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**Vote Buying and Credible Elections
in Nigeria: An Opinion Survey
of Voters on the 2019 General
Election in the Federal Capital
Territory (FCT), Abuja**

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Abstract

Monetary inducements has been part of the electoral process in Nigeria in recent years but the incidence of vote buying became so glaring and discredited the democratic process in the 2019 General Election. This study interrogates the phenomenon of vote buying as it affects the prospects of credible elections in Nigeria. It relied on primary and secondary data to investigate the causes, incidences and impact of vote buying on the democratization process in Nigeria. The study also adopted and applied the General Incentive Model as its framework for analysis. It was discovered that the quest to institutionalise the best practices of democracy as well as ensuring the sanctity and integrity of the process in Nigeria has always encountered threats in every election cycle. The paper recommends the reduction of poverty in Nigeria as well as the amendment of the Electoral Act 2010 to incorporate electronic voting, among others, as a measure to curb vote buying in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democracy, Elections, Financial Inducements, Voters and Vote Buying

Introduction

One of the prominent pillars, supporting and determining the quality of democracy is the electoral process. It is no surprise that modern States regard periodic and regular elections as a core attribute of democracy. As submitted by Baidoo, Dankwa & Eshun (2018), elections seem to have become a major factor in the stabilisation and democratisation of emerging democracies. They also maintain that election forms an important pillar that places the power to govern with the people and is a litmus test for democratic institutions. It is apparent, therefore, that electoral processes held under conditions that meet global and regional standards of credibility

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give meaning to democracy's core values of political equality, legitimacy and the accountability of those who govern.

The sanctity of choice embedded in the modern democratic idea presupposes that the electorate has the latitude to choose those who would govern them in a regular, free, fair and credible electoral process. For a legitimate government to rule, the people must have the luxury of choosing their leaders through the processes that meet international good practices. This implies that fraudulent elections fall below the accepted democratic norms, anywhere in the world. Thus, democratic self-government is incompatible with electoral farces (Ojo, 2008). Put differently, regular, free, fair and credible election is a *conditio sine qua non* for a political system to be termed democratic, stable and secure.

In spite of the fact that regular, free, fair and credible elections are important to routinise democratic ethos, the conduct of elections in Nigeria has been deficient (Ojo, 2014). Since Nigeria returned to the democratisation process in 1999, the conduct of elections has left much to be desired, because the election process has been characterised by electoral fraud, including vote buying, electoral violence among other violations, undermining its legitimacy and of government. Though monetary and other material inducements have been part of the electoral process in Nigeria, the incidence of vote buying and financial inducements became so glaring in the 2019 General Election (Adigun, 2019 and Dauda, et al, 2019).

Suffice to add that the 2019 General Election was a highly competitive and fierce contest between the incumbent, President Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic (PDP). Moreover, the election was contested by 91 registered political parties, with an unprecedented 73 presidential candidates on the ballot paper. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reported a total voting population of 84, 004, 084, an increase of 18 percent from the 2015 election (Nwachukwu, 2019). Consequently, vote buying escalated as contestants and political parties struggled to outdo their rivals, in order to influence the electoral outcomes. What then is the impact

of vote buying on the electoral and democratic process in Nigeria? This study interrogates the phenomenon of vote buying and how it affects the prospects of credible elections and democratic stability in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

i. Election

The importance and centrality of election as one of the cardinal features and a fundamental aspect of representative democratic politics has elicited various attempts at conceptualising the term. Egwemi (2014, p.98), conceptualised election as a process under democracy through which people or the electorate exercise their freedom and inalienable right to organize their life and to choose those whom they delegate their rights as representatives. Similarly, Animashaun (2010), opined that election is a democratic process that provides citizens with the freedom to choose their rulers and to decide on public policy. Under any democratic system, citizens who are legally qualified to exercise franchise are provided with the opportunity to choose political alternatives and to make decisions that express their preferences.

Election can be defined as a formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of connected antecedent and subsequent behaviour, involving the participation of the people in the act of electing or choosing their leaders and participation in governance. This key import of election is that elective principle is indispensable in a modern democratic setup. On the contrary, fraudulent elections are incapable of producing acceptable and legitimate leaders.

ii. Vote Buying

As an emerging phenomenon in political and electoral lexicon, the concept of “vote buying” has attracted vigorous clarification from various scholars. A commonly cited definition is by Etzioni-Halevy (1989, p. 287), who defined vote buying as “the exchange of private material benefits

for political support.” This definition emphasises the gaining of private material benefits by voters in return for offering political support. It also entails giving voters some benefits such as gifts or incentives so that they can reciprocate by voting for the giver(s) or the candidate(s). Therefore, this view sees vote buying as an exchange in the sense that materials gifts are given to the electorates in anticipation of votes for the givers.

Similarly, Baidoo, Dankwa & Eshun (2018, p.7), capture the concept as “the use of money and direct benefits to influence voters.” It is noteworthy that while the first definition did not actually focus on the use of money, Bryan specifically includes money in his definition. It is clear that his definition does not restrict vote buying to only money but includes other material items like food, clothes, and motor bikes and so on. In this instance, electorates are given money and other direct benefits to influence their decisions or choices at the polls. In addition, voters are also given these direct benefits and may be expected to abstain from voting or to vote in a particular manner or not to vote.

It therefore, means that any reward given to a person for voting in a particular way or for not voting can be called vote buying. Essentially, vote buying can be defined as any form of financial, material or promissory inducement or reward by a candidate, political party, agent or supporter to influence a voter to cast his or her vote or even abstain from doing so in order to enhance the chances of a particular contestant to win an election. Suffice it to add that vote buying is a fraudulent electoral practice in most democracies, including Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the General Incentive Model, developed by Clark and Wilson (1961). They posit that if we know the kinds of incentives that an organisation may give to induce members’ greater cooperation, then something can be learnt about the incentive system a political party uses to sustain members’ participation in its

activities. Clark and Wilson (1961, p. 130) pointed out that the internal and external events of organisations may be explained by understanding their incentive systems. They stated that all organisations in good standing must provide “tangible or intangible incentives” to their members to induce optimal contribution.

In the use of incentives to buy votes from the electorates, politicians often use monetary and non-monetary incentives to influence the behaviour of voters. These incentives are usually targeted at the poor or less educated class of opposition backers, not to turn out and vote which is referred to as “negative vote buying, swing voters and a party’s main supporters to turn out and vote which are also referred to in this model as ‘turnout buying’” (Cox & McCubbins, 1986). While negative vote buying reduces votes for the opposition party, turnout buying increases votes for the party buying votes.

Vote buying incentives provide goods which are short-term, private, and have a high degree of certainty (Desposato, 2007). In view of this, poor voters assign higher values to vote buying where uncertainty of the compensation for their vote is low (Desposato, 2007). Two main purposes are intended to be achieved during the distribution of these vote buying incentives: One, to ensure positive or participatory vote buying and two, to achieve negative turnout. The poor and less educated among the electorates is often the target during the distribution of vote buying incentives. This is attributed to the fact that gifts have more force among the poor. Hence, parties will buy the votes of the poor before trying to buy those of the wealthy (Stokes, 2005). The poor who finds a naira note on the street, for example, will be made happier by finding it than will, a wealthy person. This is due to diminishing marginal utility of income. Bratton (2008), for instance, reports that during Nigeria’s 2007 elections the most common amount of money offered to voters was the United States’ dollar. These economic mechanisms are likely to make poor voters the prime targets of vote buying by political parties who want to maximize their (re)election chances. It follows that the same outlay of resources by the party will buy more votes among poor than among wealthy voters.

In a nutshell, vote-buying can be a greater motivation to the poor to vote than the enticement of public goods, as the poor are oftentimes relegated in the distribution of public goods. Desposato (2007, p. 104) says “poor voters, on average, should have higher utility for immediate private goods than for delayed public goods.” Moreover, unless a voter has an alternative source of income and simply did not need the incentive, it is unlikely that poor voters will therefore be able to resist vote-buying incentives.

The assumptions/propositions of the theory were not clearly stated to justify the adoption of the theory as the framework of analysis.

Methodology

The study employed the mixed method approach which is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methodological approaches in collecting data. The mixed methods combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches into the research methodology of a single study. The combination of the two research approaches offers a good benefit on the study of which either could have on the work. Thus, a sequential mixed-method design was employed for the study. Data from questionnaire was triangulated with interviews. The target population for this study consisted of potential voters in the FCT, Abuja, who were 18 years and above. The six (6) Area Councils of the FCT - Abaji, Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje and Kwali - were selected for the study. A sample size of four hundred (400) was determined through the Taro Yamene's formula. These were chosen for the quantitative (questionnaire administered) aspect of the research while 12 others were purposively selected for the qualitative (interviews conducted) aspect of the study. For the purpose of the oral interview, two respondents were selected from each of the Area Councils (totaling 12 respondents) and interviewed to support the data. Responses show that out of 400 copies of questionnaire distributed only 387 (96.8%) were retrieved. This was accepted and adjudged suitable, which formed the basis of the analysis of this research.

The quantitative tool of data analysis employed in this study was the frequency distribution table using simple percentages. The analysis of the data collected was tabulated with the aid of the frequency distribution using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0.

An Overview of the phenomenon of Vote Buying

As democratic elections have been spreading across the globe since the early 1970s, so has electoral fraud, including vote buying. Affirming this fact, Baidoo, Dankwa & Eshun (2018), submit that vote buying has been widespread in many countries that have continued along the path towards democracy. In corroboration, Vicente (2008), affirms that vote buying happens frequently in many parts of the world. He maintains that vote buying, the use of electoral incentives to buy votes, has been a frequent practice during electoral campaigns and elections in several developing and developed countries.

Numerous scholars have documented widespread usages of these campaign strategies in Britain and the United States (O'Leary, 1962), Nicaragua (Gonzalez-Ocantos, Jonge, Mel'endez, & Nickerson, 2012), Argentina (Stokes, 2005), Taiwan (Wang & Kurzman, 2007) and Lebanon (Corstange, 2010). In African countries like Sao Tome and Principe, Nigeria (Athanasius, 2019; Onuoha & Ojo, 2018); Bratton, 2008; Vicente, 2008), Kenya and Ghana (Kramon & Posner, 2013), vote buying has steadily grown in scale and brazenness. As further submitted by Baidoo, Dankwa & Eshun (2018), campaigns seek to ensure that voters clearly associate the gift with their candidate. The candidate's flyer, for example, may be stapled to packages of food handed out to voters or cash may be attached to flyers.

Vote buying appears in different forms in every society. It may take the form of direct payments to voters. To Schaffer & Schedler (2005), vote buying, in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange. They aver that candidates "buy" and citizens "sell" votes, as they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets. This shows that the act of vote buying is a contract,

or perhaps an auction, in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder. Parties and candidates who offer material benefits to voters may generally aspire to purchase political support at the ballot box in accordance with the idea of market exchange.

Other forms may include offering of employment before elections, giving out of gifts, provision of social infrastructure to communities at the “last minute” and conditional promises to individuals upon the election of a candidate (Baidoo, Dankwa & Eshun (2018). Similarly, Kramon (2009) is of the view that political parties employ certain strategies to buy the votes of electorates. The strategies may focus on demobilising active opponents or on mobilising passive supporters. The former is often described as “negative” vote buying or “abstention buying”, while the latter may be considered as “participation buying.” These strategies may be intended to restrain electorates from casting their votes or ensuring a high turnout but how the parties choose amongst the strategies when offering electoral incentives or buying votes remain a great question.

Again, Baidoo, Dankwa & Eshun (2018) submit that during the distribution of these “goodies” or “freebies,” political parties and politicians target or consider two specific issues. According to them, one of the factors political parties consider in buying votes is the type of voter. In this vein, Cox and McCubbins (1986) identify three types of voters: core supporters, swing voters and opposition backers. Thus, in every electoral system, these three major groups of voters can be identified and they form the persons that are targeted during vote buying. Schaffer & Schedler (2005) identify the second factor as they assert that, vote trading propositions may target either electoral choices or electoral participation. They may be intended to persuade individuals to vote in certain ways, or to vote or not to vote in the first place.

Furthermore, extant literature and theoretical perspectives have identified three dominant arguments to explain the foundations of vote buying in elections. First, it is argued that socio-economic factors, especially poverty, unemployment and illiteracy play a major role in promoting the market

for votes in democracies. Second, it is argued that the voting methods in a particular electoral system may also guarantee the predominance of vote buying during elections. The third explanation is predicated upon the belief that vote buying is a product of the nature of partisanship and party organisation in a particular state (Onapajo, Francis & Okeke - Uzodike, 2015).

Vote buying is frowned upon in every democracy. It raises questions about the quality of democracy. In view of this, some arguments are usually made against the practice. First, they argue that because vote buying gives wealthier individuals an unfair advantage, it violates the principle of equality. Second, there is a concern that votes buying may promote inefficiency. This is because the interests of some voters are bought by parties before the election, and their needs or interests may therefore be ignored by political representatives after the election. Buying of votes is also frowned upon in most economies. This is because once a nation becomes user-friendly to vote buying and vote selling; it ceases to be in the best books of foreign multinational companies seeking to invest in developing countries (Baidoo, Dankwa & Eshun, 2018).

It is noteworthy that vote buying is prohibited in Nigeria. 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.

In consonance with the Electoral Act (2010), 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.” In spite of these legal frameworks prohibiting it, vote buying continues to be a widespread practice in recent elections in Nigeria. In fact, the brazen nature of vote buying in Nigeria, led to the description of Nigeria’s electoral politics as “cash-and-carry democracy” (Onuoha & Ojo, 2018, p.1).

There is no doubt that the occurrence of vote-buying, understood as incentives or gifts given to voters before elections in exchange for their votes is a corrupt electoral practice. The phenomenon seems to obstruct democratic processes, yet remains pervasive in many developing democracies. Vote buying is a threat to the conduct of quality elections. According to Akwetey (2016), electoral fraud, corruption and unfair practices bring the reliability of the electoral process into question. It affects the legitimacy of the elected officials. He said that the practice often leads to mistrust, violence and conflicts, while robbing citizens of their need for expected peace and development.

There has been a widespread of this cankerworm in a sense that many African elections have not been centred on issues or policy or accountability. This has consequences for economic development since it is normally done through the giving out of electoral incentives. In a democracy, an election campaign is supposed to be a peaceful and open discourse of persuasion. Ideally, candidates compete for popular support by presenting reasoned arguments about why they are most qualified for election to office. They stake out rival positions about programmes of public goods, all the while being tugged towards the median voter at the centre of the political spectrum (Downs, 1957). Voters then choose the contender whose policy positions most closely resemble voters’ own set of preferences.

Nigeria returned to a democratic rule in 1999, and since then the country has organised and conducted six (6) general elections, comprising the Presidential, National Assembly, Governorship, State Assembly and Council elections. This is beside rerun and bye elections. All these

elections have been fraught with allegations of distribution of electoral incentives aimed at buying the votes of electorates. Vote buying seems to have become the norm of the day both at the national and internal party elections. The problem stems from the fact that there is high rate of poverty and ignorance among the voting populace. According to the Civil Society Situation Room (2019), it is a cynical tactic that seeks to take advantage of widespread poverty and want by getting people to sell their votes to the highest bidder. The Situation Room reports blatant incidents of vote buying across Nigeria, involving major political parties (wherein) Party agents stationed themselves at polling units paying voters sums ranging from N500 to N5,000 to get them to vote in favour of their candidates.

The implication of the manifestation of vote buying in Nigeria is that it will undermine political legitimacy and make a mockery of Nigeria's democracy. It will create a fundamental problem of unaccountability and irresponsibility as the voters will not have the moral ground to demand good governance from politicians and it will affect the credibility of the elections. Vote buying increases the outlays of elections for candidates and parties and may preclude dependable aspirants from contesting for political office (Matenga, 2016). It generates disparagement among voters, with a sense of alienation from a besmirched system that nosedives democratic principles.

Findings and Discussions

This section contains the assessment of the responses of the respondents on the phenomenon of vote buying in the Nigeria, especially in the 2019 General Elections.

Table 1: The reality of vote buying in Nigeria

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid			
STRONGLY AGREE	221	57.2	57.2
AGREE	129	33.3	90.5
UNDECIDED	09	2.3	92.8
DISAGREE	16	4.1	96.9
STROGNLY DISAGREE	12	3.1	
Total	387	100.0	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

In the survey, as presented in table 1, two hundred and twenty-one, representing 57.2% of the total sample strongly agreed that vote buying is real in Nigeria. This was corroborated by 129 respondents or 33.3% of the sample. The cumulative figure shows that over 90% of the total sample answered in the affirmative to the reality of vote buying in Nigeria. On the other hand, nine (9) respondents or 2.3% were undecided. Meanwhile, a total of twenty-eight (28) respondents representing 7.2 % either disagreed or strongly disagreed that vote buying is a reality in Nigeria. These results demonstrated clearly that the phenomenon of vote buying is real and alarming in Nigeria.

Table 2: Money/Gift items were distributed by politicians during the 2019 General Elections

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid			
STRONGLY AGREE	198	51.2	51.2
AGREE	145	37.5	88.7
UNDECIDED	0	0.0	88.7
DISAGREE	31	8.0	96.7
STROGNLY DISAGREE	13	3.3	100
Total	387	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Vote buying characterised by money and gifts incentives were distributed during the 2019 General Elections. Majority of the respondents had either known some people and, or personally received a gift or an incentive from a political party. In table 2, the findings showed that 198 and 145 respondents, representing 51.2% and 37.5% strongly agreed and agreed, respectively that money and gifts items were used as incentives by politicians during the 2019 General Elections. The distribution of these incentives was for the purposes of influencing the voting behaviour of voters, which is tantamount to vote buying. On the other hand, 31 and 13 respondents, representing 8.0% and 3.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively that money and gift items were distributed by politicians during the 2019 General Elections.

The results indicate that more than a third of the total respondents had been exposed to vote buying incentives. Similarly, 10 out of the 12 interviewees affirmed that vote buying was a common phenomenon during the 2019 General Elections. In Bwari Area Council, for instance, it was reported that residences of party chieftains became a Mecca of sorts for the distribution of money and other gift items as encouragements for voters to vote in some particular way. This means that majority of the respondents were either beneficiaries or witnesses to vote buying.

On the issue of specifications of gift items received as an incentive for vote buying, the respondents gave a range of items received as incentives from political parties and politicians to include money, rice, beans, condiments, as well as branded party materials like 'T' shirts, wrappers, bangles and umbrellas. In some cases, motor bicycles were given to key party supporters and opinion moulders.

Table 3: Communities benefitted from developmental projects prior to the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid			
STRONGLY AGREE	67	17.3	17.3
AGREE	99	25.6	42.9
UNDECIDED	17	4.4	47.3
DISAGREE	114	29.5	76.8
STROGNLY DISAGREE	90	23.2	100
Total	387	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Furthermore, the study investigated if communities in the FCT benefitted from developmental projects prior or shortly before the 2019 General Elections. The aim was to establish if such efforts were meant to serve as incentives to sway the voting behaviour of voters, which is tantamount to vote buying. Table 3 shows that 67 (17.3%) strongly agreed and 99 (25.6%) agreed with the assertion that communities benefitted from developmental projects towards the general elections. It was observed that 17 (4.4%) were undecided. On the other hand, 114 (29.5%) and 90 (23.2%) disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively with the assertion. This means that those who answered in the affirmative witnessed projects in their communities or were aware of same in other communities. Again, those who answered in the negative were neither aware nor witnessed any of such projects prior to the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria. In the interview sessions, participants named some of the developmental projects as building of community clinics, construction and tarring of roads, construction of boreholes, installation of transformers and provision of public power supply.

Corroborating the above submission, the Punch Newspaper (2019), in its editorial of September 27, 2018, avers that the Presidency, through the Office of the Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria began a process of giving out ₦10, 000 to ₦30, 000 traders in Osun State through

the Tradermoni initiative of the Federal Government. The question on the minds of most Nigerians is, “why ₦10,000 and why now?” Although the aides of the Vice-President refuted the claim, the practice was hiked and spread throughout the country in the run up to the 2019 General Elections. This was considered by many as a governmental inducement of voters. The Punch (2019) avers that given ₦30,000 to traders could appear small, but they actually have mothers, fathers, children and friends of voting age, who could simply be induced indirectly by such gesture of the All Progressives Congress (APC) controlled Federal Government to make election table unbalanced in the country.

Table 4: Conditions Attached to Vote Buying Incentives by Politicians or their allies

S/N	Item	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %	Total %
1.	I was told to snap my ballot paper as proof	43 (11.1)	56 (14.5)	12 (3.1)	178 (46.0)	98 (25.3)	387 (100)
2.	I was made to swear an oath to comply	34 (8.8)	61 (15.8)	09 (2.3)	190 (49.1)	93 (24.0)	387 (100)
3.	A spy was sent to watch me	169 (43.7)	98 (25.3)	23 (5.9)	58 (15.0)	39 (10.1)	387 (100)
4.	I was to call their party agent to thump print for me	195 (50.4)	67 (17.3)	05 (1.3)	86 (22.2)	34 (8.8)	387 (100)
5.	I was threatened with death if I failed to comply	32 (8.3)	43 (11.1)	14 (3.6)	167 (43.1)	131 (33.9)	387 (100)
6.	There was no condition attached to the incentive	65 (16.8)	73 (18.9)	07 (1.8)	172 (44.4)	70 (18.1)	387 (100)
7.	I rejected the incentive because of the conditions attached.	80 (20.7)	110 (28.4)	08 (2.1)	86 (22.2)	103 (26.6)	387 (100)
8.	I accepted the incentive but voted the way I wanted	167 (43.1)	67 (17.3)	05 (1.3)	86 (22.2)	62 (16.1)	387 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2019

SA. - Strongly Agree, A. - Agree, U. - Undecided, D. - Disagree, SD. - Strongly Disagree. Fig-ures in bracket are percentages

This study also investigated the conditions that were attached to the incentives during vote buy-ing. It also solicited respondents’ views on the kind of conditions that were attached to their in-centives. Table 4 reveals clearly that various conditions were attached to the incentives given for

the purposes of vote buying. Many respondents that were interviewed accepted that conditions were attached to the incentives. However, a good number insisted that though the incentives were given to sway voters' behaviour, no condition was attached to their incentives. This confirms what a party stalwart in Gwagwalada Area Council said that they do not actually attach conditions to the incentives unless they have doubts about the party affiliation of the person or have the belief that a person just wants to collect the item and not vote for them. The survey also indicated that many electorates were prepared to accept incentives when offered by politicians, yet, vote according to their consciences. In other words, the electorates had the intention of accepting incentives even if conditions were attached by politicians.

Implications of Vote Buying on Elections and Democracy in Nigeria

The consequences of vote buying are manifold, particularly for a developing democracy like Nigeria. It is paramount to note that vote buying unduly raises the cost of elections thereby shutting out contestants with little finances and promoting political corruption. When victory is purchased rather than won fairly, it obviously leads to State capture. What happens after State capture can best be imagined. This implies that vote buying can trigger corruption by politicians after they are voted into power. This is because they would want to recoup the money expended during electioneering process. This can lead to the abuse of state resources.

Again, vote buying equally compromises the credibility, legitimacy and integrity of elections. It undermines the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidders and not necessarily the most popular or credible contestants (Adamu, Ocheni & Ibrahim, 2016). Vote buying definitely has major negative implications for the electoral and the political system as a whole. It therefore discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics and causes citizens to lose faith in State institutions, and leads to political and voter apathy.

Furthermore, vote trading equally has the tendency to perpetuate bad governance. It not only compromises the well-being of those who sold their vote for instant gratification, but also the future of those who did not sell their votes but are inevitably exposed to bad governance that results from such a fraudulent process. For every vote traded, there are many people who would suffer the unintended consequences when the traded votes make the difference between winning and losing in the election. Put differently, vote buying vitiates the commitment of the “elected” government to the ideal of good governance like accountability, inclusiveness and responsiveness. Vote buying compromises the credibility, legitimacy and integrity of elections.

More so, the usage of incentives to buy votes may have devastating repercussions on Nigeria’s elections. It can negatively impact the quality (freeness and fairness) of elections. Vote buying can contribute to the wrong political parties being elected to serve the State and leadership positions become a prize for the highest bidder. Once voters are paid to cast their votes in a certain way they become enslaved by their political paymasters as, by default, their rights to challenge their vote buying political paymasters have been emasculated. As vote buying is so widespread, it raises concerns about the quality of emerging democratic institutions and how potential elections conducted will help to deliver better and more accountable governments.

Again, it was established that vote buying constituted one of the biggest threats to the 2019 General Elections. In this way, a security threat assessment survey released on the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria revealed that vote buying was the foremost of the fourteen risk factors that could generate tension or electoral violence. As submitted by Elebeke & Ulebor (2019), the national average score for the risk factors emerged in this order: vote-buying (1.16), godfatherism (1.16), hard drugs (1.14), hate speech (1.14), history of electoral violence (1.11), cult activities (1.10), politicians (1.10), problematic party primaries (1.08), violent campaigns (1.07), farmer/herdsmen crisis (1.07), ethnicity/religious crisis (1.08), insurgency (1.04), agitation (1.04), and militancy (1.02). In the survey, the level of tension the

risk factors can generate was rated on a scale of 0.1 to 1.0 as Low, 1.1 to 2.0 as Medium, and 2.1 to 3.0 as High.

There is no doubt that vote buying in Nigeria has reached an alarming proportion and has got to the extent that politicians have spread their tentacles of inducements to election officials, security agencies, election observers and even the media. This ugly phenomenon has astronomically increased the cost of elections; created an uneven playing field for electoral contestants; and gives victory to the highest bidder. It has also heightened political corruption as those who invested mind-blowing amounts to procure election victory are not altruistic philanthropists but shrewd businessmen who hope to reap bountiful rewards through corrupt means. As the saying goes, “there is no free lunch in Freetown.” Thus, as recounted by Ojo (2018), the opportunity cost of vote-buying is the underdevelopment of the country.

In line with international standards, when it comes to democracy, everyone has equal rights. In a true democracy the world over, every citizen of a State for instance, is entitled to vote and be voted for, provided there are no reasonable or legal restrictions. However, where there is vote buying, that alone can make it impossible to meet this requirement because such practice is likely to penalise potential candidates from running for offices, especially, when these individuals are at an economic disadvantage, that is, persons, who do not have so much money to buy votes and win elections (Athanasius, 2019).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Vote buying has gradually gained traction in Nigeria’s electoral system. It is apparent that the rate of poverty in Nigeria is alarmingly and scandalously high and consequently, the poor have often been targeted for vote buying by political parties. This has made vote buying more effective with the poor and powerless. Often, the effectiveness of vote buying with poor voters is interpreted as a reflection of the fact that small material goods

have a greater marginal utility to poor voters.

It was discovered that some of the major items used as incentives of vote buying range from money, branded and unbranded cloths, rice, cooking condiments, motor bikes and even developmental projects, executed during the electioneering season. In the survey, money was distributed during the week of the election and on Election Day, particularly at the polling units. In many cases, conditions were not attached to the incentives except where the person giving the incentive suspects that the receiver may deviate or renege on the contract between the seller and the buyer. Essentially, it was obvious that voters were not willing to reject the items (incentives) even if conditions were attached to them. Many voters believed that it is not wrong to accept money from politicians for votes because they felt it is an opportunity to get back some money, which had been stolen by these politicians. Whatever the case may be, vote buying effects have been discussed above.

It is therefore recommended that:

- i. Reduction of poverty can be an effective strategy to reducing vote buying. Since the findings concluded that there is a relationship between income (economic status) and voters' decisions, governments should make it a point of duty to reduce poverty by enhancing wealth creation and redistribution. This can be done by creating or providing sustainable jobs, especially for people in rural areas.
- ii. There is the need for more voter education, sensitisation campaigns and awareness creation for citizens about the malpractice of vote buying. Voters, civil society organisations (CSOs), the media and other non-state actors should engage the State and political parties to spearhead and strengthen democracy by mounting vigorous campaigns to educate the electorates not to accept financial or material inducements before they vote for a particular candidate or party as this amounts to selling their conscience and rights. In other words, there is 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.

- iii. 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.
- iv. 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.
- v. 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 criminalised.
- vi. Civil society groups should advocate and apply pressure for police and other law enforcement agencies to arrest, investigate and diligently prosecute those involved in the act of vote trading.

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