



VOTE TRADING IN NIGERIA POLITICS

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Abstract

Vote buying is a common phenomenon in Nigeria's political system that has caused havoc to the country's electoral system. Vote buying as a practice was well noticed in 1999 when Nigeria started experiencing a smooth and successful transition of government from one civilian administration to another. However, the alarming rate at which vote trading is growing in Nigeria has called for serious attention particularly during 2015 and 2019 general elections in the country. Although, government had made series of efforts to curb the menace such as amendment in the Electoral Act, review of electoral laws and regulations, but all to no avail. The study deduces that those that were targeted for vote buying are majorly the illiterates and the poor masses in the country who can be easily influenced and induced with small amount of money. The study also showcase some evils behind engaging in vote buying which is capable of exposing the society to the inability to produce credible candidates. Similarly, vote trading could lead to underdevelopment and poor economy in a country. The study makes use of bilateral bargaining and clientelist theories to illustrate the offer and acceptance agreements between the political parties and voters. This study is a qualitative that adopts both primary and secondary sources of data to examine issues surrounding vote trading in Nigeria and its effect on the generality.

Keywords: Elections, Vote Buying, Democracy, Campaign Promises, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Elections and its sorts serve as one of the means of appointing leaders in many countries. This process as described by scholars such as Hayes and McAllister (1996) is bloodless but sensitive marketing warfare. Sensitive marketing warfare simply connotes the manner at which politicians or candidates for an election canvass for votes and political mandates from the electorates. Mostly, in some third world countries, politicians strategize through different means ranging from persuasion, promises, gifts among others, which amount to *offer* from the politicians and at the same time *acceptance* from the electorates. These actions from both the candidate and the electorate are referred to as vote buying and vote selling respectively. Vote selling and buying are phenomena which are common among the developing countries that are nurturing democracies. Vote-buying could be viewed as a form of transaction where candidates give out goods in the form of gift or cash to canvass for electoral support and voters' turnout (Guardado & Wantchekon, 2018). Arguably, vote-selling and buying encourage higher turnout of voters in many developing democracies. Although, there are evidence to support the claim that candidates influence specific voters with gift or cash to canvass for the vote, it has been proved otherwise in some places where the voters received gifts or cash from candidates and go against their wish. This paper wants to ascertain the extent in which gift and cash influence the turnout of the electorate in Africa, particularly in Nigeria's elections.

Similarly, vote-buying and its form of hinder development and political trust in many democratic settings (Kitschelt et al., 2010). Aside from the above mentioned defectives resulted through vote-buying and selling, the practice could also lead to deficits and inefficiencies in public sector which are capable of breeding corruption and spreading poverty in the society (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). For instance, it was reported that Nigeria's politicians offered less than \$4USD to masses as a form of buying vote (Bratton, 2008). People engage in vote buying mostly finance it with public resources particularly when their party is in government. As a result of this, other candidates whose parties are not incumbents might be deprived of such opportunity. The denial of such advantage prompted Keefer and Vlaicu to have argued that "if vote buying can be financed out of public resources, incumbents buy more votes and enjoy an electoral advantage....." (2017:773). Therefore, vote buying and selling are phenomena which should be addressed in order to return sanity to the African democratic system. It is against the backdrop that the study is focusing on vote trading in Nigeria and its effect on illiterates and poor masses.

As electoral violence is regarded as breach of process, vote buying and vote selling could be described as infractions of public morality in Africa. This has called for series of studies such as Neeman and Orosel (2006), Ojo (2008), Bratton (2008), Carreras and Irepoglu (2013), Nichter (2014), Jenson and Justesen (2014), Khemani (2015), Kramon (2016), Keefer and Vlaicu (2017), Guardado and Wantchekon (2018), Risk and Stoetzer (2019) among others where all centered on the manner at which politicians had influenced voters through vote buying. Similarly, it has been observed that there is scanty literature on how vote trading in Nigeria's politics has affected the country's citizens particularly the illiterates and poor masses. It is against this backdrop that the study examines vote trading in Nigeria politics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is a qualitative research that focused on the use of secondary data sources. This involves the use of literature that centers on elections and vote-buying cases cited in books, journal articles, newspapers among

others. Also, this study adopts bilateral bargaining and clientelist theories. The theory explains how voters' attitudes and their compliance to vote trading offered by the politicians in Nigeria has contributed to the issue of non-accountable of political office holders to the society that elected them. Thus, arguably leads to a low level of development in Nigeria. The theory as argued by Napel is portrayed by two agents. These agents could "individuals, firms, governments, who have a common interest in cooperating, but who have conflicting interests concerning the particular way of doing so" (2002:1). The agents involve come together with a common goal and focus in order to produce certain surplus or benefit to themselves or the society at large. Bilateral bargaining style can be described as a determination between two or more people or groups to cooperate for a purpose and share the outcome/payoffs accordingly.

Both in politics and life, everyone needs interaction to enjoy the maximum dividend of one's action. This has canvassed for a series of interaction, negotiation and bargaining in everyday life (Young, 1998; Van Bragt, Gerding & La Poutre, 2000). People enter into agreement with their fellow human beings in order to achieve certain purposes. Arguably, this has made political parties and their candidates to lobby the masses with a series of campaign promises, gifts and device persuasive means to canvass for votes. Therefore, the *offer* and *acceptance* action by both the political parties' candidates and the masses amount to what could be described as vote trading. This attitude is common to every political setting but the alarming rate at which many African countries practice it, canvass for the examination of vote trading in Nigeria politics.

Similarly, clientelism is an act of exchanging goods, services, promises among others for political support. This implies that there is a relationship between groups of political actors and the masses in exchange for favours. As argued by Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007:10), "the politician's delivery of a benefit is contingent upon the actions of specific members of the electorates". Nichter (2014) argues that vote buying underweight the contingency of favours from the parties and its candidates compare to the loss and its sorts which are likely to be experienced by the voters. An example of this was found during an election in Argentina where Peronist party allotted gifts to less advantage voters in exchange for the votes. Having studied the process, Therefore, Nichter described clientelist vote buying as:

The distribution of rewards to individuals or small groups during elections in contingent exchange for vote choices. Rewards are defined as cash, good (including food and drink), and services. Post-election benefits, employment, public programs and transportation to the polls are not considered rewards (2014:315).

In a nutshell, vote buying can only be considered as clientelist only if the person accepting the gifts is ready to deliver votes in exchange for the favour received.

Vote markets was a common phenomenon in Western Europe particularly when their democracy was young. This behaviour was put under control due to the development in European economy (Aidt & Jensen, 2012). As the democratic system of government extend from the Western World down to many developing countries, vote markets reduce in many African countries (Jensen & Justesen, 2013). However, reports of vote buying conducted by Blaydes (2006), Bratton (2008), Vicente and Wantchekon (2009), Jensen and Justesen (2013) among others, in democratic system have shown that vote market (where people engage in a direct exchange of gifts or money for favours) has returned to political system of many countries particularly, Africa. Although, some view vote buying as parts of the essential features of electoral practice in recent democracies, but the manner at which most players involved in the act, is what made the act to be otherwise. As observed by Jensen and Justesen,

“vote buying is a particular form of political clientelism” (2013:220). This implies that, political parties or politicians exchange material goods or rewards in form of appreciation for electoral favour from the masses. Vote buying or trading may or may not necessarily affect free and fair election but indirectly the voters’ interest might have been bought by parties (Robinson & Verdier, 2013). This action by political parties would in one way or the other affects the decision of masses to vote for the candidates/parties of their choices without been influenced.

Similarly, reports have shown that in many developing countries where vote buying is prevalent, poor masses in those areas were highly affected and influenced by the political parties (Vicente & Wantchekon, 2009). Therefore, poverty and illiteracy have been identified as parts of what subject many voters/electorates into vote trading particularly in developing countries. The two identified factors have made electorates to involve in vote buying which has given parties and their candidates’ opportunity to exploit voters through material needs (Jensen & Justesen, 2014). Hence, these identified factors that influenced spread of vote buying in many African countries has led to disperse of gospel on the need to curb the menace for African democracy to survive.

In line with the assertion made by Robinson and Verdier (2013) on the effect of vote buying, the former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo at a seminar organized by INEC-Civil Society Forum on 27th November, 2003 expressed the need to control the manner at which parties and their candidates spend towards election. He stressed that:

I have said that we prepare for elections as if we are going to war, and I can state without hesitation, drawing from my previous life, that the parties and candidates together spend during the last elections, more than would have been needed to fight a successful war. The will of the people cannot find expression and flourish in the face of so much money directed solely at achieving victory. Elective offices become mere commodities to be purchase by the highest bidder, and those who literally invest merely see it as an avenue to recoup and make profits. Politics becomes business, and the business of politics becomes merely to divert public funds from the crying needs of our people for real development in their lives (Adetula, 2008:19).

Irrespective of how strong the electorates’ wills and determinations towards voting for candidates of their choice, failure to control parties and candidates spending towards election could jeopardize the freedom to select a right candidate. Aside from the fact that such act affects voters’ freedom, vote buying mostly has a great influence on masses especially the illiterate ones.

Vote buying as part of electoral phenomena is pervasive in many African countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Benin, Mali, Madagascar among others, while it was reported to have its low widespread in countries like Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and others (Jensen & Justesen, 2014). Therefore, this study is narrowing down to focus on the trend and pattern of vote trading in Nigeria politics.

Vote Buying and its Terms

Vote buying is one of the hindrances that prevented the popular choices of masses to prevail in an election. There are series of irregularities that affect the electoral process ranging from registration problems, lack of enforceable law or electoral rules, deprivation of access to media, vote buying among others. As argued by Franklin (2004:6), the electoral participation of people in a country is not “about how people approach elections; rather it is mainly about how elections appear to people”. Parties and their candidates try several means to infuse into the electorates what would make the latter subscribe to the idea of the party in order to have their votes. Part of the ways that political parties influence voters is through the offering of gifts (in forms of cash or kind) and promises. As argued

by Brusco et al quoted in Guardado and Wantchekon (2018:139), Vote buying is described “as the proffering to voters of cash or (more commonly) minor consumption goods by political parties, in office or in opposition, in exchange for the recipient’s vote”. Similarly, Stokes et al (2013) viewed vote buying as an instance whereby the political machines bribe or offer service to people in order to persuade and at the same time exchange for votes from the masses.

It has been observed that some educated voters resist vote buying by actualizing what they think is right by casting vote to a candidate of their choice inspite of whatever strategy that might be adopted by politicians to influence vote into their favour. Similarly, poor masses and uneducated ones in the society are vulnerable to vote buying in Africa. The reason for that could be attributed to their economic status and access to education in society. Thus, the attitudes of voters to either succumb or resist to vote trading is what Bratton (2008) termed as *defection*. Defection according to Scott (1985) is a weak weapon of the masses. This action (defection) could be categorized into three: *Comply*; *Defect* and; *Refuse*.

Comply – this is an act of voting for a candidate or party in the form of appreciation to what has been offered to voters by party/candidate. Meaning that masses are fulfilling their part for the gifts or money offered to them by the political party to influence votes and canvass for support.

Defect – this is another form of vote buying where electorate receive money or gifts from party or candidate to canvass for votes but electorate eventually cast its vote to the candidate of its choice rather than allowing himself to be influenced by such gifts. In another word, electorate receives gifts or money from party but vote only to candidate of his choice without been influenced by the political party.

Refuse – this is also an act of vote buying where money and gifts are offered to electorates by party or candidate but the electorates reject the offer only to vote for a candidate of their choice without any influence from the party.

Vote buying as argued by Wang and Kurzman (2007) increases as the election approaches. For instance, in 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections in Nigeria, vote trading accelerates daily till election day with series of forbidden offers from political parties and candidates.

Nigeria and Vote Buying

Vote buying has characterized all elections in Nigeria starting from the 1999 general election upward. People or citizens were offered money, food, clothing, jobs, at times inducement of 500naira which is not up to 2USD is capable of influencing voters to change their minds and perception towards candidates of their choice. Nigeria’s elites were not comfortable with the manner at which the country’s electoral process was going which made priority for the government to control the attitude. Thus, it has canvassed for actions of Nigeria’s leaders such as Chief Olusegun Obasanjo to address the matter.

Nigeria’s former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo tried to curb vote buying in the country through signing of harmonized Electoral Bill on 6th June, 2006 that became the Electoral Act 2006 in Nigeria (Adetula, 2008). This Electoral Act serves as a guide for political parties and their candidates particularly in regulating party finance in the country. Electoral Act and other reforms in Nigeria is done in order to restore public confidence in the country’s political process. Having signed the Electoral Act 2006 into law, the level at which vote buying is accelerating in Nigeria is highly alarming. For instance, the source from Afrobarometer reported cases of vote

buying in Nigeria where it was quoted that:

...485 cases of vote buying as experienced by 296 respondents out of a random sample of 2410 Nigerians. Because there were more crimes than victims, it follows that many individuals (196, or about two-thirds of all victims) were approached from more than one partisan group. The largest political parties were the most active in vote buying. According to the survey respondents, the Peoples Democratic Party made 40 percent of all reported attempts to buy votes, followed by the All Nigeria Peoples Party (31 percent) and the Action Congress (10 percent)...In part because of competing inducements, vote buying is probably an ineffective strategy for securing votes (Afrobarometer, 2007).

Vote buying has resulted in lack or loss of confidence among Nigerians in country's electoral process. The abuse of money in politics in most of the developing countries often resulted in violence.

As earlier mentioned, Nigeria political history is characterized by series of abnormalities ranging from social injustice, corruption, political instability, poor governance, vote-buying, politics of godfatherism, among others (Adetula, 2008). These imbalances in Nigeria's political arena has influenced the decision to curb the menace. Prior to the Electoral Act of 2006, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under the 1999 Nigeria's Constitution was empowered to monitor financial activity of the political parties in the country. Such power includes audit of parties' funds and as well as evaluation of annual examination for political parties which its reports would be published for public information. As part of monitoring of party finances and curbing the excesses in party's spending, INEC for instance through the approval of the National Assembly earmarked N600 million for the registered political parties in Nigeria for the conduct of 2003 general election.

Although, the monitoring action by INEC posed many challenges to the commission which some of it evolved from the report submitted by a group known as the Transition Monitoring Group. These group reported that the party primaries conducted by political parties such as Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria's Peoples Party (ANPP), United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP), National Democratic Party (NDP) among others were characterized with widespread of bribery. The group as quoted by Adetula stressed that, "there was widespread bribery of delegates with sacks stuffed with money to influence votes" (2008:21).

Political parties mostly receive donations and source their finance externally aside from the money budgeted for them by the federal government of Nigeria. These were part of what 2006 Electoral Act tried to monitor. According to Sections 93 Sub section 1-3 of the 2006 Electoral Act, it was stipulated there that the Presidential and Governorship aspirants must not spend above N500,000,000 and N100,000,000 respectively. The spending capability of Senatorial candidates, House of Representatives, State House of Assembly together with Chairmanship of local governments, and Councillorship were reduced to N20,000,000, N10,000,000, N5,000,000, N500,000 respectively.

As earlier mentioned, Nigeria since 1999 has experienced a successful transition of power from one civilian administration to another (Omotola, 2010). Out of those transitions through the conduct of general election in the country, vote buying was more pronounced during the 2015 and 2019 elections. During 2015 and 2019 elections, political parties and their candidates were found given out cash at the same time using others means to induce voters. As argued by Onuoha and Ojo, "vote buying is not fundamentally new to Nigeria's electoral politics or only restricted to Nigeria...(2018:1). However, Nigeria's government is trying to curb the menace of vote buying in the country. Apart from the measure taken under the Electoral Act of 2006 to reduce the rate of vote

buying in Nigeria politics, another giant stride was made by government through the Article 130 of the amended 2010 Electoral Act. The amended Act stipulates that:

A person who –(a) corruptly by himself or by any other person at anytime 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 (The Electoral Act, 2010).

Upon all the preventive measures against an act of vote trading in Nigeria, politicians are found of engaging in the act. For instance, during a governorship election held in Ekiti State of Nigeria on 14th July 2018, it was documented by the Punch Newspaper, a case of a retiree who claimed to have been offered with money by a political party agent. According to him:

I was offered N5000 to vote for the party, but I rejected it. I am 73 years old retired teacher. I cannot allow the future of my children to be bought by moneybags. I don't know how we descended to this level when people brazenly offer money to people to secure their votes. It was not like this in the past. Will our votes count with this problem? (Atoyebi, Olufemi, Ajaja, Tunde, Aworinde & Tobi, 2018).

From Nigeria's settings, one could deduce that, some factors might have led to the act of succumbing or accepting the offer (such as gifts, money, promises among others) made available by political parties and their candidates to voters in an exchange for favour. Thus, the following factors are identified as part of the reasons that led to vote buying in Nigeria:

- i. Poverty
- ii. Desperation among politicians and political parties, and
- iii. Technological advancement and innovations.

Poverty – the rate at which poverty is growing in Nigeria subjected masses to engaged in vote trading. As reported by Punch (2018), Nigeria has the largest poverty population in the world with more than 87 million rates. The high rate of poverty in Nigeria significantly affects people in rural areas.

Desperation among politicians and parties – political parties and their candidates are desperate to assume the position of authority in Nigeria. The fear among the politicians and parties that failure on their part to lobbying the appropriate quarters and actors that involve in the electoral process may create opportunity for opponent to take the advantage. Thus, such practices among the political parties allow for vote buying to be rampant in Nigeria.

Technological Advancement and innovations – the believe that advancement in technology would curb election rigging and other nefarious ways of manipulating the results of election has made politicians to pump-out money to voters in order to woo them in exchange for votes.

Therefore, the identified factors causing vote trading in Nigeria need to be addressed in the country.

CONCLUSION

Vote buying is a criminal act which should be curbed in Nigeria. As a popular adage that says, “there could be no acceptance without offer”, meaning that if the politicians and their parties do not make offer of money or gifts to masses, there would not be acceptance for such offer.

Act of given out money when election is approaching and during election is becoming alarming in Nigeria which need to be properly corrected for the dividend of democracy to be attained in the country. In order to achieve this and make way for a credible candidate to emerge in an election, vote trading should be discouraged in its totality in Nigeria. Thus, the following suggestion could assist the country in addressing the issue of vote buying in Nigeria:

First, the Secret ballot system should be more enhanced to enable voters exercise their voting right confidential and at the same time prevent party agent from seeing voters’ thumbprint on ballot paper. Secondly, civil society and the likes should ensure to mount pressure on the law enforcement agencies such as police, civil defence, among others to arrest, investigate and prosecute actors involve in vote trading.

Thirdly, the Electoral Act should be reviewed periodically in order to amend and address lapses that are likely to affect the electoral process. Furthermore, there should be proper awareness and orientation to the general public through civil society and mass media on the danger involve in vote trading. Finally, the federal government of Nigeria should ensure that country’s economy is in good shape in order to reduce the poverty rate and improve peoples’ standard of living in the country.

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