

Politics of vote buying: A menace to vibrant democracy in Nigeria

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International Journal of Science and Technology Research Archive, 2022, 03(01), 143–147

Publication history: Received on 14 July 2022; revised on 25 August 2022; accepted on 27 August 2022

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53771/ijstra.2022.3.1.0078>

Abstract

This paper reviews the vote buying in Nigeria electoral and political process, while vote buying has constantly been the bane to better democratic process, on the contrary, the expectation of representative democracy was thwarted. This has been a cyclical element that has posed lot of danger to getting the best out of election as a major element of democracy in selecting an apt candidate that will bring out best in governance. The structure is now inherently bastardized and has been a cankerworm to primary and general election as it cannot survive the potency of electoral act. While efforts to eliminate vote buying or money politics proved abortive, this in turn necessitated this paper in bringing the best out of our processes.

Keywords: Politics; Democracy; Voting Buying; General election; Primary election

1. Introduction

Contesting for political positions is now an exclusively reserved for the privileged bourgeoisie. Poor but qualified aspirant are now left at the expense of corrupted rich, who in turn trade their money in order to siphon public fund at the emergence on power. Although the electoral act of the federal republic of Nigeria prohibits vote buying, it's so disheartening that they were not curtailed over the years. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as the electoral body in Nigeria is saddled with the responsibility of monitoring and regulating excess expenses of aspirants, but it's unfortunate that the body has not really been efficient in such obligation.

This does makes it genuine in this study to explore this common ugly phenomenon of vote buying in Nigeria's politics and its implications as a menace to the vibrant democracy in Nigeria. Vote buying has eaten the cankerworm of our democratic system. It has posed a lots of danger to the emergence of right candidacy in Nigeria primaries and general elections, It has become a known fact that votes are now being sold to the highest bidder as Buying and selling of votes has become a fixture in the Nigeria's political arrangement and it has posed a great challenge to the democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Across the world, election remains a process whereby leaders are elected into political offices. It is a universally accepted process through which candidates are chosen by the electorate to represent a body or community in a larger entity of government. It is still one of the essential features of democracy.

Democracy itself is considered to be the best form of government all over the world but It's application has been bastardized in Nigeria due to the menace of vote-buying. Indeed, vote-buying has taken over the electioneering process in Nigerian politics. Essentially, the electorate trade their votes for financial aid and foodstuffs.

Researchers have made it known that one in five Nigerians has received an offer to sell their vote [1]. During

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electioneering process, Nigerian politicians have been known to offer money, commodities such as food like rice, bread, salt, beans and vegetable oil and also items like umbrellas, T-shirt, caps, bags and brooms etc to the voters in a deliberate attempt to buy their vote.

The Chairman of CDD's Election Analysis Centre (EAC), Prof. Adele Jinadu, revealed at a preliminary briefing of journalists in Abuja on the conduct of the governorship election that the Center for Democracy and Development (CDD) field observers documented 41 instances of vote buying and selling at polling units across six Local Government Areas (LGAs) during the governorship election in Ekiti state held on the 18th of June, 2022. According to the civil society group, the cases were recorded at Ado-Ekiti, Ijero, Ikole Irepodun/Ifelodun, Ise/Orun and Moba LGAs of Ekiti.

While in their reports, observers under Yiaga Africa Watching the Vote (WTV) documented how the party agents of All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) were doling out cash – ranging from N5,000 to N10,000 – in exchange for the votes of the willing sellers, thereby turning an election that should have been free and fair to a trade by batter process. In Ijero LGA, specifically, Yiaga Africa also observed APC agents sharing N7,000 per voter. In Ado-Ekiti, as shown in its report, Yiaga Africa also observed the party agents of the ruling party sharing N5,000 to every electorate, who provided evidence that they voted for the APC in their polling centres.

Meanwhile at the recently concluded Osun State gubernatorial election which held on the 16th of July 2022, a new method of vote buying was observed. The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room said codes and coupons were used to extract commitments from voters in the Osun governorship election, as opposed to the blatant money exchanging hands in the Ekiti election conducted in June. The Coalition of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) made this known in its Second Preliminary Statement on the Osun Governorship Election. In addition, Operatives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) arrested at least three suspects with respect to vote buying during the Osun governorship election.

It is generally believed and assumed that electioneering process in Nigeria is not complete without politicians greasing the hands of the voters. This is seen in the recently concluded Ondo State gubernatorial election where money and foodstuffs were distributed by the politicians to lure voters into voting for them. 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 [2].

This study tends to examine the phenomenon of vote buying in Nigeria and evaluate its implications as a menace to the vibrant democracy in Nigeria in order to find long lasting solutions to the dreaded monster. In doing this, the study is divided into five sections. 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.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This review espoused Political Economy Approach. Political economics is resolve into two sections: Classical Political Economy and Modern Political Economy. Classical Political Economy studies the workshop of proponents similar as Machiavelli, Adam Smith, and Karl Marx. Ultramodern Political Economy, on the other hand, studies the work of ultramodern proponents, economists, and political scientists like John Maynard Keynes, Milton Freidman, and Friedrich Hayek.

The study of political economy is told by game theory, as it involves different groups contending for finite coffers and power that assess which programs will give the most salutary results. It also relates to the capability of the economy to achieve the asked results. Game theory is a theoretical frame for conceiving social situations among contending players. In some areas, game theory is the wisdom of strategy, or at least the optimal decision- timber of independent and contending actors in a strategic setting. Game theory is basically an approach to understanding collaborative decision-making. Although game theory is applicable to salon games like poker or ground, utmost exploration in game theory focuses on how groups of people interact. There are two main branches of game theory i.e. cooperative and non-cooperative game proposition. The key to game theory and to understanding why better people may make the world a worse place is to understand the delicate balance of equilibrium (David K. Levine). The crucial settlers of game theory were mathematician John von Neumann and economist Oskar Morgenstern in the 1940s. Mathematician John Nash is regarded by most scholars as giving the first significant extension of the von Neumann and Morgenstern work. The focus of game theory is the game, which serves as a model of an interactive situation among rational players. The key to game theory is that one player's profit is contingent on the strategy enforced by the other player.

The game identifies the players' individualities, preferences, and available strategies and how these strategies affect the result. Depending on the model, various conditions or hypothesis may be necessary.

The applicability of this approach to this study is that the desire and struggle to retain or control state power by politicians makes them play the game of vote-buying in order to impact voters' opinions in the result of the election. They exploit the fiscal difficulties of voters by dangling money bags and gifts to voters as a price for voting for the politician.

1.2 An Overview of the phenomenon of vote buying

Vote buying as a phenomenon in the society is not limited to a particular form it has taken various forms which may include the form of direct payments to voters, coupons and codes given to voters etc. To Nurdin [3], vote buying, in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange. They opined that candidates "buy" and citizens "sell" votes, as they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets. This shows that the act of vote buying is an exchange of value in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder in order to receive either a financial or material reward. Political parties try to induce voters to vote for them by offering them material rewards thereby solidifying the fact that vote buying is indeed a form of market exchange.

Various Studies have shown that vote buying is a widespread phenomenon in the USA and Britain [4], Taiwan [5], Nicaragua [6], Lebanon [7] and Argentina [8]. Vote buying has become an essential aspect of an election in African countries like Kenya and Ghana [9] Sao Tome and Principe, Nigeria [10-13] where by political parties openly buy votes without consequences. The candidate's flyer, for example, may be stapled to packages of food handed out to voters or cash may be attached to flyers.

1.3 Implications of vote buying on Nigerian Democracy

The menace of vote buying has wrecked a lot of havoc on the Nigerian Democracy. A fact worthy of note that despite the fact that vote buying during election is not only practiced in Nigeria, there has been a significant increase in its practice and as a result, it has become an important method or way of winning elections as witnessed in the Ekiti gubernatorial election held on the 18th of June, 2022 and also during the Osun gubernatorial election held on the 16th of July, 2022. However, the magnitude of vote-buying in Ekiti state 2022 election was so glaring to the extent that videos were circulated on social media pages. That occurrence made further crystalized the fact that vote buying is now considered a norm in Nigeria and many Nigerians see elections as money making opportunity.

The consequences of vote buying are multifarious, particularly for a developing republic like Nigeria. It's consummate to note that vote buying overly raises the cost of choices thereby shutting out rivals with little finances and promoting political corruption. When palm is bought rather than won fairly, it obviously leads to State capture. What happens after State capture can best be imagined? This implies that vote buying can spark corruption by politicians after they're voted into power. This is because they would want to recoup the money expended during electioneering process. This can lead to the abuse of state coffers.

Again, the use of incentives to buy votes may have ruinous impacts on Nigeria's choices. It can negatively impact the quality (freeness and fairness) of choices. Vote buying can contribute to the wrong political parties being elected to serve the State and leadership positions turns a prize for the top bidder. Once voters are paid to cast their votes in a certain way they become enslaved by their political paymasters as, by dereliction, their rights to challenge their vote buying political paymasters have been paralyzed. As vote buying is so wide, it raises concerns about the quality of arising democratic institutions and how potential elections conducted will help to deliver better and further responsible governments.

In addition, vote trading inversely has the tendency to immortalize bad governance. It not only compromises the well-being of those who sold their vote for instant pleasure, but also the future of those who didn't sell their votes but are inescapably exposed to bad governance that results from such a fraudulent process. For every vote traded, there are numerous people who would suffer the unintended consequences when the traded votes make the difference between winning and losing in the election. Put else, vote buying vitiates the allegiance of the "elected" government to the ideal of good governance.

Furthermore, vote buying inversely compromises the credibility, legality and integrity of elections. It undermines the integrity of elections as the winners are frequently the loftiest stab and not necessarily the most popular or believable rivals [14]. Vote buying surely has major negative recriminations for the electoral and the political system as a whole.

It thus discourages conscientious people from partaking in electoral politics and causes citizens to lose faith in State institutions, and leads to political and voter apathy.

Recommendations

- The electorate should be given acceptable exposure 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 defense to the conduct of reckless and asleep leaders when they begin to destroy the nation thereby mortgaging and risking their future and that of their children.
- The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) should develop a strategic cooperative framework for effective monitoring of political parties' campaign finances in order to effectively check electoral fraud, including vote buying
- Political parties and their candidates should learn how to engage on politics of decency, zero tolerance, transparency and accountability with a view to shirking acrimony, covetousness, sacrilege against the rule of law and due process, which is inimical to credible election and democratic process in Nigeria.
- Civil society groups should endorse and apply pressure for police and other law enforcement agencies to arrest, probe and diligently make those involved in the act of vote trading.
- To enhance the secretiveness of the ballot, the INEC should construct a collapsible voting chamber that will make it tricky for party agents to see a voter thumbprint on the ballot paper. conduct that reveal the vote cast by voters should be criminalised.
- Enforcement of the existing electoral regulations on party finances including campaign programs is largely supported.
- Anti-craft agencies should as a matter of necessity unite with banks and other fiscal institutions to thwart the deals and the movement of cash during elections in Nigeria.
- Nigerian democratic institutions should be strengthened to insure an enduring democratic process.

2. Conclusion

This research work discovered that vote buying during election in Nigeria has become the new norm and is now being done without remorse as displayed during the Ekiti and Osun state 2022 gubernatorial election. The study also noted that vote buying has done major harm to the Nigerian democracy and it needs to be curbed before it totally destroys the Nigerian democracy. In addition, the research work also gave several ways of curbing vote buying among the candidates and the electorates.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge Dr. Jiboku Peace, a Senior lecturer at Olabisi Onabanjo University for her guidance and supporting in the writing of this paper

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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