Nigeria, where party nominations, campaign structures, and even the independence of electoral bodies are frequently influenced by financial inducements and patronage. Michels' (1911) "Iron Law of Oligarchy" further underscores this reality, contending that all political organisations, including democratic ones, tend toward elite domination. This is reflected in the Nigerian context, where despite electoral reforms and the 2022 Electoral Act,

the persistence of monetized practices—from vote-buying to patronage-based mobilization—reveals that democratic institutions are routinely manipulated to favour elite interests.

Yet, while elite theory effectively highlights how financial power entrenches inequality, it has limitations if taken in isolation. Its structural determinism risks portraying voters and grassroots actors as entirely passive victims of elite manipulation. In reality, the Nigerian case—particularly in Kogi State—shows a more complex interplay between elites and citizens. On the one hand, elites deploy money to influence voter choices through patronage networks, gifts, and direct inducements. On the other, citizens sometimes resist or subvert these strategies, for example by accepting payments but still voting according to personal preferences, or by rallying behind reformist candidates who frame themselves as outsiders to entrenched elites. This dynamic suggests that while elite capture is pervasive, it is neither absolute nor uncontested.

Other perspectives also enrich the analysis of election monetization beyond the classical elite theorists. From a political economy perspective, monetization can be seen as a rational response to poverty, unemployment, and weak institutions. In Kogi, where economic deprivation is high, many voters perceive elections as opportunities to extract immediate material benefits rather than engage in long-term policy deliberations. Here, monetization thrives because structural inequalities incentivize both elites (who can cheaply buy loyalty) and citizens (who view vote-selling as survivalist). From a democratic theory perspective, this practice undermines substantive democracy: elections may occur procedurally, but they lack the qualities of fairness, inclusiveness, and genuine competition required to sustain democratic legitimacy.

A comparative institutionalist view adds further nuance. Whereas elite theory highlights elite dominance, institutionalist perspectives stress the weakness of electoral commissions, anti-graft agencies, and judiciary mechanisms in Nigeria, which allows elite manipulation to flourish unchecked. In contrast, in democracies with stronger institutional safeguards, financial influence exists but is tempered by transparency, campaign finance laws, and independent oversight. This comparative angle shows that Nigeria's case is not inevitable but rather a reflection of institutional fragility.

Finally, a sociological perspective considers how political culture and ethno-religious loyalties intersect with elite practices. In Kogi State, monetization is not merely about financial inducement but also about how elites strategically align money politics with ethnic sentiments or religious affiliations to mobilize support. This intertwining of money and identity politics deepens the entrenchment of elites while simultaneously masking financial inducement under communal obligations or loyalty.

Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that while elite theory offers a powerful lens for understanding the monetization of presidential elections in Nigeria, it is insufficient on its own. It must be complemented by political economy, institutionalist, and sociological analyses to capture the full dynamics of how money shapes democracy. In Kogi State, this interplay has resulted in a system where financial capital, institutional weakness, and identity politics converge to entrench elite dominance, yet also leave space for resistance and reform pressures. The challenge, therefore, is not merely that elites dominate but that the systemic conditions of poverty, weak enforcement, and political culture provide fertile ground for monetization to persist, undermining the prospects for genuine democratization.

Historical Evolution of Election Financing in Nigeria

Money politics has remained a dominant feature of Nigeria's electioneering process since both the pre-independence period and the post-military democratic era. The influence of money, particularly in campaign funding and political financing, often begins at the earliest stages of electoral activities ranging from party primaries and candidate selection to campaign organization and the conduct of general elections. As noted by Nwali and Onah (2018), the role of money extends beyond the election itself, influencing post-election activities such as legal battles over election outcomes and petitions to the electoral commission. They further argue that the roots of money politics in Nigeria predate independence, tracing back to the introduction of the Elective Principle under the Clifford Constitution of 1922. This constitution created four elective legislative seats (three in Lagos and one in Calabar) and marked the beginning of electoral competition in Nigeria. Jinadu (2010) supports this view, emphasizing that while the Elective Principle introduced limited suffrage for the first time in Nigeria, it was fundamentally an income-based franchise, thereby laying the groundwork for financial considerations in political participation.

The 1922 Clifford Constitution introduced the elective principle, but it restricted electoral participation to individuals earning at least £100 annually, effectively disenfranchising the majority of Nigerians who did not meet this income threshold. As a result, from 1923 to 1946, only four Nigerians were elected into the Legislative Council, with the electorate consisting primarily of the wealthier class (Coleman, 1963). This financial requirement served as a strategic mechanism by the colonial administration to limit broad political participation and suppress growing nationalist sentiments.

The trajectory of election financing in Nigeria's First Republic has been presented in scholarship with a certain tension between modesty and impropriety. Jinadu (2011) draws attention to the ways campaigns were sustained through relatively decentralized sources such as party membership dues, voluntary donations from wealthy individuals, and contributions by loyal supporters. At face value, this suggests a leaner, less financially extravagant system of electoral competition when compared with contemporary practice. Yet Jinadu's work also makes it clear that the seeds of the corruption that would later overwhelm Nigeria's democracy were already visible, as political elites occasionally diverted state resources to underwrite party activities. This duality—between ideological commitment and creeping financial manipulation—captures the fragile foundations upon which Nigeria's democratic structures rested in that early period.

Davies (2012), on the other hand, emphasizes a different facet of the First Republic's electoral dynamics by arguing that money did not yet carry the same overwhelming weight it has come to bear in subsequent republics. He observes that campaigns revolved more around symbolic mobilization: the distribution of party emblems, caps, shirts, food, and drinks, rather than outright cash inducements or vote buying. In his view, the more powerful tool of political persuasion at that time lay in appeals to ethnic and religious sentiments, which were mobilized as effective strategies for galvanizing support. By stressing this cultural and identity-driven character of electoral competition, Davies provides a corrective to the tendency of interpreting even the First Republic solely through the lens of monetization.

Taken together, these perspectives underscore the fact that the First Republic was marked not by the absence of money in politics but by its limited and indirect role. Jinadu's insight into the early misuse of state resources shows how financial abuse became institutionalized over time, while Davies's reminder of the primacy of ethno-religious mobilization demonstrates that money was not yet the dominant factor in determining electoral outcomes. Rather, it functioned as a secondary tool within a broader political culture shaped by identity and

ideology. The two accounts complement each other in revealing both the continuities and the departures that defined Nigeria's electoral history. Where Jinadu hints at the long-term trajectory toward corruption and resource capture, Davies brings out the immediacy of cultural strategies that initially overshadowed financial inducement. In reconciling the two, it becomes clear that the First Republic laid the foundations for Nigeria's current money-driven politics: although cash did not yet buy elections outright, the intertwining of financial impropriety with ethno-religious mobilization created a political environment in which money would gradually gain ascendancy as the republics unfolded.

The return to civilian rule in the Second Republic (1979–1983) marked a significant transformation in the nature and scale of campaign financing. During this period, the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and other dominant political parties began to engage in extensive fundraising and spending. Political parties received state subventions but also relied heavily on donations from business interests and public officeholders, some of whom diverted public resources for political campaigns (Suberu, 2007). The unregulated nature of campaign finance and the absence of transparent oversight mechanisms led to widespread electoral corruption, vote buying, and electoral violence, which contributed to the collapse of the Second Republic.

According to Ojo (2000), the monetization of politics in Nigeria became more entrenched during the Third Republic, particularly under the military regime of General Babangida. His administration introduced the concept of "new-breed" politics, which effectively restricted political participation to an elite class, largely defined by their accumulated wealth. The annulled June 12, 1993, presidential election was marred by widespread allegations of electoral malpractice, including substantial financial inducements involving candidates and electoral officials. Ojo (2000) further asserts that available evidence indicated that the total amount of money spent by presidential candidates exceeded ₦2.1 billion, underscoring the deepening role of money in Nigeria's electoral process.

Following years of military rule, the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999 brought renewed hopes for a transparent and accountable electoral process. However, the re-emergence of democratic governance coincided with the entrenchment of money politics. Political parties, particularly the dominant People's Democratic Party (PDP), increasingly used state resources, corporate donations, and foreign patronage to finance campaigns (Omotola, 2009). Campaign financing in this era became heavily monetized, with candidates spending vast sums to secure party nominations, mobilize voters, and manipulate electoral outcomes. The lack of internal party democracy further exacerbated the problem, as aspirants often bribed delegates and party officials during primaries.

The Electoral Act of 2006 and its subsequent amendments introduced legal provisions to regulate campaign finance, including ceilings on spending and requirements for disclosure. Nonetheless, enforcement has remained weak, and political actors have found ways to circumvent the regulations. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) lacks the capacity to monitor and audit political spending effectively, allowing candidates and parties to overspend with impunity (Ibeanu and Orji, 2014). In the 2015 and 2019 general elections, for instance, there were credible reports of massive vote buying, media capture, and the use of illicit funds by major parties, including during presidential contests (Uadiale, 2019).

The 2023 general elections followed similar patterns. Despite efforts by civil society groups and international observers to highlight the corrosive effects of money in politics, candidates spent heavily on political advertisements, logistics, and direct inducements to voters

(YIAGA Africa, 2023). The growing influence of wealthy individuals and political godfathers in campaign financing has further eroded democratic ideals, making political offices accessible mainly to the highest bidders rather than candidates with integrity or public service commitment.

Election Monetization and Presidential Elections in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023

The 2015 presidential election in Nigeria marked a critical turning point in the nation's democratic trajectory, yet it was not exempt from the pervasive influence of election monetization. Although hailed by both local and international observers as a relatively credible and peaceful transition being the first time an incumbent president lost an election in Nigeria - the process was heavily tainted by the influence of money politics (Ibrahim and Ibeanu, 2015). Campaign spending reached unprecedented levels, with both major parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), deploying vast financial resources to secure support across the country.

Vote buying was rampant across many polling units, particularly in economically vulnerable regions. Voters were reportedly offered cash, food items, and material inducements in exchange for their votes. According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), politicians spent heavily to mobilize voters, recruit party agents, and sway electoral officials, reflecting a deeply entrenched culture of monetized electoral behaviour (CDD, 2015). The deployment of these funds was not only a reflection of financial muscle but also of strategic manipulation, as cash was used to influence both voter turnout and voting patterns in strategic states such as Kano, Rivers, Lagos, Kaduna and Kogi.

Furthermore, the 2015 elections witnessed the extensive use of campaign financing to dominate media spaces. Wealthy politicians and their sponsors paid enormous sums for advertisements, media appearances, and public relations campaigns, thereby skewing the political information landscape in favour of the highest bidder (Omotola, 2016). This imbalance contributed to the marginalization of smaller political parties and candidates who lacked the financial capacity to compete, thereby undermining the principle of electoral fairness.

The 2019 presidential election in Nigeria was yet another demonstration of the entrenched role of money in the country's electoral politics. The financial cost of contesting primaries in Nigeria's two dominant political parties - the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) - is prohibitively high, with nomination forms costing up to NGN 45 million (EU EOM, 2019). This exorbitant fee effectively excludes the majority of Nigerians, many of whom live on less than US$1 a day, from participating in the political process. For most parties, the sale of expression of interest and nomination forms has become a major source of revenue; for instance, the APC reportedly generated over NGN 13.5 billion from this alone. In addition to these formal charges, the EU EOM (2019) further observed that aspirants incurred extra costs through informal payments to voting delegates during the primaries, further entrenching financial barriers to political participation.

During the 2019 campaigns, the misuse of state resources by leading political parties became a prevalent issue. Concerns were raised over the potential use of public funds for voter inducement through various social and financial initiatives, including the distribution of money. Notably, the Federal Government's TraderMoni scheme, launched in August 2018, disbursed at least NGN 20 billion in interest-free loans to traders. According to the EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM, 2019), the scheme lacked sufficient procedural accountability, and loan repayments were inconsistently enforced, fostering the perception that the initiative was employed as a vote-buying tactic. EU observers documented instances

where rally attendees were paid or reimbursed for travel on nine occasions. Despite awareness campaigns by INEC, media, civil society, and several state agencies against vote-selling, EU observers either witnessed directly or received credible reports of multiple instances where both major parties provided cash or in-kind inducements to voters. Although the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) reportedly investigated some vote-buying cases, particularly on election days, no public outcomes of these investigations were disclosed.

Despite increased voter awareness and international calls for electoral reforms, financial inducements remained a dominant feature of the election process. The election, contested primarily between the incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), was characterized by the widespread use of monetary incentives to influence voter decisions, mobilize political loyalty, and compromise electoral integrity (EU EOM, 2019).

The 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria were deeply influenced by the growing trend of election monetization, which continues to undermine the credibility and integrity of the democratic process. The increasing cost of political participation, particularly the exorbitant nomination and expression of interest fees demanded by major political parties like the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), created significant barriers to entry for less financially-endowed candidates. For instance, the APC reportedly charged NGN 100 million for its presidential nomination forms, while the PDP charged NGN 40 million, effectively limiting competition and reinforcing a political system dominated by wealthy elites (Premium Times, 2022).

This monetization extended beyond party primaries into the campaigns and election day activities. Reports from election observers, including the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), indicated widespread vote-buying across various regions. Voters were offered cash, food items, and other material inducements in exchange for their votes. CDD (2023) documented several cases where political actors deployed large sums of money to sway voters, with some communities reportedly receiving as much as NGN 10,000 per voter. These actions further entrenched a culture of transactional politics, where electoral choices are dictated not by policy preferences or ideology, but by immediate material gains.

Moreover, the misuse of state resources was also a recurring concern. Incumbent politicians and government officials were accused of using government programmes and public funds to indirectly finance campaigns or curry voter favour. For example, state-level disbursement of palliatives and other welfare programmes close to the election period were viewed by many stakeholders as strategic efforts to influence electoral outcomes (YIAGA Africa, 2023).

Even though, in late 2022, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) undertook a major policy initiative with the redesign of the ₦200, ₦500, and ₦1000 notes, citing reasons such as reducing counterfeiting, controlling inflation, and, critically, curbing vote buying ahead of the 2023 general elections. The CBN set a deadline for the withdrawal of old notes and imposed limits on cash withdrawals, intending to reduce the amount of physical cash in circulation that could be used for illicit electoral purposes. However, despite these well-intended objectives, the policy ultimately failed to prevent vote buying and the broader trend of election monetization in the 2023 presidential elections.

One of the central reasons the cashless policy failed to curb vote buying in Nigeria was the sheer resilience and adaptability of political actors determined to sustain their hold on the electoral process. Far from being deterred by the restrictions on cash circulation, politicians

shifted strategies with remarkable ease, turning to electronic transfers, foreign currencies, and in-kind inducements such as food items, wrappers, and cooking oil. Reports by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023) confirm that these alternative methods were not isolated improvisations but widespread tactics deployed to maintain voter influence. What this reflects is not merely a failure of policy design but the deeply entrenched culture of transactional politics, where monetary and material exchanges are woven into the fabric of electoral behaviour.

The irony of the cashless policy lies in how it amplified the very problem it sought to mitigate. By creating a scarcity of naira notes, the policy produced significant economic hardship, particularly for ordinary Nigerians in rural and low-income communities. In such contexts of desperation, the appeal of vote buying increased rather than diminished. Voters who were already cash-strapped found the offers of politicians—whether in the form of money or essential household items—almost irresistible. As Punch (2023) reported, many admitted to accepting inducements not out of political conviction but as a survival strategy in the face of the economic strain caused by the poorly executed currency redesign. The cashless policy thus reveals how structural economic vulnerabilities intersect with political manipulation, making it exceedingly difficult to sever the link between poverty and electoral monetization.

Beyond the socio-economic context, institutional weakness compounded the failure of the policy. Regulatory and security agencies such as the EFCC and ICPC were quick to issue public statements about monitoring cash flows during the elections, but their actions fell short of meaningful deterrence. Few arrests were made, and no significant prosecutions followed, reinforcing the perception of impunity for electoral offenders. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) too faced structural and operational challenges in enforcing campaign finance regulations, creating a regulatory vacuum that political elites readily exploited. The European Union Election Observation Mission (2023:3) captured this reality in its report, noting the "limited transparency and accountability in campaign financing and insufficient deterrence against electoral malpractices." Such observations underscore a chronic enforcement gap: rules exist on paper, but the absence of credible sanctions renders them ineffective.

Taken together, the failure of the cashless policy to curb vote buying illustrates a broader conceptual problem in Nigeria's democratization process—the tendency to frame electoral reforms as technocratic fixes without addressing the political economy that sustains malpractice. When poverty, desperation, and elite manipulation converge, even well-intentioned policies become counterproductive. The Nigerian experience shows that combating monetized elections requires more than financial restrictions or ad hoc regulatory efforts; it demands structural reforms that strengthen institutions, insulate them from elite capture, and improve the material conditions of citizens. Without such holistic interventions, policies like the cashless redesign risk serving as temporary hurdles that political actors merely sidestep, while voters remain trapped in cycles of dependency and inducement. Ultimately, the lesson is clear: electoral corruption cannot be outmaneuvered by surface-level restrictions—it must be dismantled by addressing the deeper socio-economic and institutional foundations that make it thrive.

Key Factors Contributing to the Monetization of Presidential Elections in Kogi State

The monetization of presidential elections in Kogi State reflects a broader national trend, but it is intensified by certain local socio-political dynamics. These factors include pervasive poverty, weak political institutions, voter apathy and illiteracy, ethnic and religious divisions, and a political culture rooted in patronage and godfatherism.

Poverty and Economic Hardship: Poverty and economic hardship are among the most critical drivers of election monetization in Kogi State. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), approximately 68.5% of the population in Kogi State lives below the poverty line. This widespread economic deprivation creates a fertile ground for vote buying, as impoverished citizens are more likely to exchange their votes for immediate financial or material gain. In an environment where basic needs such as food, healthcare, and education are often unmet, the promise of cash, foodstuff, wrappers, or even petty trading capital during elections become highly attractive. For many voters in Kogi, elections are not viewed as a democratic process of leadership selection but rather as a rare opportunity to receive direct economic benefits, however temporary.

Weak Institutional Frameworks: Weak institutional frameworks significantly contribute to the monetization of presidential elections in Kogi State. Key democratic institutions such as the INEC, anti-corruption agencies, and security bodies often lack the autonomy, capacity, or will to effectively enforce electoral laws and regulations. Although electoral guidelines prohibit vote buying and excessive campaign financing, enforcement is often selective or entirely absent. For example, INEC's inability to prosecute offenders or nullify elections marred by financial irregularities sends a signal of impunity. According to the Electoral Reform Project (2022), less than 5% of reported electoral offences across Nigeria between 2015 and 2019 were ever prosecuted, reinforcing a culture where candidates can manipulate elections without fear of consequences.

Low Voter Education and Political Awareness: Low levels of voter education and political awareness play a critical role in perpetuating election monetization in Kogi State. Many voters, particularly in rural areas (like Ejule, Ihima, Obangede, and Ogori-Magongo), lack sufficient understanding of democratic principles, the value of their votes, and the long-term implications of vote selling. This gap in civic education makes them susceptible to short-term incentives such as cash gifts, food items, or other material benefits during elections. According to the INEC (2023), voter education programmes often fail to reach marginalized communities due to inadequate funding, poor coordination, and limited access to remote areas. As a result, a significant number of voters view elections as an opportunity to gain immediate economic benefit rather than to make informed decisions about leadership and governance.

Studies by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2022) show that in parts of North-Central Nigeria, including Kogi, over 40% of voters admitted to knowing someone who exchanged their vote for money or material gifts in recent elections. Without consistent and targeted voter education, the electorate will continue to be vulnerable to financial inducements, thereby undermining democratic development in the state.

Ethno-Religious Divisions and Political Loyalty: Ethno-religious divisions in Kogi State significantly contribute to the monetization of presidential elections. The state is marked by a diverse ethnic and religious composition, often exploited by politicians to mobilize support along identity lines rather than based on policies or competence. In such an environment, political loyalty is frequently tied to ethnic or religious affiliations, and candidates resort to distributing money and material resources to ethnic and religious leaders to secure bloc votes. These leaders, in turn, influence their followers to vote for particular candidates, not necessarily out of conviction but because of the material benefits received. This dynamic reinforces a culture of transactional politics, where the focus is on immediate gains rather than long-term development or accountability.

Godfatherism and Political Patronage: Godfatherism and political patronage are deeply entrenched in the political landscape of Kogi State, significantly contributing to the monetization of presidential elections. Political godfathers - wealthy and influential individuals exert control over candidates by financing their campaigns and ensuring their political emergence. In return, these candidates are expected to remain loyal and implement policies that favour their sponsors once in office. This patron-client relationship prioritizes personal gain over public interest and promotes a system where access to political office is determined not by competence or public service orientation, but by the size of financial backing from godfathers (Omotola, 2009). Consequently, candidates feel pressured to spend heavily, both to gain the favour of godfathers and to secure the loyalty of delegates and voters, further institutionalizing vote buying and electoral corruption.

Effect of election monetization on voter behaviour and electoral outcomes in Kogi State

Commodification of Votes and Shift in Voter Priorities: The commodification of votes in Kogi State's presidential elections has significantly altered the traditional relationship between voters and the electoral process. Instead of evaluating candidates based on policies, competence, or ideological commitments, voters increasingly view their votes as commodities to be exchanged for immediate material benefits such as cash, food, or gifts. This transactional nature reduces electoral participation to a commercial exchange, where loyalty is effectively bought rather than earned through genuine political engagement. Such commodification undermines democratic principles, as it shifts the focus from long-term governance and accountability to short-term personal gains, making voters more susceptible to manipulation by financially powerful political actors (Mustapha, 2017; Okereke, 2019).

Distortion of Electoral Outcomes and Democratic Disenfranchisement: Monetized elections skew electoral outcomes in favour of wealthy politicians and political parties who can afford to influence voters, electoral officials, and security agents. This often sidelines credible but financially disadvantaged candidates, undermining the principle of free and fair elections. In Kogi State, political offices frequently go to the highest spender, not the most qualified candidate, leading to the recycling of corrupt elites and weakening accountability. Furthermore, the normalization of vote-buying has fostered widespread political apathy among citizens who feel alienated from the political process or believe that elections are rigged in favour of the wealthy and powerful (Yusuf, 2020; INEC, 2023). This erosion of public trust in the democratic process ultimately stunts political development and deepens governance challenges in the state.

Increased Electoral Violence and Intimidation: Increased electoral violence and intimidation have become significant consequences of election monetization in Kogi State. The high stakes associated with securing votes through financial inducements often escalate tensions among political actors and their supporters, leading to confrontations, clashes, and disruptions during election periods. Candidates and their agents may resort to threats, coercion, or physical violence to safeguard their investments and intimidate opponents or voters who refuse to comply with monetary demands. Such violent behaviours not only threaten the safety of citizens but also undermine the credibility of the electoral process by creating an atmosphere of fear and mistrust (Ibeanu, 2016; Omotola, 2017).

Undermining of Political Accountability: Election monetization significantly undermines political accountability in Kogi State by distorting the relationship between elected officials and their constituents. When votes are essentially bought through financial inducements, politicians feel less obligated to respond to the genuine needs and interests of the electorate. Instead of being accountable for their performance or policy promises, elected representatives often prioritize repaying the financial backers who funded their campaigns.

This shift weakens the core democratic principle that leaders should serve the public interest and be answerable to the people who elected them (Nwabuzor, 2018; Okoye, 2020).

Entrenchment of Patronage Networks: Election monetization in Kogi State has led to the entrenchment of patronage networks that deeply influence political dynamics and governance. These networks are formed when politicians use financial resources to build loyalty among supporters, local leaders, and influential community figures by offering material rewards such as money, jobs, contracts, or other benefits. As a result, political support becomes transactional rather than ideological, undermining democratic values based on policy debates and collective interests (Akinola, 2017; Ojo, 2019). This patron-client relationship ensures that elected officials maintain a loyal base but at the cost of fostering dependency and limiting political competition.

Low Voter Turnout and Political Apathy: Low voter turnout and political apathy are significant consequences of election monetization in Kogi State, severely undermining the democratic process. When voters perceive elections as transactions driven by money rather than genuine representation or policy debates, their motivation to participate diminishes. Many citizens feel disillusioned, believing that their votes can be easily bought or manipulated by financial inducements, which erodes trust in the electoral system and political institutions (Agbo and Okeke, 2018). This sense of futility leads to widespread political disengagement, reducing the overall participation rate during elections and weakening the legitimacy of elected officials.

Distortion of Policy Priorities and Electoral Promises: Election monetization in Kogi State significantly distorts policy priorities and electoral promises, undermining the foundation of democratic governance. When financial inducements become central to electoral success, politicians are often more focused on recouping the money spent during campaigns rather than delivering on meaningful development agendas. This leads to a shift where electoral promises are designed to appeal primarily to immediate financial or material incentives rather than long-term public interest or policy effectiveness (Adebanwi, 2014). Consequently, elected officials may prioritize patronage and personal enrichment over addressing critical issues such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic development. According to Ojo (2019), the emphasis on vote buying and monetary rewards fosters a transactional relationship between politicians and voters, where loyalty is purchased rather than earned through genuine representation or effective governance.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study, titled *"Presidential Election Monetization and Democratization in Nigeria: A Study of Kogi State, 2015–2023,"* contributes to knowledge by providing a nuanced understanding of how entrenched monetization practices undermine democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It shows that despite reforms such as the cashless policy, election monetization in Kogi State persisted through adaptive strategies by political elites, sustained by widespread poverty, weak institutional enforcement, and systemic elite dominance. By situating the Kogi experience within broader debates on elite theory and the political economy of democracy, the research extends existing literature on electoral corruption, revealing why technocratic fixes often fail in fragile democracies and underscoring the need for deeper structural and institutional reforms to strengthen Nigeria's democratization process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Monetization of politics, particularly electoral politics, poses a grave threat to good governance, sustainable democracy, and the long-term stability of the Nigerian state. It has become a defining feature of Nigeria's electoral landscape, particularly in Kogi State, where

it has significantly shaped presidential elections from 2015 to 2023. The pervasive use of money to influence electoral outcomes reflects deep-rooted systemic issues, including widespread poverty, institutional weakness, political patronage, and voter disenfranchisement. Evidence from the study indicates that both voters and political actors have come to accept monetary inducements as a norm in the electoral process, thereby undermining the principles of democratic participation and competitive politics.

The research findings affirm that election monetization distorts electoral behavior and outcomes, as many citizens vote based on immediate financial gain rather than informed policy preferences or ideological alignment. This commodification of votes contributes to the election of unaccountable leaders, weakens the democratic process, and perpetuates a cycle of corruption and underdevelopment. Despite the presence of legal frameworks such as the Electoral Act, the 1999 Constitution, and anti-money laundering laws, the paper concludes that these measures have not been adequately effective in curbing election monetization. Weak oversight, lack of political will, and voter complicity remain significant barriers. The ineffectiveness of punitive measures emboldens political actors to continue the practice, often without consequence. Therefore, addressing the challenge requires more than institutional reforms; it demands a multi-stakeholder approach involving civil society, the media, political parties, and the electorate to achieve strengthened enforcement of campaign finance laws, promotion of voter education and civic awareness, reformation of political party financing, combating of poverty and economic hardship, and deployment of technology in elections.

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