



# Vote -buying, Voting Behavior and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Osimen Goddy Uwa<sup>1</sup>, Iloh Charles Emeka<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of International Relations & Diplomacy, Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti-Nigeria

<sup>2-4</sup> Department of International Relations & Diplomacy, Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti-Nigeria

## Abstract

*Nigeria's democracy is under threat following growing trend of vote buying and selling in elections. Capacity, competence and character are not parameters for assessing electoral candidates. Cash-for-vote or 'see and buy' is emerging as the major determinant of electoral choice. Besides being illegal as explicitly stated in Nigeria's electoral laws, vote buying also has a tendency to aggravate corruption in public offices as those who hold public mandates are made to seek corrupt means of enriching themselves towards future elections. Vote buying, in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange. Candidates "buy" and citizens/electorate "sell" votes, as they buy and sell apples, shoes, or television sets. The act of vote buying by this view is a contract, or perhaps an auction in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder. This is why money bags venture into politics with ultimate ambition of capturing power with ease. Public offices have become chattels with rich politicians becoming mercantile too. This menace is undermining electoral choices and could imperil Nigeria's democracy if not abated. It is on this note, the paper critically examine the concepts of vote-buying and voting behavior, and its negative effects or challenges it reposed on the electoral and democratic consolidation in Nigeria using qualitative method of data collection. The study revealed that vote buying politics has a great setback on voting behavior and democratic governance in Nigeria. The paper posited that vote buying is consistent with the continued materialization and commercialization of party politics in prebendal Nigeria wherein electioneering and partisan relations are commodified in a manner that translates to economic exchange. Elections provide citizens with a say in the decisions that affect their everyday lives and provide governments with a legitimate authority to govern. However, only when elections are free, fair and credible can they help promote democracy, human rights and security. When elections are fraudulent and subject to vote rigging, they have the potential to trigger political instability and violence. It is also revealed that effective governance, virile democratic institutions and citizenship rights are achievable only when undue interferences are avoided. The paper further revealed that any polity where voters are not completely or as much as possible insulated from outside pressure most especially, they cannot choose freely. It notes that if power and money influence take the centre stage of determining the elector choices, the very essence of constitutional rights of the citizens to freely exercise their freedom of choice and equality in the democratic society may be called to question while such good governance and development will remain a mirage. The study contends that resolving the issue and reversing the trend may involve general economic empowerment of voters (citizens), far more than and beyond casual tinkering with modalities of voting and improving balloting secrecy by the authorities. It will take good governance, legal enforcement, prioritisation of employment generation, restoration of ideological base for political parties, holistic war on corruption, and effective poverty reduction as policy options towards reversing and remedying the ugly trend.*

**Keywords:** Election, Vote -buying, Voting Behavior, democratic consolidation, Nigeria

## Introduction

Vote buying has been an integral element of money politics in Nigeria. Recent experiences however show that vote buying takes place at multiple stages of the electoral cycle and has been observed eminently during voter registration, the nomination period, campaigning and election day. It is more predominant during Election Day, shortly before or during vote casting. In the Vote for Cash approach a person has to show evidence that he or she has voted for the party in order to receive payment for the vote. Like a typical market place, the politicians, political parties, and party agents are the vote buyers while prospective voters are the sellers. The commodity on sale is the

vote to be cast while the medium of exchange could be monetary and non-monetary items. The market force that determines the value or price of a vote is the level of desperation of politicians to win in a locality. Voting is the main form of political participation in democratic societies. Voting is one of the most fundamental aspects of civic engagement. Many political scientists link voting with the vibrancy of the democratic process and argue that declining voting rates may be symptomatic of a “democratic deficit”. Vote buying and voting behavior are key phenomenon in Nigeria electoral process. Vote buying occurs when a political party or candidate seeks to buy the vote of a voter in an election. Vote buying can take various forms such as a monetary exchange, as well as an exchange for necessary goods or services. The practice of vote buying appears in many societies and organizations, and in different forms. Obvious examples include direct payments to voter’s donations to legislators, campaign by special interest groups, the buying of the voting shares of a stock, and the promise of specific programs or payments to voters conditional on the election of a candidate. This practice is often used to incentivize or persuade voters to turn out to elections and vote in a particular way.

Election has become the most acceptable means of changing leadership in any given political system. There are elements that make electorates vote or not to vote in an election. These elements are different and dependent on the socio-cultural, economic, and political background of the nation and voters at one point or the other. Money politics or vote-buying have become strategies by many politicians today in the world and Nigerian politicians in particular. The simple logic behind the adoption of the method is because of their inability to convince the electorate through their manifesto as what they stand for, their mission and vision and most importantly, what the electorate stands to benefit if voted into power. Vote-Buying connote the exchange of voting right by the voters with money from the candidates in an election. It is a process whereby voter’s conscience and views are manipulated to the advantage of the political parties’ candidates in an election through the use of money or other material things to induce and appeal to the electorate directly or indirectly.

According to Fredrick and Andrea’s (2005), candidate ‘buy’ and citizens/electorate ‘sell vote’, as they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets. The act of Vote-Buying by this view is a contract or perhaps an auction in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder. Parties and candidates buy votes by offering particularistic materials to voters. Candidates may generally aspire to purchase political support at the ballot box in accordance with the idea of market change. Vote-buying may carry different meaning in different cultural context (Ovwasa, 2013).

Paradoxically, money itself has become a dominant factor in African politics. Money seems to have taken the Centre stage in the political process in most countries and in the Nigerian politics. It is, sadly, now playing an increasingly critical role. It even appears to be so dominant in the electoral process to such an extent that the word 'money politics' with a pejorative connotation, has crept into the country’s political lexicon. It is now a critical variable when assessing the level of political corruption in the country.

Vote-buying in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange (Ovwasa, 2013). The Nigerian state often experiences governmental instability in the forms of bad policy options and implementation. The basic necessities of life such as electricity supply, water supply, employment and quality education are inadequate in the Nigerian society. Democracy which is adjudged to be the best form of government all over the world is also being constantly assaulted in Nigeria due to the phenomenon of money politics and vote buying. Although, Nigeria enthroned democratic governance in the fourth republic on May 29th, 1999, the dividends of democracy to the people are very scanty and far apart. This is because the concept and practice of democracy appears to be at variance in Nigeria. Actually, money and vote buying have vitiated the good qualities of democracy in the country.

Vote buying is prohibited in Nigeria and be categorized as serious offense too. For instance, Article 130 of the Electoral Act 2010, as amended, states that:

A person who — (a) corruptly by himself or by any other person at any time after the date of an election has been announced, directly or indirectly gives or provides or pays money to or for any person for the purpose of corruptly influencing that person or any other person to vote or refrain from voting at such election, or on account of such person or any other person having voted or refrained from voting at such election; or (b) being a voter, corruptly accepts or takes money or any other inducement during any of the period stated in paragraph (a) of this section, commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of N100,000 or 12 months imprisonment or both. Similarly, the 2018 Revised Code of Conduct for Political Parties in section VIII (e) provides that, "... all political parties and their agents shall not engage in the following practice: buying of votes or offer any bribe, gift, reward, gratification or any other monetary or material considerations or allurement to voters and electoral officials”.

Notwithstanding its prohibition, vote buying continues to be a widespread practice in Nigeria’s recent elections. Although vote buying has become ubiquitous in recent elections, its history predates the return to democracy in May 1999. There have been allegations of vote buying in the electoral history of Nigeria. It was rife during the Social Democratic Party presidential primary in Jos in 1992. Indeed, vote buying was part of the reason adduced by

Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida for annulling the 12 June 1993 presidential poll which was hailed as the freest and fairest election in Nigeria's history. Even before the presidential election, and indeed at the party conventions, we had full knowledge of the bad signals pertaining to the enormous breach of the rules and regulations of democratic elections. There were proofs as well as documented evidence of widespread use of money during the party primaries as well as the presidential election. Evidence available to government put the total amount of money spent by the presidential candidates at over two billion, one hundred million naira (N2.1 billion). The use of money was again the major source of undermining the electoral process.

Although money and other valuables can be used to effectuate vote buying, political actors have adopted two main approaches to buying votes for Election Day.

The first is the Cash for Vote approach. It involves giving or promising the prospective voter some agreed amount of money well before the individual casts his or her vote at the polling station. The payment is done before the actual voting, and could be within the vicinity of the polling station or farther away. The "settlement" is made secretly or in the open. Often, the vote buyers demand evidence of ownership of a voter's card and assurance that the voter will vote for their party before offering the money. In this approach, trust is key to the contract. It is also known as the pre-paid method of vote buying.

The second approach is the Vote for Cash. It involves giving or rewarding the voter with the agreed amount of money or material compensation after the individual has shown evidence that he or she voted for the party. There are several ways the voter can prove to the vote buyer that he or she voted for the agreed candidate. One method is where the voter shrewdly displays the ballot paper that (s)he has thumb printed in favour of a particular party, so that the party agent standing strategically nearby can confirm compliance with the unholy contract as (s)he emerges from the cubicle at the polling station. Another method is for the voter to photograph the thumb printed ballot paper to show as evidence. Thereafter, compensation in cash and/or kind can occur either immediately or at the close of balloting, and may take place within the precinct of the polling station or at an agreed place. In this approach, evidence is key to the consummation of the contract. This approach is also known as the "see and buy" or the post-paid method.

The vote buying practice, which is completely antithetical to the ethos and norms of democracy, has become a common feature of party primaries and general elections conducted in recent years in Nigeria. For example, during the All Progressive Congress (APC) presidential primary in Lagos State before the 2015 and 2019 General elections, it was reported that "over 8 000 delegates who participated allegedly made US\$5 000 each from the candidates. Delegates were supposed to have received US\$2 000 each from the Atiku Abubakar group and also US\$3 000 each from the Buhari group. Given that more than 8 000 delegates were reported to have attended the primaries, the competing camps could have spent more than US\$16 million and US\$24 million respectively on vote buying at the primary stage". There were widespread allegations of vote buying in the off-cycle governorship elections in Edo and Ondo states in 2016. In the 28 September 2016 gubernatorial election in Edo, observers reported massive vote buying by the two main political parties, the APC and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The parties were accused of giving N3 000 to N4 000 for votes in several polling units. Similarly, in the 26 November 2016 governorship election in Ondo State, it was observed that members of the APC, the PDP and the Alliance for Democracy were giving money to voters at most polling centres across the state. Some polling stations in Odigbo, Okitipupa and Ilaje local government areas were given N450 000 while each voter got between N3 000 and N5 000.

Vote trading often takes place in the presence of security agents who appear unable, unwilling or too compromised to deter such electoral offences. In the 18 November 2017 gubernatorial election in Anambra State, many observers condemned the brazen incidences of vote buying during the poll, stating that the level of commercialisation of the vote was an eyesore to democracy. In particular, the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room noted that "even more lamentable was the fact that the buying and selling of votes took place in the full glare of security men and election officials. It was simply a bazaar in which the election officials and security agencies were undoubtedly complicit". Widespread acts of vote-buying were also reported during the recently held governorship election in Ekiti State on 14 July 2018. For example, the Punch newspaper documented the case of a retiree who claimed that an APC agent offered him money to vote for the party.

The problem with this situation is that the electoral process is often compromised resulting in elections not being free and fair. It is pertinent to observe that it is not in any way being suggested that the use of money by political parties or any person or group of persons in politics has inherent corruptive influence. The truth is that, money is needed for sundry services and logistics such as mobilization for political campaigns and rallies, printing of posters and manifestoes, production of party emblems and other symbols etc. The only worry, however, is the noticeable corrupting influence of vote-buying, and its negative impact on good governance in Nigeria. So many reasons can be adduced as being responsible for the persistent and increasing level of vote-buying and voting behaviour in Nigeria. Some of these factors include ignorance on the parts of the electorates, apathy, poverty, inadequate information or lack of awareness and inadequate sensitization, willingness on the part of the voters and deceit by the politicians. There is also attitudinal problem on the side of the people involved in both buying and selling. Our attitude toward politics is not good because most politicians view it as a call to investment from which

huge benefits is expected and not a call to serve humanity. Electorate on their parts sees politics especially during elections as an opportunity to sell their vote to represent their own share of national cake since they do not have access to where the national cake is being shared (Ovwasa, 2013).

For a country whose citizens have been chanting “we want change”, vote buying has been acting as a veil that is blocking their eyes from reality. So to let it go slide at first I think we should, and then apparently we do it free and fair. There is need to avoid sentiment, religion and culture. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to examine vote buying and voting behavior in Nigeria. Other general objectives of the paper are; to examine the relationship between vote buying and voting behavior, to examine the causes of vote buying in Nigeria, to examine the major forms of vote buying and related threat it may cause to democratic sustenance, to analyze the role of the parties and voters preferences in determining the winner in an election, this study will also focus on the reason why people vote the way they do and to suggest ways of improving our political system. In attend to do this; the following questions will be addressed. What are the causes of vote buying in Nigeria? What are the effects of vote buying on democratic sustenance? , What are the implications of election rigging on democratic sustenance? What is the strategies use in vote buying during election? What is the relationship between vote buying and voting behavior and which ways can the political system improved in Nigeria?

### **Understanding the Phenomenon of Vote Buying/Selling in Nigeria**

Owen (2013) defined vote-buying “as a process consisting of an offer made to purchase the vote of an individual of voting age, who accepts the offer, receives compensation, shows up at the polling station, and then votes as paid.” Voting behaviour is a form of political behaviour which explains how and why decisions are made by public decision makers. It focuses on why people vote as they do and how they arrive at the decisions they make. This implies that decisions at elections are determined by such factors, as gender, age, education affiliation to ethnic groups (Fredrick, 2005). Furthermore, factors such as assessments of certain collective characteristics such as personal qualities, abilities, evaluation of performance, party identification and ideology are also determinants of candidate choice (Lindberg, 2006) He further noted, that voters’ personal ideology about a candidate’s Charisma determined their voting preferences. They found that a combination of voter’s personal ideological position and leaders’ charisma predicted voter’s behaviour. Also the stimuli voters receive from political parties shape voters’ ideology and behavior which he refer to this as clientelistic voting based on personal ideology and affective ties of patronage.

Lindberg and Morrison (2017) found this to be a common feature in African political systems. The Patron-clientelistic networks of patronage and personal loyalty shaped the personal ideology of voters and the leadership they reproduced. Thus exchanging political support for personalized favours and benefits reproduce pacts of mutual loyalty and voters choose representatives based on how good they are as patrons. In Nigeria, the patronage approach was evident in most states during the 2015 election. Many governorship candidates provided food stuffs and many other items to the people of the state during Christmas and New Year celebration and in exchange for their votes.

Age has been identified as an important factor that determines voting behaviour. Lindberg and Morrison (2017) found that age explained different attitudes towards voting and that there was age difference in voting behaviour among electorates. Also Balogun and Olapegba (2017) in examining the influence of psychological and demographic variables among voters in Ibadan, Nigeria, found that age was a major predictor of voting behaviour. In the same vein they, found that young people in the United Kingdom are the least likely to vote; rather they are bystanders and most likely not registered to vote. The explanation for this is that they are most likely not to be politically engaged.

Simply put, vote buying/selling refers to “the exchange of cash for votes. It is a pattern of ‘money politics’ (Ovwasa, 2014), particularly in under-developed electoral politics where electoral success and/or victory is/are often determined by extra-legal incentives such as vote purchase or vote compulsions. Vote buying/selling follows the logic of economic transaction and/or market exchange, although it is not really governed by open, free market norms (Ovwase, 2014). In this illicit trade, vote becomes an object of economic transaction and is actually bought and sold. Hence, candidates ‘buy’ and citizens/electorate ‘sell’ “votes as they (would) buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets” (cited in Ojo, 2008:111).

Vote buying/selling reduces electoral campaign and voter mobilization to a market scenario whereby votes are auctioned out to competitive bidders. In this regard, parties and candidates compete with one another to purchase electoral support by offering particularistic material inducements to prospective voters. The inducement can be in cash or in kind, or both. It is in kind when money is exchanged in prospect of electoral patronage. It is in kind when material goods (clothes, food stuffs, etc) are used in place of money ( Okoye, 1996). Vote buying/selling is not solely an electoral phenomenon. There is a crucial dimension of vote buying/selling that obtains in the legislative arm of government whereby law-makers trade votes for money (Okeke, 2014). In this respect, legislators may collect money or other material inducements from the political executive or its agents in order to favour a particular bill or policy proposal. This is euphemistically understood in some climes as ‘executive lobbying’.

Vote buying/selling is an important determinant of electoral outcome, particularly in developing democracies. However, the extent to which vote buying/selling actually influences voter behaviour is dependent on a number of factors such as the level of civic/voter education of the electorate, the type of ballot system in operation (open or secret ballot system), as well as other relevant socio-economic and socio-cultural attributes of the electorate. The efficiency of vote buying/selling transaction is likely to be low in contexts where the act is widely perceived as an infraction of public morality and legality. More importantly, the transactional obligation of vote buying/selling is obviously problematic to enforce in electoral politics where proper secret ballot voting is in practice.

In any case, three alternative causes of action are available to the electorates in dealing with the temptation of vote buying/selling. According to Bratton (2008.1) the electorate stands the chance “to refuse, to defect, or to comply”. To refuse is to decline from entering into an agreement to trade ones vote; to defect is to refuse to vote at all, or to vote as one pleases; to comply is to trade ones vote in keeping with the terms of the exchange (Bratton 2008). Refusal is most likely to obtain in a polity characterized by high level of civic orientation and sound political education. Defection is more likely in contexts where the electorates are cross pressured from both sides of a partisan divide, or where the electorates are exposed to both vote buying and violence at the same time (Okoli, 2014). Compliance is a likely option in politics with a more or less open ballot system, or among primordial systems where the electorate hardly acts objectively and independently. Whatever is case, compliance or otherwise is largely a morality issue that is best determined by individual conscience. Vote buying/selling in Nigeria obtains at two important levels of the electioneering process, namely the party nominations (primaries) and the general elections. At the primary elections, votes are usually purchased by candidates or their godfathers through cash transfers to the participating delegates. The monetary prices ranges from hundreds of thousands to millions Naira, depending on the competitive nature of the electoral struggle as well as the financial powers of the candidates or their financiers.

At the general elections, the electorates are often approached with monetary and non-monetary inducements in an attempt to sway their patronage in favour of a particular candidate. Consequently, cash, food stuffs, clothes and other material goods are handed out to prospective voters at campaign rallies and other contact points. This practice is widely acknowledged in the Nigerian contemporary public parlance in the notion of ‘stomach infrastructure’. Political Economy Interrogation of Vote Buying/Selling The structural materialism of Nigeria’s socio-economic formation provides ample incentive and cover for ‘queer capitalist syndrome’ (Okoli, 2014; Okoli and Uhembe, 2014). This is prominently exemplified in the prevalence of unorthodox market relations and practices such as corruption, prostitution, human trafficking, kidnapping, and so on. In this regard, the illicit, the illegitimate, and even the sacred become amenable to commodification and commercialist tendencies. Literally, each of these passes for a business, albeit on the illegal side of it.

The aforementioned tendency is a necessary contradiction of capitalism in its stage of hegemonization. As capitalism seeks to assert its dominance on contemporary society, it tends to penetrate and penetrate even the non-economic, non-market spheres thereof. A crucial dimension of this trend is the annexation and usurpation of the non-market domain (and relations thereof) in such a manner that depicts ‘marketization’ of the wider society (Jessop, 2012). The materialization and commercialization of partisan relations in the fashion of vote buying/selling is a logical consequence of this trend. The material conditions of life in Nigeria encourage and promote vote buying/selling behaviour. The acute livelihood crisis of many Nigerians, exemplified in poverty, unemployment and material destitution, make them susceptible to material inducement in the arena of electioneering. For instance, a jobless, poor fellow who cannot afford his daily meals on predictable basis would hardly resist any temptation to trade his vote. He needs to feed after all. Whether he votes in keeping to the inducement is another issue altogether (Okoli and Okpaleke, 2014; Ovwase, 2014).

### **Theoretical Consideration**

The paper adopts Richard Joseph’s (1991) prebendalism as its theoretical framework. Joseph used the construct of prebendalism to characterize the pattern of politics whereof “state power is sought by all and sundry as a means of personal material aggrandizement (Okoli and Orinya, 2014: 1479). This obtains in a context where the state has usurped the role of the economy as the major wealth creator, employer of labour, and guarantor of socio-economic security (Okoli, 2009; Okoli and Otegwu, 2010; Okoli and Orinya, 2014). The prebendal character of politics in Nigeria has significantly influenced how state power is sought and utilized. In this respect, politicking attracts inestimable premium and high stakes. As observed by Bratton: Elections are struggle over the access to the resources controlled by the state, which are the biggest prize in society. Given these high stakes, politicians resort to a variety of means – whether fair or foul – to attain public office (2008:1). The expediency of power struggles in the arena of electioneering necessitates and compels the adoption of extra-legal incentives to ensure electoral success and victory (Okoli and Iortyer, 2014). In this regard, politicians often resort to material inducement or intimidation in their desperate bid to gain electoral advantage. In this circumstance, vote buying becomes a competitive electoral strategic tactic. The point being established in the foregoing is that prebendal ‘political culture’ in Nigeria has led to the commercialization and materialization of electioneering and partisan relations in

the country. The exchange of votes for money as exemplified in the phenomenon of vote buying/selling is, therefore, a necessary consequence of the prebendal character of politics in Nigeria.

### Methods and Strategies of Vote Buying in Nigeria

Kwasau (2013) enumerated the strategies political parties use to rig elections in Nigeria which include: bribing electoral officials, the police, and other enforcement officials to collude in the acts of rigging; diverting ballot papers to private residence for thump-printing and falsification of electoral papers; multiple voting; using under-aged children as voters; distribution of voting cards to unregistered voters to vote on election days; bribing agents of other political parties to collude with the political party offering the bribe to falsify election results; and distributing food and other goods to induce voters to vote for a particular party or preferred candidates, (Lucky, 2013).

Vote-selling, one of the rigging methods is pervasive in Nigeria where about 20% of voters normally sell their votes, and sizeable numbers of voters are exposed to vote buying (Bratton, 2008; Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, & Nichter, 2014). Vote-buying became an electoral strategy in Nigeria after independence and reached a crescendo during the 1993 primary and presidential elections (Lucky, 2013). It is no more limited to general elections but has extended to primary elections (Olarinmoye, 2008). In recent elections, vote-selling has become the most prominent electoral strategy amongst political parties in Nigeria because of voters' perception that election provides them with opportunities to partake in the sharing of the "national cake" (Onapajo et al., 2015). The political parties in Nigeria engage in the following vote-buying strategies in the process of executing their election budgets for vote-buying:

(a.) Door-to-Door campaigning by local representatives or agents of candidates for political offices and political parties. The Nigerian "door-to-door" campaign is unique in its operation because it involves the distribution of cash to registered voters with the expectation that the electorate who receive cash will reciprocate by voting for the preferred candidates or political parties of the vote-sellers on the Election Day;

(b.) **Mobilization for Voters' Cards Registration:** Political parties and political leaders in the local communities pay cash to individuals of voting age during voters' registration exercises to register to vote in future elections.

(c.) **"See and Buy" vote-buying strategy:** The strategy involves the monitoring of actual votes of vote-sellers at the polling booths by individuals representing political parties or the contestants who position themselves strategically in locations where they could confirm how the voters voted (Onapajo et al., 2015).

(d.) **On-Line Transaction:** Many prospective voters who work and receive salaries from the state government were credited with #3,000 as stipend at the eve of election. Also, unemployed youths numbering over 30 thousand were credited with various amounts ranging between #2,000 and #3,000 each as mobilization from the state government, all with a view to influencing their choice of candidate.

(e.) Various gifts and food items were also distributed by different political parties' weeks/days before the election to woo voters and,

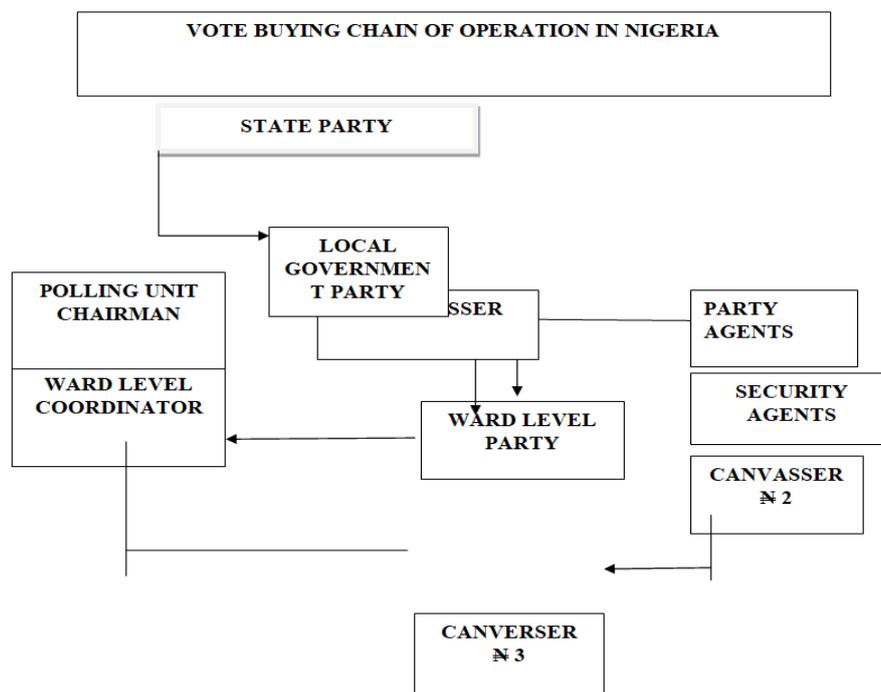
(f.) Suspicious empowerment programmes were carried out prior to the election such as purchase of free JAMB Forms, grading of communities and farm roads, distribution of "empowerment" items like hair dryers, washing machines, power-generating machines to different individuals and groups with a view to securing their support and vote on election day.

### How vote buying influences voting behavior of electorate in Elections

There is a close relationship between poverty, election violence, and vote buying/ selling. For the politicians, this is gold. Poverty plays a crucial role in vote selling and post-election violence in Nigeria and the politicians are aware of this fact. They know that the poor standard of living has driven majority of the people into extreme poverty to the extent that the people are willing to sell their future for a paltry amount. According to the world data lab, an estimated 87 million people in Nigeria now live below the extreme poverty line of \$1.90 a day. This number makes up about 44 percent of the country's population. Based on that data, nearly six Nigerians fall below the extreme poverty line every minute. Vote buying and selling originate from the fact that there is a failed system that makes it possible for the politicians and their agents to buy, and for the people to sell and make some quick money. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be any campaigns that appeal to the politicians not to make such offers for vote buying. In Nigeria, vote buying and selling also involves obtaining people's permanent voters' cards (PVC). In this case, the voting card becomes the property of whoever paid for it and is used exclusively to vote for that aspirant. You might wonder how that is possible since only the rightful owner is able to use the PVC, as it carries the biometric data of the owner.

During the 2019 elections, there were lots of irregularities that were overlooked by both local and international organizations. The most visible of them was the failure of voting tools to function in full capacity. While most of the card readers identified PVCs as original cards, registered in specific voting units, most frequently the biometric part of the card readers failed to make a match between the card and the thumbprint of the card

owner. As a result, most of the election officers abandoned the biometric verification process because the thumbprint recognition part of the biometric equipment simply didn't work. The malfunction of the biometric verification machine opened the floodgates to multiple voting by any individual in possession of PVCs. One is therefore left to wonder if some aspirants and political parties had foreknowledge about the deficiency of the biometric verification part of the card readers and as a result stocked up on PVCs. Agents of aspirants and political parties bought PVCs before and during elections for as low as N5, 000 (approximately \$34 then). In some cases, stealing and selling PVCs became a brisk business, while others willingly and intentionally sold theirs and saw it as "the only dividend of democracy they will ever enjoy". Some thought the money was better than standing under the hot scorching sun for an election that has already been decided by the powers that be. Recently, the governorship election in Ekiti, a south western Nigerian state, was characterized by a pervasive buying and selling of votes. There were reports of political party agents and affiliates openly buying votes on Election Day in voting units. Agents bought, people sold, and everything went back to being normal. In addressing part of the challenges that give room for vote buying and selling, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has to rectify the malfunction witnessed with the biometric verification of voters in 2015. Local and international organizations and groups must insist that only voters whose biometrics has been verified will be eligible to vote.



Payment point Source: YIAGA AFRICA Initiative, August, 2018

**Factors that Determined the Voting Behavior of Nigerians in the Elections**

Some of these major factors that determined a paradigm shift in voting behavior of Nigerians are as follows: fear, insecurity, expectations and political socialization.

Fear based on psychological literatures, especially in the works of Maddux and Rogers (1983), De Hoog, Stroebe and John (2005) "is a persuasive message that attempts to arouse fear in order to divert behavior through the threat of impending danger or harm". Just as a natural impulse, it is aroused by an impending danger or harm. The danger here is what the Nigerians experienced in the previous government. The relationship between fear and voting behavior was intellectually provided by Ruiter and Abraham (2005) Walkters (2000) Peters, Ruiter and Kok (2014). Their argument is that, people change behaviorally as a result of risk and vulnerability against a particular action. If Nigerians were vulnerable for example, under the previous regime, their lives were then at risk and vulnerable. The inference of this relationship, was given by Witte and Allen, 2000), who believe that, fear "presents a risk, presents the vulnerability to the risk, and then describes a suggested form of protective action". The protective action here represents the shift or the change in voting behavior and pattern. This will also make us understand why the low voter turnout during the 2015 general elections unlike in the previous elections which witnessed massive turnout. This was due to the fear of post-election violence, as people with voter cards fled without voting. The fear of Nigerians not to go back to yesteryears of unemployment, armed robbery, kidnapping, economic difficulty and educational collapse, has made them to change in their voting behavior. The economic theory of democracy as explained in the theoretical framework above indicates that, voters and politicians are rational players. Each will maintain his interest based on the profit he is likely to maximize. For the voters, political

utility in employment opportunities, economic growth and development, increase in per capita income, social welfare, and infrastructure are basic needs. Nigerians changed in their voting behavior because they wanted not to experience the same treatment obtained in the previous government.

- **Insecurity**

The issue of security is a sensitive one in every socio-economic formation. People must be strengthened to have sense of belonging and feel strong to withstand certain security challenges. According to Erich Fromm (2000) the feeling of inferiority is an integral part of insecurity. Security has also been seen as a part of societal basic needs (Alfred, 1964). The insecurity situation in Northern Nigeria has caused about 10849 deaths, thousands injured and property of billions Naira lost (John, 2014; Mark, 2015) Nigerians have experienced what they never did under the previous administration in respect to insecurity. People were dying in Nigeria as in Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Libya, south Sudan or Palestine. People were not protected, no Nigerian was safe and the government refused to put in place a formidable mechanism to restore order and build confidence in people. Nigerians therefore, were forced to make a shift in their voting behavior from the hitherto traditional voting behavior, to a more democratic one. People believed that from their campaigns, the opposition party stood a better chance to make a systemic transformation-hence the voting behavior drastically changed.

- **Expectations**

The bounded rationality model somehow deals with forecast of even less sophisticated scheme (Evans and Honkapohja, 2001) as expected by a people under a particular government. This model may see such people not to expect even more and higher deliveries from the government (Homes and Sorger, 1998) but little expectation as contained in the constitutional framework as the government should discharge its own duties according to the law. Even this was somehow lacking, hence-the behavioral change in voting process of Nigerians as the case may be. The principles of social contract that hold the society between government and the people is the ability of the government to discharge its functions as it relates to: protection of lives and property, education, defense against external aggression, water, roads, power, hospitals and generally speaking, social welfare. The citizenry's expectations from the government are not beyond as mentioned. The citizenry in turn, obey the government, respect the constitution, pay taxes and remain good citizens in the society. It was evident that all the expectations of the people of Nigeria were not met by the previous government and where it was met at all, with just at peripheral level. This has shifted the voting behavior of Nigerians from ethno-religious and regional voting behavior to a democratic one, which is built based on legitimacy by results.

- **Economic Situation**

While adopting the structuralist position of economic crisis, failure and poverty, Rank and Herschl (2006) is of the view that, the government is at fault whenever there is unemployment, economic recession, poverty, low per capita income and other related issues. For example, when the Russian economy was crumbling, the Russians became very much concerned about the future of their federation. With the emergence of president Putin, who strengthened the economic structure of Russia, Putin was able to mobilize voters during elections (even though there were allegations of riggings). Putting continues to be a great political figure of Russia for his determination not to see Russia down. In Nigeria, accordingly, the economic situation has not been good for Nigerians. The number of unemployed has waxed and rising level of inflation with decreased exchange rate of naira with other currencies. If a government structurally fails to protect the economy and allow for economic recessions, such government may force the people change their voting behavior from one pattern to another. This may also make the electorates vote against the ruling party in favor of opposition.

- **Political Socialization**

Political socialization as a process of molding individual's character, attitude and conduct to make him become a proper member of the society, plays significant role in election periods. Socialization as defined, is a "lifelong process of inheriting and disseminating norms, customs and ideologies, providing an individual with the skills and habits necessary for participating within their own society" (Clause, 1968). It is therefore, "the means by which social and cultural continuity are attained" (Macioni, 2010). Socialization or re-socialization of the voting behavior of a people can be done by the family, per groups, religious institutions, schools, the mass media, political parties and other interest groups. The position of family leaders can easily change the mindset of the family members on who to be voted for, what political party should we vote for. Peer groups also have influence over their peers on voting. Schools play prominent role in analyzing moralistic political party structure and the students should be able to determine which government is moralistic and ethical politically which one is not. The media and musicians have really participated in shifting the voting behavior of Nigerians during the 2015 general elections. Children of very young age were clamoring "Sai Baba Buhari" as mantras. When people are preconditioned, prepared or even taught how to vote, whom to vote and what symbol of political party should they go for, they adapt quickly to changes.

### **Factors Responsible For Money Politics, Vote-Buying and Voting Behavior in Nigeria**

YIAGA AFRICA Initiative (2018) outlines the following factors:

- (a) **Poverty and Hunger:** The twin challenge of poverty and hunger was a major factor driving of vote buying and selling in Nigeria. When households lack means to basic subsistence; the law of exigency takes charge resulting to compromised electoral behaviours such as vote buying and selling.
- (b) **Non-payment of workers' salaries, pensions and allowances:** on the part of government of the day remains at the bottom of the current malaise to trade away personal judgment for the lure of cash during elections. Nonpayment of several arrears of salaries and emoluments of workers and pensioners in a civil service economy accounts for why many voters could not resist the offer of cash to sell their ballots during the election. Many workers and pensioners could not meet their domestic obligations. For example, a family that has four prospective voters who are sure of gathering twenty thousand naira after casting and showing their ballot papers to a particular party, as exemplified by one of the respondents would not think twice before opting for such offer because of the consideration of what the amount could do to alleviate their immediate suffering.
- (c) **Failure of political office holders to fulfill previous campaign promises:** The failure of past political officeholders to fulfil their campaign promises encouraged prospective voters to demand for cash before casting their ballot for individuals or political parties. Many voters were with the wrong orientation that you could only get your share of the National cake from the politicians during elections when they are humble enough to beg for your votes citing examples of past neglect by politicians that got their votes free of charge.
- (d) **Neglect of Rural Communities in the even distribution of infrastructural facilities:** The state government either deliberately or due to paucity of funds neglected many rural communities in the provision of basic amenities. The government concentrated development efforts at the centre of attraction (state capital). Communities opted to sell their votes to avert what they termed 'double tragedies' in case they are neglected by a new administration or political leadership.
- (e) **Corrupt Leadership:** Many politicians had enriched themselves through public wealth; thereby have more than enough cash to manipulate the electoral process in their favour either as contestants or godfathers. Though at the national level, few of them are facing trial while some are convicted through the anti-corruption crusade of the incumbent president, the large percentage is still in the public space dominating and controlling the electoral system
- (f) **Greed:** Greed has caused a lot of crises in the Nigerian society. It is because of greed that political leaders embezzle funds meant for national development and use the proceeds for self-perpetuation in political circle. The same greed and love for material things caused many average Nigerian people to accept money, food items and material gifts to trade away their conscience during poll as implied by many Nigerian.
- (g) **Improved checks and balances in the electoral process:** The integrity of the electoral commission and introduction of technology and new innovations to the electoral process has deepened the integrity of elections in Nigeria. These improvements have made outright rigging unattractive for desperate politicians. Politicians resorted to vote trafficking as a strategy of compromising the electoral process.

### **Consolidating Democracy in Nigeria: The need to Promote Electoral Integrity**

Vote-buying and vote-selling are products of electoral systems, the electoral Process, and voting rules (Mares & Young; 2016; Onapajo et al., 2015; Pande; 2011). Developing democracies would be well advised to reform their electoral system and voting rules to reduce or eliminate vote-buying and vote-selling, and facilitate good governance, economic growth, and prosperity. However, politicians that subscribe to vote-buying objects to electoral reform that will limit or destruct their electoral strategy (Cruz & Keefer, 2015). Economic development can have a positive effect on an electoral practice that will consequently lead to the eradication of poverty with the resultant effect of reducing or eliminating vote-selling (Jensen and Justesen, 2014). Further, educating voters on the adverse consequences of vote-buying may reduce voters' propensity to sell votes (Vicente & Wantchekon, 2009). Vote buying and selling as well as instigating and financing election violence are criminal acts that obstruct and undermine the Nigerian democracy. This criminal act is not new to Nigerian elections and politicians but the fact that this criminal act is now a normal phenomenon means the fragile democracy in Nigeria will continue to be obstructed and undermined. As long as perpetrators of these heinous acts are not held accountable and brought to justice, they will brazenly continue to take advantage of the people and drive the democratic process into a quagmire. Both international and especially local groups and organizations are saddled with the responsibility to stand against any form of vote buying and election violence and must demand justice for anyone caught in the act. Election campaigns should target the masses but also the politicians, political parties and agents. If politicians don't instigate and finance election violence there will be none. If they don't offer to buy votes and provide the funds to buy votes there will be no selling of votes. To minimize the challenge of vote buying and selling INEC needs to fix the biometric part of the card readers and ensure that only individuals who have successfully gone through the card and biometric verification are eligible to vote. So, while it is important to enlighten and engage the masses, it is also more important to engage politicians and their platforms.

### Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

It was revealed in the study that vote buying has significant effect on voters' choice of candidates during election which has become most prominent as an electoral strategy among political parties in Nigeria because voters pay little or no regard to election promises and are willing to trade their votes for money. Interestingly, the study clearly showed that poverty plays a crucial role in vote buying in which the politicians are aware of this fact. Politicians are aware of this fact that poor standard of living has driven majority of the people into poverty and exploits this weakness to make them trade their votes for any amount of money which influences voters behavior in a negative way. Political parties often use vote buying as a strategy to bribe officials, police and law enforcement agencies, distributing food and other goods to induce voters to vote for a particular party that has taken over the order of the day. Conclusively, if the act of vote buying continues, electoral fraud and manipulation of voters' choice in Nigeria's electoral process and democratic structures will be difficult to sustain. In view of the above findings in the paper, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) should develop a strategic collaborative framework for effective monitoring of political parties' campaign funds in order to effectively curb electoral fraud, including vote buying.
- ii. Anti-corruption agencies need to collaborate with banks and other financial institutions to monitor the movement of cash during elections
- iii. Enforcement of electoral laws. A corollary of good governance is the introduction of stringent laws and effective implementation and punitive systems capable of dissuading potential offenders and sanctioning perpetrators.
- iv. To enhance the secrecy of the ballot, the INEC should construct a collapsible voting cubicle that will make it difficult for party agents to see a voter thumbprint on the ballot paper. Actions that reveal the vote cast by voters should be criminalize
- v. Democratically elected leaders should ensure good governance, and improve the conditions of the ordinary people.
- vi. The Electoral Act should be amended to empower citizens to effectively deploy social media tools in facilitating exposure of electoral fraud like vote buying, and prohibit the photographing of ballot papers by a voter or any person.
- vii. Poverty reduction: there is no gainsaying the fact that poverty plays a major role in creating the economic atmosphere for voter inducement and vote-buying to thrive as revealed in our findings. The nexus between poverty and elite manipulation and control of the masses leads one to a possible hypothesis that there may be a witting plan to impoverish followers in order to maintain and sustain political control. It is important therefore, that effective and sustainable poverty reduction strategies be put in place to assuage the influence of hunger and starvation in electoral decision making.
- viii. Media and civil society organizations need to intensify voter education and enlightenment campaigns on the negative implications of vote trading— particularly on how it raises the costs of elections, promotes political corruption and undermines good governance.
- ix. The Government should establish a National Commission on Electoral Offences with the responsibility of investigating and charging electoral offenders to court.
- x. Enforcement of the existing electoral regulations on party finances including campaign programmes should be implemented
- xi. Introduction of electronic voting system could potentially reduce incidence of voting buying and selling in elections.
- xii. The Nigerian government should pursue a policy of aggressive diversification of the economy to create more employment opportunities and reduce the level of poverty that makes people susceptible to criminal, financial and material inducements.
- xiii. What we need is a deep sense of patriotism and a devoted sense of selfless to the acquisition of wealth by unjust means and refuse to be brought at election time or to commit any electoral offence or other kind of evil during elections and if we refuse to make ourselves marketable commodities, the elections will be free and fair. Further, if we behave like decent persons and law abiding in the absence of the uniformed police officers or soldiers, the election will be free and fair.

Improved management of election security. Security agencies involved in elections must demonstrate commitment to electoral integrity and transparency through effective and objective management of election security. Security agencies should also intensify efforts in arresting and prosecuting electoral offenders.

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