

How Politics Is Like a Nigerian Email Scam

Comes this e-mail to me today from one Mr. Bintou Ojabo, with the subject line reading “I need your full trust”:

DEAR ONE,

PLEASE PERMIT ME TO INTRODUCE MY SELF TO YOU, MY NAME IS BINTOU OJABO, I AM 19 YEARS OLD, I AM THE ONLY CHILD OF LATE MR.DAVID OJABO WHO WAS A FAMOUS GOLD MERCHANT BASED IN ABIDJAN HERE,THE ECONOMIC CAPITAL OF IVORY COAST (COTE D’IVOIRE) BEFORE HIS UNTIMELY DEATH.

I AM SEEKING FOR YOUR URGENT ATTENTION TO HELP ME TRANSFER THE SUM OF (US\$6,500,000.00) INTO YOUR BANK ACCOUNT, IT IS MY INHERITANCE FUND FROM MY LATE FATHER, I AM WILLING TO OFFER YOU 15% OF THIS FUND AS YOUR COMMISSION FOR YOUR URGENT ASSISTANCE TO ME. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I HAVE ALL THE NECESSARY DOCUMENTS IN RELATION TO THIS FUND DEPOSITED BY MY LATE FATHER IN THE BANK.

PLEASE KINDLY GET BACK TO ME TO GIVE YOU MORE IMPORTANT DETAILS CONCERNING THIS FUND.

THANK YOU FOR BEING THERE FOR ME.

*YOURS SINCERELY,
BINTOU OJABO*

Of course, this pitch is simply one of countless manifestations of an everyday scam designed to take advantage of people’s gullibility (especially when they are flattered) and their self-interest. Almost no one falls for it (although, I suppose, a tiny handful of fools *do* fall for it – thus explaining the continuing prevalence of this scam). So how to explain the fact that most people continue to fall for

a scam that is in principle no different from – and every bit as common as – the one conducted by the writer of the above e-mail?

The common scam about which I speak is politics. The typical politician seeks the confidence of many strangers in order to secure their votes so that that politician wins power and office. The typical politician seeks this confidence by promising the strangers something for nothing – manna from the capital city or from City Hall – if only the strangers will put their trust in him or her. He wins, they lose.

It's a long-running con.

Were I in 2016 to fall for Monsieur Ojabo's scam, I would correctly and nearly universally be regarded as an imbecile.

Yet were I to fall for Madam Clinton's or Mr. Trump's (or Mr. Obama's or you-name-almost-any-successful-politician's) equally ludicrous scam, I would be applauded by about half of my fellow Americans as a fine and wise citizen. (The other half of my fellow Americans would applaud me if I were to fall for the con of the opposing candidate.)

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