

Trends and Difficulties Related to Vote-Buying and the Electoral System in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Vote-buying has unquestionably emerged as a crucial and worrisome trend in Nigeria's political process. Its patterns and difficulties in the nation's voting process have gotten out of hand. In Nigeria's political activities, vote-buying has also become the norm, endangering the country's willingness to adopt sound democratic administration. Because it costs so much money to run for public office, buying political jobs is usually reserved for wealthy individuals in politics. Therefore, the clientelism theory, which describes the connection between Nigeria's electoral system and vote-buying, was chosen as the theoretical foundation for this study. Vote-buying has been common despite the electoral rules and the INEC's position on the practice. Due to the difficulties in holding free, fair, legitimate, and fair elections in Nigeria, this study must examine the reality of vote-buying. The study uses the documentary technique to gather information from secondary sources. It suggests that Nigeria builds solid institutions and implements sensible, politically unbiased policies to solve the issue of vote-buying in the nation. In order to prevent electoral anomalies that have long characterized politics and the election process, it is therefore essential to confront the threat of vote-buying through nonpartisan and impartial bodies.*

Keywords: Vote-buying, Electoral Process, Politics, Democracy, Political Parties, clientelism

Introduction

Since the country's return to democracy in 1999, vote-buying has become widespread in Nigeria. Whether it was during general elections or political party primaries, this electoral fraud was frequently used. According to Bunte and Ufen (2009), vote-buying has been brought up in public discourse and used in nearly all of the nation's elections. However, the prevalence and expansion of vote-buying in Nigeria's electoral process are rooted in the politics of the elites and were more evident in the general elections of 2011, 2015, and 2019. The phenomenon is widespread in societies and is characterized by disagreements over party ideologies and principles, political officeholders breaking campaign promises, and a failure to provide infrastructure and social services to rural communities. Vote-buying is the practice of rewarding someone for casting their ballots a certain way. Voters in an election sell their votes to the highest bidder in a direct economic exchange. Scholars have noted that vote-buying is common among political candidates and the electorate in Nigeria and some other African States. Arguments for why vote-buying threatens democratic governance and the electoral process come from various analytical perspectives. Vote-buying in Nigeria has gotten so bad that candidates for political office have expanded their networks of inducements to include election officials, security personnel, and even the media. This explains why the Nigerian case has sparked concern and a debate among academics.

Vote-buying challenges the electoral system, and good democratic governance supports poor governance and undermines citizens' ability to hold elected officials accountable and sustain corruption. In other words, candidates for political office continue to exhibit undemocratic tendencies and abuse democratic norms due to their desperation for power at all costs, including vote-buying. On the other hand, the electorate is enmeshed in institutionalized poverty, lack of education, and a low level of political education, each of which is likely to derail the electoral process. This has led to continued opposition to the practice of vote buying from civil society, the media, conscientious people, and lawyers. This study concentrates on vote-buying challenges and trends in Nigeria's electoral process from 2015 to 2019. It poses and responds to the following inquiries:

- What are the legal implications of vote-buying in Nigeria?
- Is buying votes a good thing for elections?
- What are the problems with vote-buying in elections?
- What are the chances that the phenomenon will spread to Nigeria?

Literature Review

Depending on each country's historical, cultural, and political backgrounds and electoral systems, the concept of "vote buying" conjures up different images. According to Bryan (2005), vote-buying is the practice of exchanging personal benefits for political support or using cash and direct benefits to sway voters. It involves the trade-off of personal material gains for political support. Vote buying is the practice of a candidate, political party, agent, or supporter inducing or rewarding a voter in exchange for casting their ballot or refraining from doing so to increase the likelihood that that candidate will win the election. Vote buying can therefore be defined as any practice in which a person is promised an immediate reward for voting or refraining from voting in a particular way. Vote buying is regarded as an electoral offense in the majority of democracies. Vote-buying has long been a critical component of Nigerian money politics. Recent events demonstrate that vote buying occurs throughout the electoral process, with the most notable instances occurring during voter registration, the nomination period, campaigning, and Election Day. It occurs more frequently on Election Day, just before or during voting. Both definitions emphasize the objective of vote buying, i.e., to obtain commodities or immediate advantages for voters in exchange for their political support.

Fox (1994) asserted that vote-buying is a component of the exchange between material gain and political support, supporting the claim above. Put another way; it is the trade-off of political rights for financial gain. According to Schaffer (2005), the goal of the vote-buying practice is to persuade voters to make a more favorable decision to the bidders. Voters' willingness to comply is frequently expressed in one of three ways: instrumental, normative, or coercive compliance. These three types of compliance can affect voters' political preferences and voting behavior. Vote buying is an arguably corrupt practice that typically takes the form of a gift or gratuity given to influence the behavior of the recipient, particularly money or any valuable consideration given to a fiduciary agent, a judge, legislator, public officer, witness, or voter, or a promise to do so. Vote buying is a corrupt practice that typically takes the form of a gift or gratuity given to influence the behavior of the recipient, particularly money or any valuable consideration given to a fiduciary agent, a judge, legislator, public officer, witness, or voter, or a promise to do so. This is to imply that any form of persuasion in which a person suggests financial gain to another with the intent of influencing a person's vote constitutes vote-buying and is a corrupt act. Ladan (2018) is resolute that this extends beyond the direct payment of a bribe and also covers the payment of outrageous stipends to election workers. Political bribery occurs when money used for persuasion is channeled, and the voter's attitude toward his voting preference is also made to be profitable.

Political actors have used two main strategies to buy votes on election day. The first is the voting approach, which entails promising the potential voters predetermined money before they cast their ballot at the voting location. The basis of the contract in this strategy is trust. It is also referred to as the pre-paid method of buying votes. The vote for money is the second strategy. It entails providing the voter with the agreed-upon sum of money or another material reward after the person provides proof that he or she cast a vote for the party. Without connecting the act to corruption, which has caused election outcomes to affect the performance of politicians once elected into office, a better understanding of vote buying in Nigeria cannot be achieved. In particular, performance is not a crucial factor in the results of elections. The incentive to engage in corrupt behavior is very high because it is a successful strategy for winning elections. Ethnicity, intimidation, and massive vote buying have been the main determining factors in the election's outcome. Since 1999, almost every election in Nigeria has been associated with vote-buying, which refers to electoral fraud by political parties, candidates, and electorates (Ojo, 2008).

Most Nigerians have the wrong perspective on politics because most politicians see it as a call to investment with high expectations of profit rather than a call to serve humanity (Davies, 2006). As a result, on election day, parties and candidates for political office frequently give away a variety of other tangible items, such as food, clothing, and services (Helmke and Levitsky, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

The research is anchored on the clientelism theory. The lack of theoretical clarity and consensus bedevils the study of many topics; Clientelism is one of them. The term is frequently used informally in the literature without much effort to define it. The term refers to entities, groups, or people who fall short of ideal standards (e.g., clientelist party system, clientelist political party, or clientelist politician). However, the literature that has attempted to define and limit the concept of clientelism serves as the foundation for these commonplace uses (Hicken, 2011). According to (Briquet, 2015), clientelism is the relationship between people of different social and economic statuses (i.e., "the boss" and his "clients") that involves a reciprocal exchange of goods and services based on a personal connection that is typically seen as a moral obligation.

The clientelism theory explains the relationship between vote-buying and Nigeria's electoral system. Gaining public support and political support through any form of inducement is essential to clientelistic practice, which is asserted in this theory.

The practice enables clients and patrons to benefit from others' support, with the theory emphasizing a series of actions based on the principle of "take there, give here" (Graham 1997). Gallego (2014) asserts that electoral clientelism has predominated in democratic Nigerian politics. Generally speaking, a relationship in which candidates provide material benefits to the electorates in exchange for political support, which could include the vote, is electoral clientelism. When elections are held per the rules intended to govern the

political game, they are said to be highly supportive of democracy. This is because elections are one of the processes of democratic institutions. In this way, vote buying significantly influenced the results of the general elections in 2015 and 2019. The ruling and opposition parties, as well as their respective candidates, engaged in the politics of vote-buying in the run-up to these elections to sway and influence voters' voting decisions.

The electoral process in Nigeria is similar to the argument put forth by the clientelism theory; rigged elections serve the narcissistic agenda of the nation's politicians, who use the machinery of vote-buying to thwart the electoral process. Vote buying is thus prevalent and intensifies before and during elections in Nigeria due to the intensity of the power struggle, particularly as evidenced by the experiences of the general elections in 2015 and 2019.

Issues Involving Vote-Buying

The advantage of democracy is that it allows political parties to present alternate candidates to replace elected officials if they cannot govern to the electorate's satisfaction. Second, the emergence of dictatorship from a one-party system is avoided by multiparty politics. Third, the multiparty system equally affords the electorate the freedom and opportunity to remove the incumbent leaders of the government if they believe that they are no longer enacting policies and programs that align with their philosophies, values, or ideologies. Therefore, it is typical for the electorate to choose candidates by exercising their right to vote and be chosen by voters.

President Muhammadu Buhari signed the Electoral Bill 2022 on Friday, February 25th, 2022, repealing the 2010 Act and enacting a new Electoral Act. The new Act establishes a framework for the law that gives the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) the authority to choose the method of voting, transmit results, and assess declarations made under duress. It redefined over-voting, legalized technology in elections, and required INEC to take "reasonable steps" to support voters with disabilities (PWDs). The new Act also modifies election-related deadlines. It establishes new deadlines for political parties to complete various obligations and tasks related to the nomination of candidates for elections. However, hearing that votes are being bought and sold on the open market is upsetting and highly concerning. More specifically, the sale of votes raises the issue of whether or not such a repugnant act is legal.

According to Section 127 of the Electoral Act 2022 (Part VII- Electoral Offences), under the subheading Undue Influence:

"A person who - (a) corruptly by his or herself 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 to corruptly influence 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), commits an offense and is liable on conviction to a fine of ₦100,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both."

Voting-box snatching and other acts of violence by politicians seeking to win elections at all costs were more common in the past. Additionally, it has long been customary for politicians to use various methods to entice voters, such as by giving away items like motorcycles, detergent, soap, salt, and raw food, etc. usually before election day than on election day itself.

Vote-buying is a threat that promotes bad governance and hinders citizens' ability to hold elected officials and representatives accountable. Aspiring political leaders are discouraged from running for office because it implies that money, not ideas or experience, is the key to winning an election. Every citizen has the right to run for office in a genuine democracy, subject to reasonable limitations. Vote-buying penalizes potential candidates in a disadvantageous economic position, making it impossible to meet these standards.

With an increased financial burden on politicians, vote-buying tied to gifts or cash incentives poses a significant threat to Nigeria's electoral system. The nature of vote-buying in the 2019 general elections motivates concern about the leadership quality, capacity of service delivery, and effectiveness of emerging democratic institutions. It also serves as a springboard for unsuitable, incompetent candidates and unsuitable political parties to public offices (Baidoo et al., 2018).

When candidates opt to buy support rather than compete for votes, they demonstrate their disregard for democratic principles and willingness to engage in unethical behavior. As a result, the candidate with the most money wins the election rather than the one who would best serve their constituents' interests. This obstructs the electoral process by infringing on citizens' rights to choose who will represent them and their interests freely. In addition, there is a problem with the growth of money politics, which puts merit, ideology, and fair and open political competition at risk. On another level, ineffective and old politicians are recycled into the political system, which has various ramifications in that they are only interested in material possessions and the simple accumulation of wealth. Therefore, vote buying does pose severe threats to the Nigerian electoral process.

Vote Buying and the 2023 General Elections

If the threat of vote trading is not addressed before the general elections in 2023, low-quality and dubious leaders could emerge, according to election experts in the nation. Therefore, to deal with electoral offenses forcefully, they urged the National Assembly to move quickly on the proposed Electoral Offenses Commission bill. In addition, the experts provided advice for a Policy Dialogue titled “Addressing Vote Trading in Nigeria: Lessons from Global Comparative Experiences,” sponsored by the Electoral Forum (Omolaoye, 2022).

According to Professor Mohammed Sani Adam, the INEC commissioner for Niger, Kogi, and Kwara States in North Central Nigeria, Vote buying is a national and sociological problem. However, he also categorically stated that “there is a limit to what INEC as a body can do in terms of curtailing vote buying during elections in Nigeria and that There are the anti-corruption agencies like the EFCC and the EFCC, including other Security apparatus saddled with the responsibility of monitoring criminal activities, ours is to conduct elections, but not to monitor criminals” (Tribune, 2022).

Speaking about the takeaways from the most recent off-cycle governorship elections in Ekiti and Osun at the Commission’s Retreat in Lagos to prevent vote buying in the general elections of 2023; the INEC Chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, said the commission is developing measures. He insisted that the creation of the Electoral Offenses Commission and Tribunal would stop vote buying in the country, promising that the upcoming elections would be better than the recent governorship elections in Ekiti and Osun (Ajayi, 2022).

Conclusion

During the 2015 and 2019 election cycles, vote-buying among political party members, candidates, and voters became a widespread political practice. This practice impedes rather than advances the electoral process and is one of the factors working against the conduct of crisis-free, credible, and acceptable elections in Nigeria. The amount of money in circulation on Election Day challenged the electoral process. Vote-buying is common in Nigeria because the average voter is poor and unable to resist the temptations of numerous electoral bribes in cash or kind. Poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy have been identified as significant causes of vote-buying by academics. The paper contends that vote-buying is the root cause of poor governance and the imposition of unsuitable candidates to fill vacancies in government.

Recommendations

Vote buying violates electoral laws when considering the difficulties mentioned above. Although INEC lacks the authority to detain those responsible for the act, it must inform and raise awareness among the electorate. Political parties also have the authority and obligation to educate and inform the electorate. Voters must be adequately educated on the meaning of vote-buying and its nature, scope, and impact on the electoral process. Because security agencies have the authority to arrest and prosecute, they must take responsibility for reducing or eliminating vote-buying. Furthermore, they should be patriotic enough not to participate in the alleged crime of vote-buying.

There is a need to educate voters to encourage them to vote based on the accomplishments of candidates and the party’s performance in government. Secret ballot voting requires applicable legislation to ensure that it is not only a right of voters but also an absolute obligation that must be followed on Election Days. A secret ballot is essential for maintaining the integrity of the electoral process and is one of the primary tools used to prevent vote-buying. Prospects for organized and well-informed Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the media, religious bodies, traditional rulers, sociocultural groups, legal practitioners, and people of conscience should go beyond rhetoric and take proactive actions against political parties suspected of vote-buying. They should continue to educate the electorate about its unpopularity and challenges to Nigeria’s electoral process.

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