

**COMMUNIQUE: DEMOCRACY NOT FOR SALE FORUM — HO, VOLTA REGION
ISSUED BY THE DEMOCRACY NOT FOR SALE PROJECT (JOYNEWS IMPACT
MAKERS FOUNDATION, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH JOYNEWS/MULTIMEDIA
GROUP) HO — FRIDAY, JULY 31, 2026**

Preamble

On Friday, July 31, 2026, the Democracy Not for Sale project convened its second regional dialogue at the Freedom Hotel in Ho, bringing together academics, law enforcement officials, traditional authorities, civil society advocates, a sitting Member of Parliament, and a large and vocal cross-section of the Volta Region public. The forum, organised by the Impact Makers Foundation in partnership with Joy News and the Multimedia Group, was broadcast live on Joy News television, Joy FM (99.7), and the Multimedia Group's digital streaming platforms.

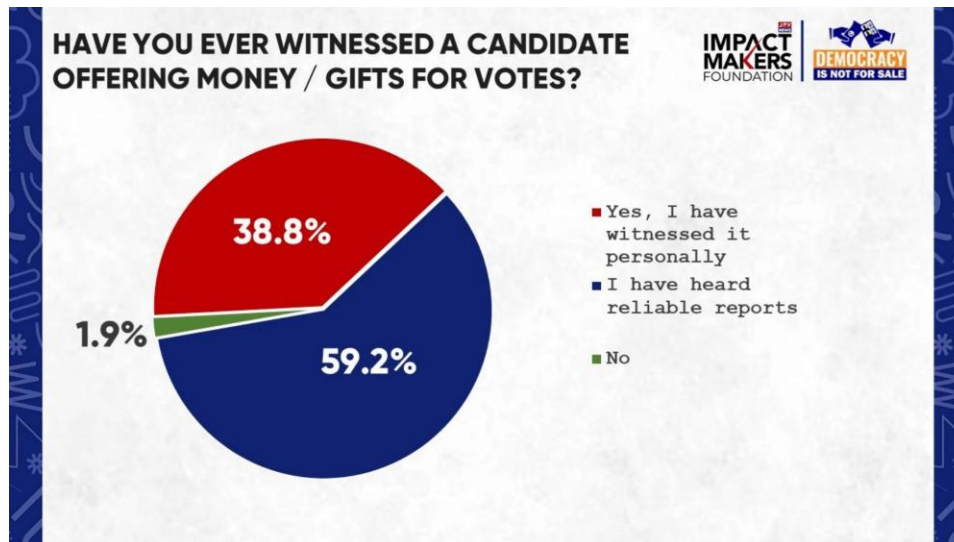
The dialogue was grounded in field survey data gathered over several days across the Ho metropolis, drawing on more than 200 interactions and 103 structured respondent interviews — exceeding the region's calculated ideal sample of 82, derived from the project's national target of 1,600 respondents across 10 regions at a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of $\pm 2.45\%$. This communiqué sets out, in full, the findings presented, the substance of the dialogue that followed, and the recommendations that emerged from both panelists and the audience.

Survey Findings

Respondents were 64% male and 36% female, with a notably youthful profile: 51% were aged 18–25, 23.3% were 26–35, 20% were 36–50, and 7% were 51 and above.

Awareness of Vote Buying

Awareness of vote buying in the region is near-universal. 38.8% of respondents said they had personally witnessed a candidate offering money or gifts for votes, and a further 59.2% had heard credible reports of it within their communities; only 1.9% reported neither witnessing nor hearing of it — meaning approximately 98% of respondents are aware of the practice through direct experience or reliable accounts.



Awareness of candidates offering money or gifts for votes.

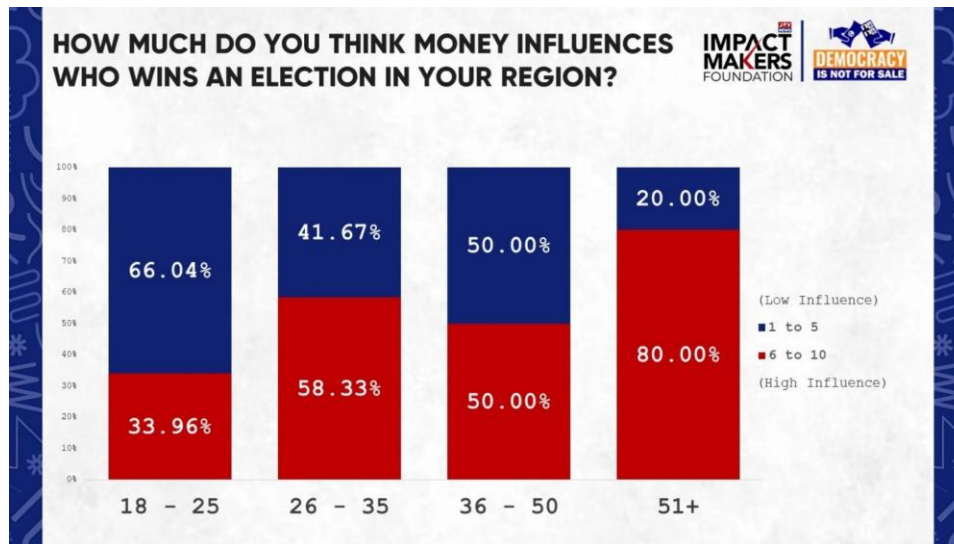
Exposure varied by occupational group. Within the informal sector, 56% had personally witnessed vote buying, 36% had heard of it, and 8% reported no exposure — the only group in the sample with any respondents reporting no awareness at all. Professionals reported 39.29% personal witness and 60.71% reliable reports. Religious and traditional leaders reported no personal witnessing but 100% awareness through reliable reports. Students reported 31.25% personal witness and 68.75% reliable reports.



Witnessed versus heard reports of vote buying, by occupational category.

Money's Perceived Influence on Election Outcomes

A pronounced generational divide emerged when respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how much money influences who wins an election in the region. Only 33.96% of 18–25 year-olds rated the influence as high (6–10); this rose to 58.33% among 26–35 year-olds, reached a 50/50 split among 36–50 year-olds, and climbed to 80% among respondents aged 51 and above — the oldest cohort was more than twice as likely as the youngest to believe money determines electoral outcomes.



Perceived influence of money on election outcomes, by age group.

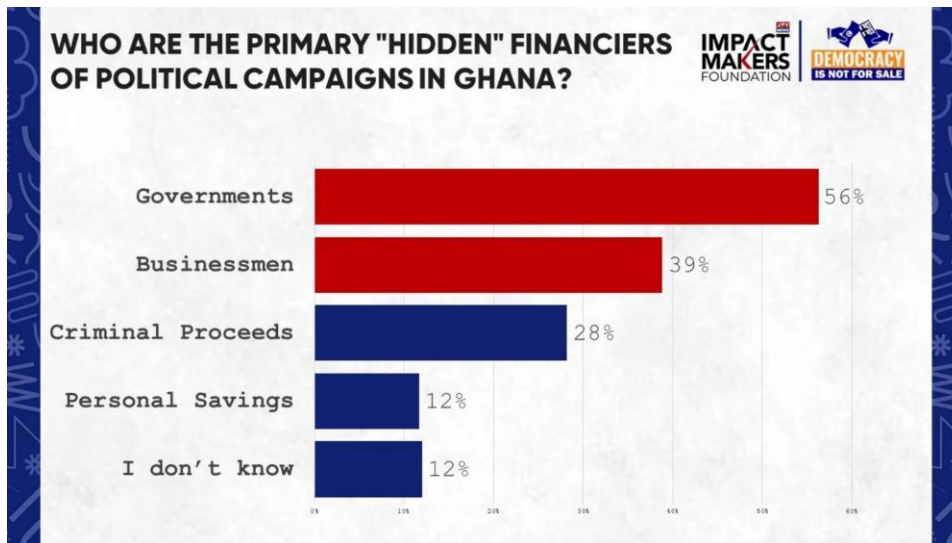
Willingness to Vote on Ideas Over Money

Despite this awareness, 82.6% of all respondents said they would be willing to vote for a candidate with fewer financial resources but better ideas than a wealthier opponent; 15.5% said they likely would not, and the remainder said it depends. This willingness was strongest among the youngest respondents — 90.57% among 18–25 year-olds — compared with 75% among 26–35 year-olds, 72.22% among 36–50 year-olds, and 80% among those 51 and above.

The research team drew particular attention to a distinctive Ho finding: unlike in other regions studied under the project, younger respondents in Ho indicated they would accept money if offered but that doing so would not determine who they ultimately voted for, whereas older respondents indicated they would both accept the money and vote accordingly.

Sources of Political Financing

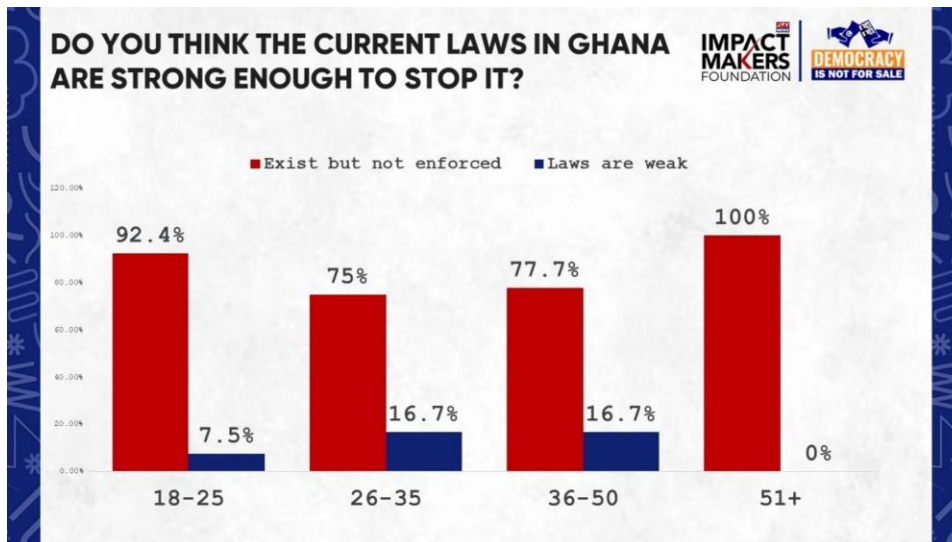
Asked to identify the primary “hidden” financiers of political campaigns in Ghana, 56% of respondents pointed to government resources, ahead of wealthy businessmen (39%), criminal proceeds (28%), and personal savings (12%); a further 12% said they did not know. The prominence of “government money” as the leading response — ahead of businessmen or criminal proceeds — was a distinctive finding for the region.



Perceived “hidden” financiers of political campaigns in Ghana.

Confidence in Existing Laws

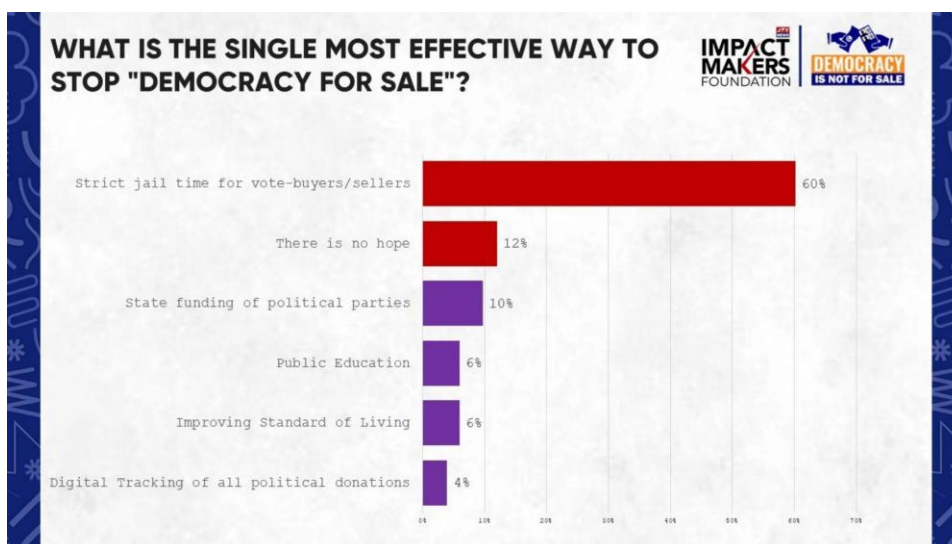
Across every age group, large majorities said Ghana’s laws against vote buying exist but are not effectively enforced, rather than that the laws themselves are weak: 92.4% among 18–25 year-olds, 75% among 26–35 year-olds, 77.7% among 36–50 year-olds, and 100% among respondents aged 51 and above.



Confidence in the strength and enforcement of current laws, by age group.

Preferred Remedies

60% of respondents identified strict jail time for vote-buyers and vote-sellers alike as the single most effective way to stop “democracy for sale.” This was followed by state funding of political parties (10%), public education (6%), improving standard of living (6%), and digital tracking of political donations (4%). A concerning 12% said they believed there is no hope — that nothing can be done to stop the practice. Additional open-ended responses called for stronger enforcement and institutions, disqualification of offenders from office, and a broader change of societal mindset.



Perceived most effective way to stop “democracy for sale.”

The Dialogue

The panel comprised: Harrison Kofi Belley (Senior Lecturer, Ho Technical University, and Chairman, Ghana Journalists Association, Volta Region); ACP Brown Mercy Wilson (Head of Legal and Prosecution, Volta Region Police Command, and Head of the Police Ladies Chapter, Volta Region); Imurana Mohammed (Programmes Director, National Commission for Civic Education, joining via Zoom); Mama Atrato II (Queen Mother of Ho-Dome); George Ashilevi (Educationist and Anti-Corruption Advocate); and Rosemond Ewoenam Atutonu (Executive Director, Global Action for Women Empowerment). Hon. Emmanuel Beer, Member of Parliament for Ho West and caucus chairman for the region’s 18 MPs, also addressed the forum from the floor.

Vote Buying Across Every Sphere of Life

Panelists and audience members testified that the monetization of decision-making in the Volta Region extends well beyond partisan politics into party primaries, chieftaincy succession, church leadership, and student and professional association elections. Mama Atrato II recounted that delegates for a Council of State contest were reportedly given GHS 5,000 each and lodged at a hotel for a weekend, while she, as a candidate, could offer only modest support an outcome she said was decided by money rather than record of service. Other participants described similar dynamics within church hierarchies, where the size of a donation was said to influence leadership standing, and among chiefs, where a customary schnapps offering is sometimes, in practice, accompanied by an expected envelope.

Several audience members gave first-hand testimony. A former police station executive who contested for a women’s organizer position in her constituency said she lost despite strong grassroots support because a rival offered delegates money on the day of balloting, and disclosed she had funded her own campaign from a small fruit juice business. A former parliamentary aspirant said his own research team told him delegates liked his ideas but doubted he could win without money to match his opponents he lost. One delegate in the audience openly acknowledged

receiving GHS 700 from a candidate, saying she took the money but voted based on her genuine belief in his ideas; he lost nonetheless.

Law, Enforcement, and Their Limits

ACP Brown Mercy Wilson grounded the discussion in constitutional and statutory terms, explaining that the rights and freedoms guaranteed under Articles 12, 21, and 26 of the 1992 Constitution carry corresponding civic duties, and that no one may trade those rights away for money, fear, silence, or violence. She cited Section 33 of PNDC Law 285, which criminalizes offering money or gifts to induce a vote (up to two years' imprisonment plus a five-year voting ban); Section 17 of the Criminal Offences Act on threats (10 to 25 years); Section 207 on insulting behaviour; Section 208 on the publication of false news; and Section 76 of the Electronic Communications Act, noting these provisions apply equally to conduct on social media.

She cited recent enforcement actions, including the conviction of eight men for political violence during the 2025 Ablekuma North by-election, and ongoing Office of the Special Prosecutor investigations into vote buying during the 2026 party primaries, including the widely referenced case involving television sets allegedly distributed to delegates during the NDC Ayawaso East parliamentary primary. She was candid about the obstacles to prosecution: intent is difficult to prove, both givers and beneficiaries of inducements are frequently uncooperative with investigators, the evidentiary standard for conviction is high, and officers attempting to intervene are sometimes physically obstructed. Several participants argued that enforcement has focused disproportionately on those who give money rather than those who receive it a supply-side bias panelists agreed must change. The Supreme Court's recent abolition of the closed delegate system was widely welcomed as a meaningful structural check on intra-party vote buying.

Structural and Economic Drivers

Multiple contributors converged on poverty and income inequality as root drivers of the practice, pointing to the wide gap between public-sector and political-office remuneration as a structure that incentivises office holders to “recoup” campaign spending once elected. Others noted that citizens who feel abandoned by officials once elected unreachable by phone or text have come to regard an election-time inducement as the only tangible benefit they are likely to receive. Ms. Atutonu

disclosed that the NCCE’s budget allocation has never crossed 30% of what is approved when funds are actually released, severely constraining its capacity to deliver civic education at scale.

Gender and Youth

Ms. Atutonu explained that the cost of contesting elective or leadership office falls hardest on women, who are frequently the primary financial and caregiving anchors of their households. She noted that women candidates face scrutiny — questions about marital status and family approval that male candidates do not, and described “femocracy”: targeted online abuse directed specifically at women who put themselves forward for public roles. One audience member described instances in which women seeking opportunities from those in positions of influence have been asked for sexual favours in exchange, which panelists agreed constitutes an especially severe and under-discussed form of corruption.

On youth, an assembly member in the audience urged the organizers and the NCCE to treat 18–25 year-olds as a strategic priority for civic education, arguing that the survey’s finding — that this cohort separates accepting money from how they vote — offers the clearest available opportunity to shift the region’s political culture over time.

Policy Developments

Hon. Emmanuel Bedzrah disclosed that Parliament is set to consider a new National Ethics and Anti-Corruption Plan (NEACP, 2026–2030), succeeding the previous National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (2014–2024), introducing an ethics and anti-corruption curriculum from basic school through university and a dedicated commission for annual compliance reporting across public agencies. He acknowledged that vote buying, including within his own party structures, remains a live and unresolved practice, and called for stronger asset declaration requirements for public officeholders.

Dr. Imurana Mohammed outlined NCCE efforts including school-based ethical leadership engagement at the tertiary level, district-level interparty dialogue committees, and joint public forums held with the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) in ten regional capitals to gather citizen input on a proposed Political Party Financing Bill. He highlighted the Constitution Review Committee’s recommendation, since accepted in principle by government, to create an

independent regulator for political parties and a “Democracy Fund” to formally finance party activity.

Voices of Resignation and Reaffirmation

A minority of participants, echoing the 12% of survey respondents who said there is no hope, questioned whether Ghana’s democracy described by some as fundamentally a “capitalist democracy” could ever be anything other than transactional, with a few raising the prospect of alternative systems of governance. Dr. Belley and Dr. Mohammed pushed back firmly, arguing the problem lies with practitioners rather than the system itself, and that Ghana’s sustained socioeconomic gains under more than three decades of democratic governance counsel strongly against abandoning the democratic project rather than reforming it.

Recommendations

From the Panel

- Rebalance enforcement of vote buying laws to hold both givers and takers of inducements accountable, rather than focusing disproportionately on the supply side.
- Adequately resource the National Commission for Civic Education and the Office of the Special Prosecutor to match their statutory mandates.
- Advance the proposed Political Party Financing Bill, an independent regulator for political parties, and the proposed “Democracy Fund” to bring campaign and party financing into a transparent, accountable system.
- Expand ethics and civic education through the incoming National Ethics and Anti-Corruption Plan, with particular focus on the youngest voting cohort.
- Implement deliberate, resourced measures to reduce financial barriers to women’s and youth political participation, enforce the Affirmative Action Act’s 30% representation target, and confront online abuse of women candidates.

From the Audience

- Close the income and benefit gap between political officeholders and ordinary public servants to reduce the incentive to recoup campaign spending once in office.
- Introduce mandatory, verifiable asset declaration for public officeholders, with a requirement to account for growth in personal wealth over a term in office.
- Encourage sustained citizen engagement with elected officials between election cycles — constituents and community leaders actively “lobbying” for their region’s development needs rather than waiting passively for benefits.
- Strengthen attitudinal and character-based education beginning in the home and in schools, alongside continued advocacy through media, civil society, and traditional and religious leadership.

Conclusion

The Ho dialogue reaffirmed that the challenge of “democracy for sale” cannot be addressed through a single approach. It requires coordinated efforts across multiple fronts: enforcement that targets both givers and takers of inducements, transparent and adequately resourced political financing, expanded civic and ethics education targeted at the region’s youthful population, deliberate measures to include women and young people in political competition, and sustained citizen engagement with elected officials beyond the election cycle. The strong alignment between institutional recommendations from panelists and grassroots solutions from the audience provides a solid foundation for designing effective interventions as the Democracy Not for Sale project continues its engagement across Ghana’s remaining regions.

For more information on the Democracy Not for Sale project, contact the JoyNews Impact Makers Foundation.