

## **Elections and Vote Buying In Nigeria: An Albatross to Democratization Process**

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**Abstract:** The study examined elections and vote buying in Nigeria and its implications on democratic process. Content analytical approach was adopted while political economy approach was used as theoretical anchorage of the study. The study reviewed the contributions of scholars in this field. Data were extensively sourced from documentary papers from which the major objectives of the study were accomplished. The study found that vote buying in Nigeria has impacted negatively on the democratic process as it leads to political apathy, leadership crisis, political violence, poor political culture and insensitivity to the needs of the people. The study recommends among other things; political education and civic awareness by relevant institutions to enlighten the electorate on the futuristic implications of vote buying in the democratic process; enforcement of the existing electoral regulations on party finances; and enthronement of good governance and improvement of the conditions of the ordinary people; strengthening the democratic institutions in Nigeria etc. This, if tenaciously adhered to, will no doubt launch Nigeria into an enduring democratic process.

**Keywords:** Elections, Democracy, electoral process, vote buying, Political development, Nigeria.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Across the globe, election represents a mechanism which people are elected into offices. It is a modern and universally accepted process through which individuals are openly and methodically chosen to represent a body or community in a larger entity of government. It is still one of the cardinal features of democracy. Democracy itself is adjudged to be the best form of government all over the world but simultaneously being constantly assaulted in Nigeria due to the phenomenon of vote-buying. Indeed, vote-buying seems to have taken the centre stage in the democratization process in Nigerian politics. Essentially, the electorate trade their votes for certain outcomes that are important to them.

Evidence has shown that one in five Nigerians has experienced an offer for their vote (Bratton, 2008). Implicitly, the rewards offered by Nigerian politicians include money, commodities such as food like rice, bread, salt, onion and groundnut oil and trinkets in the form of umbrellas, T-shirt, caps, bags and other valuables. In Nigerian state, it may be out of thought that an election could be won without greasing some palms and scratching some backs. Olaito (2018) opined that election period in Nigeria can be compared to a season of give and take with lots of commercial activities in the red light street. He further noted that vote buying does not only take place in the wee hours of the election day but starts from the fee charged by political parties for application forms for party officers from the national to the local level, to the party/caucus meetings, congresses, conventions, campaigns grounds, party primaries and then general elections. In point of fact, the phenomenon of vote-buying and democratic experiment in Nigeria appears to be at variance as it vitiates the good qualities of election and to a large extent, undermine democratization process (Kwanghaga and Tarfa, 2015).

It is in realization of the problematique and the attendant consequences of vote-buying in Nigeria that this study tends to interrogate the implications of vote-buying in Nigeria's democratization process with a view to finding a lasting solution to the dreaded monster. In doing this, the study is divided into . Section one delved into the general background of the study. Section two dealt with the conceptualization of election, vote buying and democratization. Section three captured theoretical framework and methodology. Section four focused on the implications of vote buying on Nigerian Democracy while section five wrapped it up with conclusion and recommendations.

## II. DELINEATION OF CONCEPTS

### **Election**

Elections are unarguably the most critical elements of democratic process. Essentially, election constitutes the strategic might to and of the democratic process; hence, the widely held view that election is the major midwife of the democratic process. Thus, the fundamental principle of representative government is that the people should be governed by officers of their own choice. In a democratic centralism, citizens are expected to take part in the work of the government by voting at polls.

Idealistically, election is the process whereby an electorate chooses, by voting, officers either to act on its behalf, or to represent it in an assembly, with a view to governing and making good administration (Nkwede, 2014; Nwobashi, 2015 and Garuba, 2007).

For Dowse and Hughes (1972:235);

Elections are one type of social mechanism, amongst others, for aggregating preferences of a particular kind. An election is therefore, a procedure recognized by the rules of an organization, be it a state, a club, a voluntary organization, or whatever, where all, or some, of the members choose a smaller number of persons to hold an office, offices, of authority within that organization.

From the above, it is quite obvious that elections are the means by which a wider body of persons chooses a smaller group of representatives to undertake specific tasks; and that elections can take place in a wide variety of organizations, formal and informal as well as governmental and non-governmental. However, our primary concern here is those elections by which representatives are chosen to occupy those governmental positions or offices that may be designated as elective. Simply put, election is very important in a political process because without the process of election, there would be the struggle for power which could either be in form of coup d'etat or radical change of government.

Consequently, there is need to enthrone credible election in any democratic environment where election is taken to be a cardinal feature of a democratic process. Ejue and Ekanam (2011) stated that election is free, fair and credible when the candidate with the highest votes wins, voter rights are protected, while credible and popular candidates emerge as winners. For this reason, they opinionated that election remains the only gateway to establish majority rule and legitimacy of government. Implicitly, this suggests that the integrity of election is paramount in a democratization process and should not be compromised by stakeholders in the system.

### **Vote-Buying**

Many scholars have given a variety of interpretation to vote-buying according to their perception and orientations. Scholars like Fredric and Adreas (2005), Ologbenla and waziri (2012), Callahan (2000), Matenga (2016), Wrigt (1985), Beetseh and Akpoo (2015), Ovwasa (2013) and Dixit and Londregan (1996) argue that the act of vote-buying is an economic exchange, a contract, or perhaps an auction in which the voter sells his or her vote to the highest bidder. For Fredric and Andrea (2005), vote-buying is a situation where candidates buy and sell vote as they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets. In this connection, parties and candidates buy votes by offering particularistic material benefits to voters.

Vote-buying, therefore, is an inducement offered to electorate in an election situation with a view to garnering popular vote.

In the context of this study, vote-buying can safely be seen as an act of exchanging one's own vote for material gains. Contemporaneously, it includes notions of clientelism, whereby voters support candidates who have provided them with particularistic forms of redistribution (Finan and Schechter, 2012; Canare, Mendoza and Lopez, 2018).

Beetseh and Akpoo (2015) maintain that vote-buying propositions may target either electoral choices or electoral participation. They may be intended to persuade individuals to vote in certain ways or to vote or not to vote in the first place. They further argue that strategies to alter turnout may focus on demobilizing active opponents or on mobilizing passive supporters.

Comparatively, vote buying as a phenomenon is neither system specific nor space bound as it is common to all political systems, be it advanced or developing, medieval or contemporary. It therefore, exists in all regions and climes, and differs in magnitude and manifestations from one polity to the other (Kwanghga and Tarfa (2015). The phenomenon of vote-buying therefore portends danger in a democratization process.

### **Democratization**

Another contestable concept in this study is democratization. Whatever the diversity of views, there is nonetheless a core minimalist definition that lies beneath all the interpretations and uses of the term. Thus, democratization is a process by which a society could progress from authoritarianism to minimalist democracy to substantive democracy. Many analysts strongly argue that the prelude to the creation of democratization is building civil society, where various political, social and cultural groups and practices play a role in defining the

limits of public authorities, and broadening public participation in the process of policy formulation and policy implementation (Amin and Schnabel, 2003; Linz and Stepan, 1996).

Unarguably, democratization is not something that can be imposed from outside as long as the conditions in the subjected society are not favourable. Beyond this, democratization cannot be expected to result in substantive democracy without the subjected society going through certain phases of development: from pro-democratic civil society changes to procedural or working democracy to substantive democracy.

Democratization in general needs to grow from within a society, based on first achieving favourable civil-society changes, with a necessary level of political and social maturation whereby a majority of the citizens can grasp and adopt democratic ideas, values and practices as not threatening but complementing their traditional referents of cultural identity and beliefs as to what might constitute the common good. Without such level of development, any effort from within or outside may produce little more than a form of manipulable or unsustainable procedural democracy.

Put differently, democratization is the process whereby a country adopts a civil or democratic regime. Typically, Nigeria has peacefully transferred power from one political party to another and has conducted peaceful elections variously in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 respectively. It is undoubtedly true that democratization is on-going in Nigeria. Such a transition is critical because it indicates that the major political forces in a country are prepared to settle their disputes without violence. Under such circumstance, democratization is said to have been put on course.

### **III. THEORETICAL ANCHORAGE OF THE STUDY**

The study adopted Political Economy Approach. Proponents of this approach are Marx (1848), Ake (1981), Aja (1998) and Chikendu (2002). The political economy approach is pigeonholed on dialectical materialism. The theory of dialectical materialism according to Marx places primacy on material or economic conditions of society. Apparently, it is premised on the belief that man is dominantly motivated by economic needs. These theorists believed that labour is the essence of material existence hence; economic activity is man's primacy concern (Oddih, 2007). For Aja (1998), the thrust of this perspective is on how the understanding of its economic structure as defined by the relations between employers of labour and the working class in the process of production. To Marx, every political system corresponds and reflects its kind of economic structure. He places emphasis and premium on the production base-the substructure, since this determines the politics, ideology and culture of the society-the super structure. Essentially, from the substructure, one easily understands the nature of internal relations, one easily organizes, manages and reproduce itself, the causes of tension, conflicts or contradictions in any given society and the bearing or direction of social change.

For these theorists, it is believed that the primary cause of tension and other social dislocation in a society is economic factor. To this end, if one understands the economic structure of a society, the relations between the people in production process, it is easier to understand the nature of politics, culture, national security, socio-psychological consciousness, and ideological inclinations. Thus, it is this economic force that breeds conflicts and contradictions in human societies. *Ipsa facto*, elections is seen as the quickest means to power and economic survival depending on the creed and perception of the politicians to win elections by all means.

As argued by Ake (1981), the postcolonial states were endowed with highly developed power. But with denial of access to wealth by the colonial masters and poor development of the forces of production to secure economic base for existence, the indigenous middle-class turns to the state to utilize the highly statist economies for its aggrandizement. State power contemporaneously becomes a high state, and an object of deadly struggles that must be captured through hook or crook means since controlling the state tantamount to controlling political and economic power. For this reason, Chikendu (2002) opined that it is not surprising therefore that political competition which is undertaken in order to gain control of state power should generate great heat and bitterness and promote extra-constitutional behaviour in the form of electoral malpractices.

All in all, the relevance of this approach to the current study is that the struggle to win and control state power and use same for personal economic advantage of the politicians lies at the root of all electoral frauds and vote-buying in Nigeria.

### **IV. METHODOLOGY**

Content analytical approach was adopted for the study. Data were collected using information from official document, direct observation, media commentaries and from scholarly writings on elections, vote buying and democratic process in Nigeria.

## V. IMPLICATIONS OF VOTE-BUYING ON NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY

Although vote-buying during elections is not peculiar to Nigeria or new in the nation's democratic process, the practice has in recent times become a significant tool of securing political power as witnessed in Edo State gubernatorial election and widely witnessed in the July 14, 2018, Ekiti State governorship polls. Howbeit, the magnitude of vote buying and selling in the 2018 Ekiti State election was too glaring to the extent that both local and international observers decried that such bizarre engagement has never been experienced in the Nigeria's electoral trajectory.

As noted by Fredric and Andreas (2005), there are enormity of implications posed by vote buying in electoral process as prospective vote buyers typically have no guarantees that voters who accept their material offers shall dutifully reciprocate on election day. There is always uncertainty due to the fact that vote buying, even when akin to a commercial transaction, takes place in a non-licensed black market of illicit exchange, rather than a normal consumer market embedded in a network of legal safeguards. Securing the compliance of voters according to Fredric and Andreas (2005) tends to be problematic for four reasons that are inherent to most vote trading arrangements.

- **Problematic enforcement:** The enforcement of contractual vote buying obligations is inherently problematic. Vote buying typically creates the commitment problems that come along with the deferred delivery of goods and services. This is because vote buyers and sellers do not engage in instant exchanges of merchandise and money, the former face the challenging task of making the latter honour their future obligation, and to that extent, they have to accomplish it without recourse to legal action. While licit consumer markets are institutionalized spheres of exchange created and protected by the law, markets for votes are neither regulated nor sanctioned by formal rules. Therefore, if voters just grab the money, vote their conscience, and disappear, parties and candidates have no legal sanctions at their disposal to punish them.
- **Problematic Monitoring:** The business of vote buying from the perspective of buyers, involve problems of surveillance as deep and troubling as the problems of enforcement. This is because markets for votes, in contrast, are opaque. Under the veil of secret voting, voter behavior is shielded from direct inspection. Vote buyers may have great difficulty knowing whether presumptive vote sellers actually honour their commitments on Election Day.
- **Countervailing norms:** It should be noted that votes do not belong to the universe of legitimate commodities. The explicit purchase of votes run counter to prevalent norms of democratic liberty and equality.
- **Countervailing laws:** Voter buying, even when consonant with local norms, is still illegal. Where laws against vote buying are enforced, and especially where hefty rewards are given to citizens who reveal the identities of vote buyers to police, givers need to worry that buyers will not only defect, but turn them in.

From the above, it can be seen that what may look like a simple economic exchange is never quite simple since voter buyers cannot rely on social norms of fair exchange and the threat of legal sanctions that typically sustain licit market transactions. Vote buyers indeed, have to resolve intricate problems of monitoring and enforcement, and they may have to surmount, too, the obstacle of countervailing democratic norms as well as the risk of prosecution. This stems from the fact the systematic uncertainties of compliance they face may indeed, be reluctant to bet their financial and political fortunes on the fragile resource of personal trust.

Essentially, when election is characterized by excessive vote buying choices of the citizens, invariably, there is likelihood that the government that emerges cannot represent, protect, and affects the will and aspirations of the people. A government that takes over power through vote buying processes cannot claim to be democratic or legitimate.

The gory effect of this ugly trend leads to political apathy, leadership crisis, political violence, poor political culture and insensitivity to the needs of the people. Implicitly, vote buying and reciprocity have a far-reaching implication on the relationship between elected leaders and the people. This is because voters may not be able to make correct leadership choices as qualified and credible candidates may not be financially capable of buying voters to vote for them. The electorate will definitely end up voting the wrong people in positions of thrust with reckless abandon and at the end, the people are governed by corrupt, inept and compromised leaders who have no masses interest at heart, thus good governance and democratic dividends would be truncated.

Conscious of the fact that extant laws in Nigeria especially the Electoral Act (2010, as amended) has adequate provisions for penalties for financial inducement in election, with section 124(a) which states that paying money to any other persons for bribery at any elections attracts conviction to a maximum fine of ₦500,000 or 12 months imprisonment or both; and section 124(b) stipulates that receiving any money or gift, for voting or to refrain from voting at any election attracts a maximum fine of ₦500,000 or imprisonment for 12 months or both, one should have envisaged that with these laws put in place, vote buying and vote selling would have been ameliorated in the Nigerian democratic process but that was not to be. Vote buying and selling in

Nigeria have reached a staggering dimension and has remained intractable due to lack of enforcement of punishment for electoral offences by the relevant government agencies and stakeholders.

The attendant consequences are that it undermines the legitimacy of the election and weakens representative democracy and to a large extent, makes mockery of Nigerian democratic process.

Furthermore, the adumbration of vote buying in Nigerian political firmament is not only a violation of the law, it also constitute an abuse of the constitutional right of the people to choose their leaders in a free, fair and credible manner.

Table 1 below summarizes the implications of vote-buying in a democratic environment.

**Table 1:** Some implications of vote buying

<b>Dimension/frame</b>	<b>Clientelism</b>	<b>Corruption</b>	<b>Fraud</b>
Basic operation	Exchange of private benefits for public support	Translation of money into power	Falsification of preferences
Guiding distinction	Private/public goods	Political rights/economic resources	Genuine and false preferences
Actors	Patron/client	Giver/taker of bribes	Perpetrator/victim
Relationship	Asymmetric	Horizontal	Vertical
Agency	Unequal	Shared	Unilateral
Citizen role	Dependent association	Complicity	Passivity
Citizen failure	False consciousness	Moral weakness	Lack of resistance
Degree of democratic norm violation	Inappropriate	Illegitimate	Criminal
Consequences for democracy	Damaging democratic quality	Subverting democracy	Denying democracy
Theoretical puzzle	Why are citizens myopic?	Why are citizens rational?	Why are citizens pliant?
Practical recipes	Social policies and civic education	Civic education and sanctions against citizens and politicians	Policing parties and candidates

**Source: Andreas Schedler, 2002.**

From table one above, it can be seen that the most prominent options to frame vote buying are three; electoral clientelism, electoral corruption, and electoral fraud. Whether we understand vote buying as a form of clientism, corruption, or fraud, it bears profound implications on the democratic process.

## **VI. TACKLING THE MENACE OF VOTE BUYING IN NIGERIA.**

Vote buying which has been conceptualized as a national disaster has the devastating implications of enthroning unpopular and unqualified leaders with its attendant multiplier effects on the Nigerian society. The country has continued to grope in the dark even after many years of independence and democratic experiment. This study, therefore, made the following recommendations as possible strategies for checkmating it.

- Politicians in Nigeria should imbibe the spirit of sportsmanship towards election and shun the penchant to crave power at all cost.
- The electorate should be given adequate orientation on the implication of succumbing or accepting money offered to them in exchange for their votes. They should be in the know that if they succumb to the temptation, they would not have any moral justification to the actions of irresponsible and insensitive leaders when they begin to mess up the nation thereby mortgaging their future and that of their children.
- Security agents deployed to voting units to provide security are sometimes found to be part of the problem when they fall prey to antics of dirty and unscrupulous politicians who are hell bent on stealing the people's mandate. They should therefore be trained adequately and be made to face the law if found acting in the contrary.
- The electoral umpire INEC among other things should sternly enforce legislations against actors involved in vote buying no matter how highly placed in the society. Efforts should be intensified to check and end vote buying in the country by sticking to the rules of the game.
- Political parties and their candidates should learn how to engage on politics of decency, zero tolerance, transparency and accountability with a view to eschewing acrimony, greediness, blasphemy against the rule of law and due process, which is inimical to credible election and democratic process in Nigeria.
- Political education and civic awareness should be pursued vigorously by the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and other relevant institutions with a view to enlightening the electorate on the futuristic implications of vote buying in the democratic process.

- Enforcement of the existing electoral regulations on party finances including campaign programmes is highly advocated.
- Anti-craft agencies should as a matter of necessity collaborate with banks and other financial institutions to checkmate the transactions and the movement of cash during elections in Nigeria.
- Nigerian democratic institutions should be strengthened to ensure an enduring democratic process.
- Political leadership should enthrone good governance and improve the conditions of the ordinary people since vote buying is to a large extent attributed to poverty level and crass impoverishment of the people by those at the corridors of power.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The distributive activities that are conventionally described as vote buying in Nigerian state and elsewhere is an albatross to democratic process. Vote seekers handing out fistfuls of cash to individual citizens at first blush look like simple market transactions and economic exchange. A political environment where voters are driven by a simple calculus of economic gain, sell their electoral services to the highest bidder is bound to crash democratically. This is because the purchase of votes demands that citizens effectively change their voting behaviour in response to and in accordance with the particularistic material offers they receive.

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### Notes

1. See Dowse and Hughes (1972) for a comprehensive review of this literature.
2. In fact, Marx (1848) takes into account the dialectical approach to political Economy in which he concludes that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonism. That it has established new classes, new conditions of oppression, and new forms of struggle in place of the old ones (p.33).

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