



MERCHANDISING VOTE AND CONSCIENCE, A ROD FOR DEMOCRACY'S BACK IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The Nigeria electoral processes that were characterized by violence, fraud, snatching of ballot papers and boxes, falsification of results and other electoral issues are shifting grounds to vote buying and selling against the backdrop of the introduction of Biomodal Voters Accreditation system (BVAS). In Nigeria electoral process, small material goods, such as money or food are distributed to voters, right before and during an election in the hopes of receiving their votes. The electorates are enticed with or are given money, food or other items to vote for a particular party or candidate. Citizens with brilliant ideas not having the financial muscle are frustrated to edges until their ideas are successfully evaporated and those who have financial muscles see the position as a capitalist venture where they are meant to create commercial relationships with Nigerians and treat them as commodities rather than resources that need to be protected, refined and preserved. Nigerian Democracy is more or less a cash and carry democracy. The major objective of this paper is to examine merchandizing of votes, conscience and the effects on democracy in Nigeria using a qualitative research method which focused on secondary method of eliciting data from existing sources. The bourgeois democracy theory is adopted as theoretical framework for this study. This paper also peruses at the reasons for vote buying and effects on Nigeria democracy. This study finds that Nigeria electoral process has always been known for its chaotic nature masterminded by the bourgeois. The paper finally made some recommendations that would reduce vote buying in Nigeria electoral processes among others.

Keywords: *Vote buying and selling, electorate constituents, money bags, political culture bourgeois, bullion van, corruption*

Introduction

The major issue that is very difficult to deal with or understand in electoral process in Nigeria is selling, buying of vote and conscience. In Nigeria, vote

selling and buying is a religion for the electorates during electoral period. It is something Nigeria electorates are devoted or committed to. It has ravaged the electoral process in Nigeria beyond revamp. Nigerians look at politics now as where to go and make money not where they want to go and be servants of the people. If one does not have money one cannot go into politics because in Nigeria, politics is capital intensive. In most cases, vote selling and buying were carried out in the full glare of security operatives, observers, electoral officials and media practitioners. The currency of vote buying in Nigeria morphed from the Naira to the Dollar. Vote buying and selling aka “See and buy in the South West Nigeria (Dazang, 2022). Vote buying syndrome, as one of the major driver of electoral fraud, is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria’s political landscape nor is it peculiar to Nigeria. It is an aged-long global political plague that has been ruining the development efforts and consolidation of democratic politics. It transcends the African continent to other part of the world. For instance, vote-buying, as a campaign strategy to lure voters is prevalent in the Philippine, Britain, Pakistan, India, the United States of America and some other European countries. Other countries that practice it during elections are Nicaragua, Argentina, Taiwan, and Labanon. In Africa, vote-buying is very prevalent in Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Sao Tome and Principe, Rwanda, Equatorial Guinea, Burundi, Uganda, Liberia, Togo, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania etc. (Owasa, 2013, Baidoo et al, 2018; Onuoha and Ojo, 2018. Regardless of the hard fact that vote buying is not peculiar to Nigeria alone, in recent time it has taken a new dimension and proportion in Nigeria.

It is interesting to know that it is not only vote-buying that exists in Nigeria, there is also conscience buying of voters. In Nigeria, the electorates see election periods as periods for making free and abnormal money. Candidates of political parties offer free medical services, clothes, foods, grinding machines, hair dryers cars, motor cycles, sew machines, welding machines, subsidization of maternity and funeral bills to voters (Felong, 2019, Schaffer, 2002).

Furthermore, the voting procedure is not secret and voluntary. The Nigerian voter is not at liberty to vote privately in accord with the dictate of his or her conscience with regards to the whims and caprices of the political elites. The voting choice of the voter is concluded and protected by the secrecy of the act. (Kramon, 2009; Ojo, 2020). Besides, Yokobson (1995) cited a Roman political and great thinker, Cicero to have complained that private and or secret voting allowed a man to wear a smooth brow which cloaks the secret of his heart and leaves him free to act as he chooses without recourse to any promise he may be asked to give.

In Nigeria, “elective offices become mere commodities to be purchased by the highest bidder, and those who invest merely see it as an avenue to recoup and make a profit. Politics becomes simply to divert public funds from the essential needs of the people for development in their lives (Sarkariyau, et al 2015). Having reasoned from the above, it is pertinent to examine the reasons why vote-buying is holding sway in Nigeria. Vote buying and selling are more or less a hideous monster that need to be dealt with and it calls for radical approaches.

Conceptualization of Terms

Corruption

There is no comprehensive and acceptable definition of the term “corruption”. However, corruption has been used to describe conducts that reflect abuse of public office for private gain, could be seen as a conflict between the obligation to exercise a public power on the public interest and self-interest of an individual to use or exploit them for private gain.

Corruption is widespread in developing countries, not because the people are different from people from other parts of the world, but because the conditions are ripe for it. There are many reasons why this is so. The motivation to earn income from among the populace in developing countries is relatively stronger, exacerbated by poverty, unemployment and low wages.

In Nigeria, accountability is generally weak. Political competition and civil liberties are often restricted laws and principle of ethics in government are poorly developed and the legal instrument charged with enforcing them are ill-prepared (Shehu, 2006).

Kaufman (2000), argues that corruption exists within specific conditions in any society, although it is not peculiar, its incidence is more severe in developing countries.

In his analysis, Gyimah (2002) opines that corruption is a word that has been defined differently by both practitioners and academicians who study corruption. “it means different things to different people depending on the individual’s cultural background, discipline and political training

Statement of the Problem

The fundamental problem facing Nigeria’s electoral processes is the effects of merchandising votes and conscience on Nigeria democracy. In Nigeria, electoral process, small material goods, such as money or food are distributed to voters, right before and during election in the hopes of receiving their votes. The electorates are enticed with or are given money, food or either items to vote

for a particular party or candidate. Also, voters received the incentives before they perform their part of the contract. There is also distribution of materials to voters. Political operatives hand over not just cash but a wide range of goods and services like bags of rice, chickens, whisky, clothing, soccer balls, hair cut and teeth cleaning objects. Parties offer incentives or benefits to core supporters during election to sustain electoral coalitions. This explains why distribution of incentives to party supporters is a recognition and affirmation of their membership to the party.

Another salient issue in Nigerian democracy is that citizens with brilliant ideas do not have the financial muscle and are frustrated to edges until their ideas are successfully evaporated while those who have financial muscles see the position as a capitalist venture where they are meant to create commercial relationships with Nigerians, and treat them as commodities rather than resources that need to be protected, refined and preserved.

In Nigeria electoral process, money is spent to recruit mindlessly brutal hands that can help forment troubles and create scenes during electoral periods so that they would muscle their way to ensure victory for their sponsors. Unemployed youths make themselves available during electoral period to initiate aggressive efforts to compel people to follow their financial sponsors. The unemployed youth scuttled electoral process if they feel that the election would not favour them. The political merchandisers retire to their voting areas after they have won the elections through questionable means. Votes are not free in Nigeria, Politicians considered electoral contest as an investment and that many of them invest their fortunes, incurred debts and even sold their houses and property to contest and get elected. Vote-buying has heightened insecurity of lives and properties, worsened the living standard of vulnerable groups and tilting Nigeria towards disintegration.

Nwagwu (2016) observes that money determines who vies for election in Nigeria than allowing potentially sellable candidates with credible credentials to compete on competence and capabilities to serve. Voters are easily pulled around by the nose with materials enticement. They vote according to the dictates of the vote-buyers. A candidate who is willing to finance widespread vote buying during campaign is likely perceived to provide poor constituents with targeted benefits on the future.

In addition, unless political operations provide particular benefits, supporters may become swing or opposition voters during next election turn out on election day to vote for the party.

Moreover, the use of incentives to buy votes of electorates, politicians use monetary incentives to coerce voters. These incentives target poor or less

educated class of opposition backer not to turn out vote and is referred to as model negative.

Vote buying, but swing voters and party supporters massive turn out votes is referred as model turn out buying.

Research Questions

- i. Does merchandising vote and conscience affect democracy in Nigeria.
- ii. Does vote-buying and selling affect the dividends of democracy in Nigeria.
- iii. Does private and or secret voting affect democracy in Nigeria.
- iv. Does exchange of political right for material gains affect democracy in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this paper is to examine merchandising vote, conscience and the effects on Democracy in Nigeria while the specific objectives are to:

- i. ascertain whether vote-buying and selling affect the dividends of democracy.
- ii. examine whether private and or secret voting affect democracy in Nigeria.
- iii. examine whether exchange of political rights for material gains affect Democracy in Nigeria.

Literature Review

In any case, related literature abound on the subject of vote buying in Nigeria's elections, yet a review of available ones indicate little or no serious attention given to merchandising vote and conscience: a rod for democracy's back in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study therefore attempts to bridge the gap so created, through its approach of broader spectrum beaming its search light with a view to seeing the effects of vote selling and buying on democracy in Nigeria.

In this discuss, Fox (1994) sees vote buying as exchanging political rights for material gains. His focus is on the right of a person to exercise his or her franchise.

Schaffer (2007) explained vote buying as a situation in which small material goods, such as money or foods are distributed to voters, right before and during election in the hope of receiving their votes. In this situation, electorates are enticed with or are given money, foods or other items to vote for a particular party or candidate. These voters receive the incentives before they perform their

part of the contract. The money or food is given to the voter before going to the poll. In a nutshell, while some culture and literatures restrict vote buying to the handing out of cash for votes, other also extend vote buying to the distribution of materials for votes. Put differently, Schaffer, (2007) asserts that political operators hand over not just cash but a wide range of goods and services like bags of rice, chickens, whisky, clothing, soccer balls, Viagra, haircut, and teeth cleaning objects. This is because some distributors may not directly tell a receiver the purpose of giving the gifts or the incentives.

Nugent (2007) asserts that voters knowledge on vote buying is based on their views and on perceptions about vote buying practices. It is therefore important to explore the range of meanings vote buying incentives convey on positive message to some voters. On the other hand, the lack of it sends a negative signal to others.

Nugent (2007) views that the failure to distribute material resources while on the campaign trail is perceived that the candidate is out of touch and does not understand the needs of the poor constituents. Indeed, failure to buy votes in this setting is a dominated strategy when others are doing so.

Bratton (2008) asserts that vote buying enhances partisan loyalty. Parties may offer incentives or benefits to core supporters during election to sustain electoral coalitions. This explains why distribution of incentives to party supporters is a recognition and affirmation of their membership to the party. This stabilizes the support base of the party to ensure that party supporters do not defect to vote for the opposition.

Kramon (2011) posits that vote buying signals a willingness and capacity to deliver small private goods which tend to be more highly valued by poor voters. In other words, politicians buying votes because of the information it conveys to voters about their credibility with respect to the provision of targeted particularistic or patronage goods to poor voters, he sees vote buying to signify credibility as a patron for the poor and as a candidate who understands the needs of poor constituents. A candidate who is willing to finance wide spread vote buying during campaign is likely perceived to provide poor constituents with targeted benefits in the future.

Gans-Morse, Mazzuca and Nichter (2009) argue that unless operatives provide particular benefit, supporters may become swing or opposition voters during next election turn out on election day to vote for the party. This eliminates apathy among supporters. In effect, the use of incentives to buy votes of electorates, politicians use monetary incentives to coerce voters. These incentives target poor or less educated class of opposition backers not to turn

out vote and is referred to as model negative vote buying, but swing voters and party supporters massive turn out votes is referred as model turnout buying.

Theoretical Framework

The Bourgeois democracy theory is adopted as the theoretical framework of analysis for this study. This theory is predicated upon one of the essential principles of communism, found in the communist manifesto issued in 1848. Karl Marx drafted the communist manifesto in co-operation with his friend and collaborator, Friedrich Engels in 1848 (Appadorai, 1974).

The focus of this theory is that the foundation of communism is the belief that the mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life.

Appadorai further adumbrates that:

“In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their national powers of production.

The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society- The real foundation, on which rise legal and political super structures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. Politics has been swallowed up by money bags in Nigeria. No one can be voted for in the Nigeria democracy without having humongous money to throw around. This is the hallmark of Nigerian democracy. In Nigeria, there is conspicuous display of unexplainable wealth during the highly monetized primaries elections of the two prominent political parties in Nigeria, All Progressives Congress (APC) and People Democratic Party (PDP) in 2022, which inevitably favoured those with the deepest pocket. This is not a true and responsible democracy. In the just concluded 2022 primary elections of the above mentioned political parties, aspirants were bought over by richer aspirants. In every part of the world, the enlightened self-interest of the ruling class dictated that autocracy be replaced first by the classical form of democracy and that next, the classical form itself be replaced by its liberal form within the context of representative democracy (Iyayi, 2004). This does not mean that members of the ruling class voluntarily conceded the right of periodic election.

He stressed that in the Greek city state which the classical idea of democracy is most practiced, only free men participated in the debates and influenced the mode of governance of the city. Slaves were not allowed to participate in the debates against the backdrop that the Greek city was divided between the nobility and subjects and free men and slaves.

The emergence of bourgeois class, not only produced struggles to redefined the meaning but also the practice of democracy. According to Iyayi, from the bourgeois point of view,

Democracy is a apolitical method, that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislature and administrative decisions. It is a method by which the individual acquires the power to participate in decisions by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote. It is the competition for votes that is the distinguishing character of the democratic method.

What is fundamental is that elections play a vital role in the bourgeois understanding of democracy and that the stability of the bourgeois order is predicated upon the credibility of its elections. This postulation has provided the benchmark against which democratic and hence electoral practice have been measured in all bourgeois context in the world.

(Iyayi, Supra), In addition, the integrity of the electoral process has major implication for the level of economic and social development that are possible or attainable in that context. (Fayemi, Jaye and Yeebo, 2003).

Development is alien to Africa as a against the backdrop that politics is warfare in Africa by the politically active segment of the ruling class. A political culture that is characterized by violence makes development a mirage. Nigeria's electoral process has always been known for its chaotic nature was masterminded by the bourgeois

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research which focused on the secondary method of eliciting data from existing sources.

The documentary method anchors on descriptive analysis of documents containing essential data relating to the phenomenon under investigation.

Bourgeoisie

Marxism posits a materialist interpretation of human history. By this, it assumes that the mode of production of goods and services and the manner of exchange of these goods and services constitutes the bases of all social processes and institutions. Marx insists that it is the economy that serves as the foundation upon which is erected the superstructure of culture, law and government. It is those who own the means of production that determine the economic fortunes of the society, rule it politically and set its social values.

Marx argues that every society is divided into classes on the basis of ownership or non ownership of the means of production. Those who own property constitute a class and those who do not constitute another class. He argues that it is the clash between classes that provides the motive force of history. The class struggle is in turn, a reflection of the contradiction between the forces of production, that is the instrument of labour and the people producing the material wealth on the one hand and the relations of production, that is, the relations among people in the process of production, exchange, distribution and consumption of material wealth on the other hand. Since the social relations develop at a slower pace than the forces of production they soon constitute a hindrance to the latter, thereby making social revolution inevitable.

Marx shows that the capitalist system is polarised into two classes:

- The few capitalist bourgeoisies who own the means of production and the proletariat, the workers. The relationship between these two classes is characterized by antagonism because the bourgeoisie exploits and subjugates the proletariat in an effort to maximize profit. Marx envisages that as the contradictions of the capitalist system become more acute, a revolutionary situation will arise during which the proletariat will overthrow the capitalists and the dictatorship of the proletariat will be established. This would be for a brief period and its major task would be to establish a socialist society and put the productive powers of the society and accumulated capital at the service of the whole society. The final aim of the revolution is to establish communism, a classless society which would have no need for the state and which would be organized on the principle of, from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs.
- **Political Culture**
- In their book, *The Civic Culture*, Gabriel Almond and Verba classified political culture into three main types. The classifications are based upon whether members of society take an active role in the political process or whether they are inactive. The first type is a parochial culture. In this

type, there are no specialized political roles. The political system is not differentiated from the socio-economic or religious system. People have little knowledge of the political system beyond what happens in their immediate local government. Politics permeated by ethnic loyalty and primordial sentiments. In addition, there is little expectation on the part of the member of the political community that significant changes in their lives can be made through politics. A parochial citizen does not expect anything from the political system, he makes no demand on it. This type is found in many traditional societies. The second type is a subject political culture. A subject orientation is essentially a passive one. The citizen is aware of the outputs of government welfare programmes, coercive measure or tax legislation, but he plays no part in the inputs. He does not participate and believes he has no influence on the government. The defunct East European Communist regimes and many authoritarian regimes in the third world countries approximate this type. In this kind of political culture, the government expects obedience from the people and conformity to its directives without questioning.

- The third type is a participant political culture. This type is characterized by a citizenry which is aware of both the inputs and outputs of government. The citizens believe in their ability to influence their government. They manifest attitude of personal political competence. They are encouraged to participate actively in the decision making process. The British, American and Scandinavian political systems best represent this ideal.

Reasons for Vote–Selling in Nigeria

The major reasons for vote selling in Nigeria are poverty, unemployment, literacy and galloping inflation. The prevalent impact of the economic recession and intrinsic inflation rate in Nigeria have disvalued the possession of the impoverished with low purchasing powers and thwarted the standard of living of the poor, thereby projecting vote buying to flourish in Nigeria politics endlessly.

The other reasons for vote selling in Nigeria are ignorance on the part of the electorates, apathy and deceit by the politicians.

Besides, attitudinal problem on the part of the people involved in the buying and selling of votes. Our attitude towards politics is not right because most politicians view it as a call to investment from which huge profit is expected and not as call to serve humanity.

In addition, the electorates on their part see politics especially during election, as an opportunity to sell their votes and represent their own share of the national cake since they do not have access to where the national cake is being shared.

Some Cases of Vote buying in Nigeria Elections

The ₦10,000.00 (Ten Thousand Naira) Trader-Moni Scheme introduced by All Progressives Congress (APC) was meant to solicit voters' supports for the 2019 general election. The scheme had been investigated and disbursements audited to expose perceived pillage of the public resources by All Progressives Congress under the guise of empowerment. The hoky-poky term "Trader-Moni" ought to be autonomously scrutinized in order to expose hidden facts. Trader-Moni was the modern form of vote-buying and enticement of voters to vote for All Progressive Congress (APC). It gives credence why it was embarked on few months before the 2019 general elections and had fizzled off immediately the aim of the exercise was achieved. The Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, denied the assertion that the All Progressives Congress ₦10,000.00 (Ten Thousand Naira Trader-Moni programme was for vote-buying, rather it was designed to empower over thirty Million Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME'S) with interest-free, collateral free loans. People Democratic Party maintained that the scheme was meant to induce voters to support All Progressives Congress during the 2019 general elections because of the way and manner it was propagated and executed by the vice president himself (Sahara Reporters, 2019).

Besides, a stalwart of the All Progressives Congress was alleged to have driven in two bullion-vans loaded with cash into his premises on the 22nd day of February, 2019 for vote-buying during the presidential election. This allegation was not investigated by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the regulatory agency or the Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) or law enforcement agencies because All Progressive Congress is involved. (Vanguard ngr, 2019).

In addition, in Nigeria a former Minister of Aviation and the spokesman of the Goodluck Jonathan Campaign Organization as he then was allegedly received money from the former National Security Adviser for Goodluck Jonathan's re-election bid, and was arraigned in Court by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) alongside a former Minister of State for finance, over an allegation ₦1.5 billion fraud (vanguardngr. 2016).

Furthermore, in Nigeria, a former Minister of State for Defence was alleged to have received ₦4.7 billion from the former National Security Adviser, which

he claimed to have shared amongst some prominent Peoples Democratic Party members for Goodluck Jonathan's re-election bid (vanguardngr.supra)

Effects of Vote-Buying

Firstly, vote buying plays destructive roles by truncating and frustrating the energies of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Civil Society Organizations and International stakeholders in consolidating and developing genuine participatory democracy in Nigeria.

Secondly, vote-buying ignites corruption amongst politicians after voting them into power. When the politicians resume office, they would first recoup all the money invested during nomination of candidates, party primary elections, campaigns and general election. This will make politicians to loot the state treasury after they have won the election.

Thirdly, vote-buying increases financial burden on politicians and this affects development in their constituencies.

Fourthly, it serves as a springboard to catapult unsellable, incompetent elements and unsuitable political party to public elective offices.

Fifthly, vote-buying enslaves vulnerable voters who are paid to support candidates of a particular party and it restricts voter's freedom of choice and blurred their rational decision making skills.

Sixthly, vote-buying amounts to mortgaging the future of voters' children children yet unborn.

Seventhly, it brings diminishing and devaluation to political power which ought to be sacred and hallowed.

Eighthly, vote –buying causes huge cost to the society, weakens accountability in government and impedes institutional growth required for democracy.

Conclusion

Nigerians are working hard to build ever stronger democratic institutions and unbiased electoral process. The Nigeria state deserves a free, fair, transparent, credible and peaceful electoral process, one that serves national cohesion and stability and leads to even stronger democratic institutions. Key political actors should refrain from violence and offer voters a clear vision coupled with detailed policies to move the country forward. Nigeria's greatest resources is not its vast oil resources, not its large mineral deposits but its people – Nigeria's amazing human resources. As a result of the introduction of Bi-modal Voters Accreditation system (BVAS) in Nigeria's electoral process, violence, chaos and rigging of elections are gradually shifting grounds to vote buying.

Nigeria's financial vulnerability is the fundamental reason for the commodification of Nigeria Politics, but as intellectuals, we owe our society the social responsibility of historicizing the financial plague for which the people of the country are known. It is most worrisome that the clergy, academia, and members of some honourable professions which ought to be conscience of the nation are used to frustrate the Nigerian electoral processes.

Recommendations

There should be radical reappraisal of electoral and citizenship education, sensitization of voters to create sufficient political awareness and emancipate the masses from the clutches of poverty and illiteracy.

The National Orientation Agency, Independent National Electoral Commission, Civil Society Organisations, the media, social organization (e.g Churches, mosques, shrines and community based associations and stakeholders should declare complete war against vote buying.

The provisions of the Electoral Act, 2022, as amended is sufficient to manage and solve the problem of vote-buying in Nigeria, but the enforcement of the provisions of the Act is another ball-game.

All elections should be monitored with a view to preventing vote-buying at the polling station by the civil society organizations and stakeholders.

The Electoral Offences Commission and tribunal should be established ahead of the 2023 general elections which would be charged with the responsibility of trying electoral offenders. Independent National Electoral Commission should ensure voter's vote in secrecy. This will reduce vote-buying.

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