## Paraphrase.io, Smarter:

Gladiatorial games offered their sponsors extravagantly expensive but effective opportunities for self-promotion, and gave their clients and potential voters exciting entertainment at little or no cost to themselves. Gladiators became big business for trainers and owners, for politicians on the make and those who had reached the top and wished to stay there. A politically ambitious privatus (private citizen) might postpone his deceased father's munus to the election season, when a generous show might drum up votes; those in power and those seeking it needed the support of the plebeians and their tribunes, whose votes might be won with the mere promise of an exceptionally good show. Sulla, during his term as praetor, showed his usual acumen in breaking his own sumptuary laws to give the most lavish munus yet seen in Rome, for the funeral of his wife, Metella.

In the closing years of the politically and socially unstable Late Republic, any aristocratic owner of gladiators had political muscle at his disposal. In 65 BC, newly elected curule aedile Julius Caesar held games that he justified as munus to his father, who had been dead for 20 years. Despite an already enormous personal debt, he used 320 gladiator pairs in silvered armour. He had more available in Capua but the senate, mindful of the recent Spartacus revolt and fearful of Caesar's burgeoning private armies and rising popularity, imposed a limit of 320 pairs as the maximum number of gladiators any citizen could keep in Rome. Caesar's showmanship was unprecedented in scale and expense; he had staged a munus as memorial rather than funeral rite, eroding any practical or meaningful distinction between munus and ludi.

Gladiatorial games, usually linked with beast shows, spread throughout the republic and beyond. Anti-corruption laws of 65 and 63 BC attempted but failed to curb the political usefulness of the games to their sponsors. Following Caesar's assassination and the Roman Civil War, Augustus assumed imperial authority over the games, including munera, and formalised their provision as a civic and religious duty. His revision of sumptuary law capped private and public expenditure on munera, claiming to save the Roman elite from the bankruptcies they would otherwise suffer, and restricting gladiator munera to the festivals of Saturnalia and Quinquatria.Henceforth, an imperial praetor's official munus was allowed a maximum of 120 gladiators at a ceiling cost of 25,000 denarii; an imperial ludi might cost no less than 180,000 denarii.Throughout the empire, the greatest and most celebrated games would now be identified with the state-sponsored imperial cult, which furthered public recognition, respect and approval for the emperor's divine numen, his laws, and his agents. Between 108 and 109 AD, Trajan celebrated his Dacian victories using a reported 10,000 gladiators and 11,000 animals over 123 days. The cost of gladiators and munera continued to spiral out of control. Marcus Aurelius' legislation in 177 AD did little to stop this and was completely ignored by his son Commodus.