

THE POLITICS OF VOTE BUYING THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE: 2015-2019 GENERAL ELECTION

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Abstract

According to David Eastern, politics is a political system or that sub-system of the social system which deals with authoritative allocation of values for the society. It is any persistent pattern of human relations which involves power relation, rule and power. Robson stated that politics centered on the struggle to gain and retain power, to exercise power influence over others or to resist that exercise. Basically as a result of the above, politicians use every means to get power including vote buying to win or influences the result of election in their favour. Vote buying is a global practice in the electoral process with its implications in democratic process and participation of the electorate in the electoral process. Vote buying involves the exchange of eligible vote for monetary reward, gifts, food items and various public relations (PR) services. In the Nigerian situation, vote buying is mostly or prominently executed during election process by political parties or its agents as a means of acquiring high vote and support for election victory. Candidates and their political parties resort to vote buying to achieve their political interest in the election, thereby making vote buying an essential in the political process. In Nigeria between "2015 to 2019", vote buying was necessitated by several factors and carried out by different actors during elections and thereby has significant implications on the democratic process and sustainable of democratization. This study will identify the causes of vote buying and will make appropriate recommendations and strategies to minimize or curb the effect of vote buying and improve the political interest and participation of the electorate in the electoral process and voting during election. This study employed secondary qualitative data.

Keywords: Vote Buying, Democratic participation, the electorate, vote selling, political party's agents.

Introduction

Voting is an important tool which the electorate use in determining the candidate which the political party present for an election for the purpose of winning election. Schaffer (2012 p.1) stated that vote buying is an electoral activity carried out through exchange of money, gift, goods and service for vote based on the perception of the buyer, (usually the political aspirant, the seller is (usually the electorate). This is clear to state that vote buying is the activities of two parties – the buyer able to buy and the seller willing to sell their votes. Rigger (2014 p.10) and Ibana (2016 p.35) agreed that vote buying and selling is an economic transaction in the electoral process whereby the seller sales his/her political conscience and freedom, and the buyer willing to buy the votes from them with the intention of recovering their investment when elected into power. It is correct to state that in the Nigerian context, vote buying is more lucrative and complex in the democratization process, because the seller sees

it as an opportunity to sell their vote and receive more financial benefit from the political parties and their aspirants, while the transaction deprives the seller their voting right of participating in the electoral process. To the buyer, it is an opportunity to control the vote and determine the election results in their favour. The vote buying and selling is carried out with the sole aid of vote brokers. Rigger (2014 p.24) argued that vote brokers can be identifies in Nigeria as the political godfather, political parties agents, compromised security agents and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials etc., who are instrumentality and facilitators in the process of vote buying and selling during election. The issues of vote buying have been noted in several elections in Nigeria, but for the purpose of this study 2015-2019 general elections is taken into consideration. Ojo (2018 p, 60) added that vote buying has reached an alarming proportion in Nigeria with its negative implication on the electorate process. The buyer

buys the vote as an investment for better political reward as they win the election, and the seller sale their vote to get money. But the fact remains that the democratic process is distorted, electorates deprived, unpopular candidates emerged leading to bad government and governance and poor development activities in Nigeria. Consequently, it is the objective of this work to investigate the issues of vote buying, its causes and its implications on political and democratic or electoral process in Nigeria.

The issue of vote buying in the Nigerian electoral process has become a source of concern to the democratic stability of Nigeria. As a matter of fact, several political actors and parties see vote buying as a medium to acquire the needed vote for them to emerge victorious in their elections. This has to do with the process of acquiring the voting right of the electorates and their political mandate to enable the party and its candidate achieve their political interest during elections. In this process, the political party and its candidate use different platforms to convince the electorates of selling off their mandate and sometimes against their will to the party and its candidate. The vote buying distorts the electoral process and influences the outcome of the election, leading to the emergence of unpopular candidate, political violence and deprivation of voting right of the electorates. Democratically speaking, the electoral process in Nigeria appears to be influenced by the politics of vote buying, particularly, during the 2015-2019 general elections, accounting for the political deprivation and poor political participation during that general election. this lead to incessant political agitation and litigations among the various political parties and complains by some electorates.

Conceptualization of vote buying:

This study considered vote buying as the act of buying and selling vote material, usually the voting card. It involves transaction between the vote buyer (candidate of political party) and seller (the electorate) with the sole aim of the seller getting monetary reward and / or receiving gift;

and the buyer in the other hand having more vote in his/her control for election victory. Schaffer, (2016 p.33) sees vote buying as economic transaction involving the buying and seller for mutual project making in a democratic process. The seller sales to the highest bidder for more economic reward in form of cash goods and services etc., and the buyer buys more based on his/her financial capacity. Jang and Chang, (2016 p.45) and Wu and Huang, (2014 p.39) argued that vote buying is carried out with the help of vote broker. The broker services as the middle man between the voter buyers and vote sellers, and negotiable with eligible voters with voters card for vote buying as demanded by the candidate for possible vote trade. This transaction is made possible during the political campaign, rally, house to house visit and party meetings. The broker applied both persuasion and force to convince the vote sellers to sell their votes, while the sellers negotiate with the highest bidder for more reward.

Records of rate of vote buying:

In Nigeria Warami, (2017 p.27) observed that the issues of vote buying is at the increase and stated the rate of vote buying in 2017 during the Lagos State Local Government election was alarming and dangerous to Nigerian democracy. Yakubu, (2018 p.39) opined that vote buying takes different forms at different time in Nigeria and has become a challenge to Nigerian democratization process. He added that recently, there are issues of voters selling their permanent voter's card (PVC's) to the highest bidder in their Units, Wards, Local Government Area and Constituencies at different rate ranging from two thousand naira, to ten thousand naira as evidences during the Ekiti state Governorship election in 2018, in Rivers state Governorship election in 2019 PVCs was sold from five thousand naira to fifteen thousand naira, this was also applicable in Ondo state Governorship election in 2016, Anambra state Governorship election in 2016, Akwa Ibom state Governorship election in 2019, Edo state Governorship election in 2016 etc. and classifies vote buying as

“democracy on sale”. This no doubt implies great danger to Nigerian democracy. Ojo, (2018 p.34) stated that vote buying is thriving in Nigeria due to the willingness of the sellers to sell their votes for money and gift items during elections. The electorates with PVC's are giving money, bag of rice, wrappers house hold items, beverages, building material etc., in exchange for their PVC's during elections. Importantly, the offering of money and gift items in exchange for voters is done selectively, as members of one party always target to buy the voters card of the opponents with view of having more cards in their control and weaken the voting capacity of the opponents. In vote buying, the target population is the weak members of the opposition parties. Stoke, (2015 p.65) explained that weakness implies economic weakness (poverty) and political weakness (poor political education). However, the electorate's attribute the sale of their votes to poverty, wants and ignorance. Bratton, (2018 p.19) added that vote buying is an electoral fraud capable of violating principles and practice of democracy in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the political economy theory. The proponents of this theory include Karl Marx (1971) Engels (1971) V.I. Lenin (1984) Clude Aka (1985) Samuel Decado (1995) Dent (1991), among others. According to Ake, (1985 p.42), the unique feature of the socio-economic formation in contemporary developing countries is that the state (Nigeria) has very limited autonomy. This is because the state is not mediated by complete generation of commodity production and exchange. The emerged bourgeois class cannot avoid ruling directly since there is hardly and separation of the political from economic given the non-separation, Ake argued that the system of institutional mechanisms of domination (state and its institutions) are not differentiated and dissociated from the ruling class and even society and does not appear as an objective force standing alongside society. The Marxian political economy views the World as dynamic and static with the conflict and contradiction

within the socio-economic system propelling this movement. This is holistic in approach. This is because it assumes the inter-relatedness of the super-structure with the sub-structure but takes the sub-structure as the point of departure in social enquiry.

The above simply explain the motive behind the vote buying and selling of vote. The relevance of the theory to this study is to explain the usefulness of all citizens in Nigeria in exercising their fundamental human rights during voting of candidate of their choice. The study sees vote-buying activities as barriers to the effective application of the participatory democracy. The politics of vote buying and selling deprives the citizens or the electorate's access to evenly participate in the democratic activities, as well as the opportunity to directly and indirectly participate in the decision of who rule them at any point in time. The electorate selling their voting right for economic reason will not help to consolidate the democratic tenet, hence vote buying and selling should be discouraged by the state and the government.

The strategies of vote buying in Nigeria:

(1) Money for Votes: The political parties and its candidates for elective position use cash exchange for electorates votes as a means of achieving vote buying in Nigeria. This is done during political campaign, tour of electoral units, wards, local government area, constituencies and state levels, from where they identify the oppositions and weak members of their parties and negotiate the exchange of their votes for cash. The sellers are in return happily received money from the politicians without minding that they have sold their political right to vote for candidate of their choice, thereby compromising their governance.

(2) Collection of gifts etc for Votes: This particular strategy of vote buying is prominent in the rural communities, where the vote brokers and politicians gladiators visit the rural people during the election period and share household items etc. to the rural poor people telling them

that they (the politicians) care for them (the poor) and are here to alleviate their suffering by giving them these gifts and in return request for their votes with the intention that when they win, they will do more. These gifts influences the electorate's decisions and guides their voting pattern in favour of the highest giver / donors.

(3)The use of force on the voters: Most times where the vote brokers and political godfather's in the party are not able to negotiate with the electorates on means of exchanging their votes or outright buying, they resort to the use of force on such electorates in a particular area where they perceived high rate of opposition. They apply this force with the assistance of political thugs, influential community leaders and / or compromised security agents. With the use of these personnel, the voters are intimidated to either vote in a particular direction, surrender their votes to such politician or absent themselves from voting. However, these personnel are highly paid for their services to secure their votes in their respected area in favour of their political master.

(4) Free medical services and skill acquisition programme: During election period, politicians contesting election carryout free medical services and skill acquisition programmes for the people within their area. This free medical service and skill acquisition programmes are targeted at convincing the electorates to vote for them and some of the beneficiaries are influenced by the services and divert their votes in favour of such politicians / party.

(5) Pay voters to absent from voting: Most time political parties particularly the ruling and major opposition political parties compromise the leadership of the smaller opposition parties not to present candidate for certain elected offices / positions during the election. Such compromise makes the members of the small opposition parties to be absent from voting or if present will vote in favour of the paying ruling or major opposition party on such election. This is achieve through compromising the leadership of such

smaller opposition political parties by giving them financial rewards and promises for political appointment in name of inclusive government when the ruling or major opposition party emerge winner.

Causes of Vote Buying in Nigeria

(1) Hunger and poverty: Poverty and lack is argued as one of the causes of vote buying in Nigeria. Poverty from the perspective of poor economic status and inability to afford the basic needs of life and classified such people as the poor. The poor are usually identifies as the weak and hungry people in the society, who lack basic needs and therefore sees the election in Nigeria as the opportunity to alleviate their poverty through the sale of their vote to the highest bidder to make quick money for feeding and clothing. The poor are easily persuaded to sell their vote representing their political right on account of economic survival.

(2).The stomach infrastructure: Ariyomo, (2018 p.33) argued that stomach infrastructure has taken a political dimension to represent a vigorous and structured food provision scheme for the possibly underfed ones in Nigeria. Traditionally, stomach infrastructure is aimed at reducing food insecurity by providing food items to the poor. Ironically, this scheme in Nigeria is terminal and only operational during elections, when political parties and politicians take advantage of the hunger in the land to distribute food items and cloths to the eligible voters in their clusters and negotiate with the voters on the condition of how much will be given to them during the day of election. With hunger, voters accept to trade their votes for money and are willing to vote in any particular direction as directed by the political party. The stomach infrastructure accelerates vote buying rather than food security in Nigeria.

(3) Ignorant of electorates: Because of poor orientation inability of the state to properly educate the electorates on their voting rights, participation process and its implications accounts for the voters poor orientation in

Nigeria. The political parties and their vote brokers take advantage of the voters ignorance and sway them into selling their votes to reduce stress during elections, by informing them of the anticipated violence during elections. This persuasion frightens the voters and compels them to sell their votes for security of their life.

(4) The Electoral Law of Independent National Electoral Commission: political parties and its agents resort to vote buying in Nigeria as a result of their inability to subvert the electoral process put in place by (INEC). Yakubu, (2018 p.45) in his press release on Ekiti State Governorship elections in 2018, affirms that the parties and its candidates resorted to vote buying as a means of winning elections due to their inability to either carry the ballot boxes or write results in their favour. This proves that the commission has put in measures to checkmate such irregularities, and the only way out to rig elections is to buy votes from the electorates.

(5) Political Parties propaganda: During political campaign, parties carry out propaganda against the other party candidates. In most cases, the opposition party carry this propaganda against the ruling party on state of insecurity, administrative failure and development inadequacies as a strategy to discredit and make the ruling party unpopular, thereby inducing the voters with money and items to vote in favour of the opposition party for good governance. With this form of propaganda most voters are persuaded to surrender their voting rights and vote for the opposition party after receiving.

(6). Compromising attitudes of security agents and electoral officers: The security and electoral personnel deployed to election duties are not properly armed, sometimes without functional vehicles and communication gadgets. The political gladiators take advantage of this weakness, and in pretense to provide for the personnel, the politicians donate vehicles and other facilities including financing the personnel welfare on the elections days. In reciprocation to the donations, the security and electoral

personnel are compromised to work in favour of such donors against oppositions who are not able to cater for the personnel welfare. According to Ojo,(2018 p.44) vote buying is thrived in Nigeria due to weak and compromising security and electoral personnel during elections as noted in Ekiti state Governorship elections in 2018, bye-elections in Rivers and Kogi States in 2018 among others.

The implications of Vote Buying in Nigeria:

(a). Loss of confidence in the democratization process: Some political aspirants vying for elective office are no longer voted into offices on account of their credibility and party manifesto, rather on account of their financial capacity to price higher and pay same to the voters in exchange of their votes. This results to democracy for sale to the highest bidder and discourage electorates who wish to vote based on candidates credibility and his/her party manifesto, thereby making such electorates to lose confidence on democratic process in Nigeria leading to low turnout of voters in elections.

(b). Loss of Vote right: According to Obaigbene, (2018 p.32) vote buying accounts for losing their voting power in the alter of vote selling for money and other valuable during elections. Arising from the persistent bidding for vote at different prices by the political parties and its aspirants, the voters see vote selling as economic opportunity with a better value than exercising their voting right, and therefore sell their votes for money and loss their voting power and democratic participation in the elections.

(c). Emergence of wrong candidates as winners: Since vote buying has because the political and economic strategy to acquire more votes and win elections, it beholds on the candidates to price higher for the votes and the financial capacity of the candidates to pay same to the voters to determine his/her election victory. Some political parties take advantage of the vote buying to field in unpopular candidate without credibility, but who are loyal to the party godfathers for elections. And with the vote buying

process, such candidate's wins the election. The effect is that the candidate will be handicapped to administer the state, but will pay more attention to appease the party godfathers than embarking on development of the people.

(d). Diversion and wastage of state resources: Political parties and its candidates spend more money on vote buying to ensure its election victory. While the ruling party use the state resources to achieve the vote buying process, the opposition parties go as far as borrowing money with interest to finance vote buying for its election victory on the condition that it will pay back when its candidates emerge the winner and assumes office. Upon the election victory and inauguration into office, such candidate first plan to recover his/her investment in vote buying during elections, including payment of the debts. And this is done with fast speed using the state resources, thereby causing developmental set back to the state and the people.

(e). High cost of democratization process: The quest for vote buying has made the vote sellers to escalate the price and has pushed the democratization process to be more expensive financially. With the huge funds required to acquire the needed votes for election victory, some political parties and its candidates who cannot afford such huge amount of money to buy votes end up declining interest to participate in the contest for the political offices, despite their outstanding leadership quality and intellectual capacity to deliver the dividends of democracy, thereby leaving the contest for elective offices for those who can afford the high cost of vote buying in the democratic process in Nigeria.

(f). Electoral violence in the democratic process: Violence as an extreme form of conflict arise in the democratic process as a result of persistence quest for political power and conflict of political interest. As a result of high demands for vote and the scarcity of eligible voters with valid vote, who are willing and able to sell their votes, the political parties and its candidates struggle for the limited votes to buy. This struggle

attracts disagreements and clash of interest and when not properly managed escalates to violence in the electoral process. Leading to loss of life, properties destroyed of the democratic process and development in the state.

(g). Intra and extra – Party Conflict: This conflict occurs arising from internal disagreement and conflict of interest between members of the party in an attempt to protect a particular interest, usually political interest. Sometime other party may cause conflict in another party. Vote buying breeds this type of conflict particularly during primaries to elect the party officials and its flag bearer. During the primaries, party candidates struggle for the votes of the delegate's and buys up as many as they can based on their financial capacity. The struggle for buying of delegates votes result to conflict among the party candidates and climax to internal party conflict between the party leaders. This conflict is not healthy for democracy, as it to division and loss democratic focus and poor participation in the party affairs. This study observed that both All Progressive Party (APC) and People Democratic Party (PDP) in its 2018 primaries, where those who cannot afford to buy the required votes of the delegates for their primary election victory opted for indirect primaries to enable such candidates buy up the votes of the delegates. Also the highest bidder won the primary election. This resulted in internal conflict of the parties, decamping of some party members to opposition parties, litigations, and deprivation of voting rights of some party members.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, vote buying is an electoral fraud carried out by the votes sellers and votes buyers, and facilitated by the vote brokers and political godfathers. It involves the exchange of votes for money, gifts and food items etc between the sellers and buyers. It is caused as a result of compromised INEC and Security agents, poor equipped security personnel, hunger and poverty of majority of the voters, politics of stomach infrastructure among others in Nigeria. Its effects are enormous, particularly in the areas of loss of

voting right, making democracy to be for sale to the highest bidder, creating high cost of elections, distorting the tenet of democracy etc. Significantly, its effects are more negative than positive on political and democratic participation and therefore the study made some useful recommendations as strategies to reduce vote buying and improve effective political and democratic involvement and participation in Nigeria.

Recommendations:

1. Proper enforcement of the electoral laws 2010 as amended on electoral fraud, including vote buying to reduce the abuse of vote buying and distortion of democratization process in Nigeria.
2. INEC and Security officials should be provided with the necessary equipment and welfare during elections to avoid them asking for support from the political parties and its candidates. This will reduce the negotiation and interaction chances to compromise the officials for vote buying in elections.
3. The federal government should without delay establish the electoral offences commission with necessary powers to investigate and prosecute electoral offenders including vote buying and selling in Nigeria.
4. The INEC should improve on its secret ballot system using the electronic machines to reduce human influence and vote buying. This will reduce the outright purchase of votes cards from voters to be used during manual voting by another imposter or the rush for buying of voters cards.
5. The Nigerian national orientation agency should embark on political education and orientation of the electorates for effective voter's education on the principles and practice of electoral laws with its implications. This will enhance the consciousness of human rights among the citizens and the need for them to participate in elections by casting their vote's base on their conscience as their right without being compromised.
6. Poverty alleviation programmes of the country should be implemented properly to reduce rural poverty and income inequality. This will as well reduce the electorate hungers and quest to sell their votes for money to feed.
7. Political parties should apply the rule of law and proper internal democracy in the management of its internal affairs, particularly parties primaries to reduce vote buying by unpopular candidates, distortion of party democratic activities and enhance wider participation of the party members in the elections
8. The political parties should use constructive propaganda, and policy that is focused to drive the voters consciousness for the development of political ideology and voting pattern, and not used to deceived the electorates to buy their votes.

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