

Vote Buying and Electoral practice in Nigeria: The Experience from 2023 General Elections

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Abstract

Vote buying has been a worrisome dimension in the Nigeria's electoral practice going by previous experiences in recent time. The paper critically examines factors and causes responsible for vote buying in an election and the consequences on the electoral integrity in a democratic practice. Specifically, the extent to which each of these factors is responsible for electoral corruption in the Nigeria's 2023 general elections occupied the central role of this paper. Vote buying has become a serious phenomenon in a recent time which has undermined the credibility and integrity of electoral processes in Nigeria. This paper relied on secondary source of data collection such as journal articles, textbooks, newspaper and online publications, the theoretical framework adopted in this paper is the clientalism theory because it explains the linkage between Nigeria's electoral process and vote-buying. Findings reveal, that bad leadership, failure in governance, weak electoral institutions and laws, failure to keep to electoral promises and poverty are the major factors responsible for voting buying in Nigerian electoral processes. The study reveals that, lack of truth in the electoral processes, distortion of democratic representation, undermining electoral accountability are the major consequences of vote buying in the outcome of Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The research emphasizes the need for comprehensive electoral reforms in order to ensure credible, free and fair election and also address the menace of vote buying in order to ensure the integrity of democratic practice in Nigeria. Finally, the paper suggests improving civic and political education of the electorate and voter awareness, addressing poverty and economic inequality, fight against corruption and strengthen the electoral institutions and laws, implementing robust regulated campaign finance and enhancing electoral accountability and transparency will curtail vote buying in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Vote-buying, Election, Consequences, Electoral processes and Nigeria's 2023 general election*

Introduction

Election has become the most effective means of changing governance in a democracy. The fundamental tenet of democracy is that the people have the right to choose who governs them. But it is unfortunate that vote buying and selling by the political class in the enthronement of democracy has become a source of concern as these activities has jeopardized the basic tenets of democracy as a pivotal to good governance. Vying for political position in this circumstance has left contest for election in the hand of the wealthy. Despite that the electoral act regulates the finances in the electoral process and activities by candidate and political activities there is the need to further strengthen the electoral act to effectively regulate the vote buying syndrome which if not check can destroy the tenets of democracy.

Vote buying is progressively becoming a regular reoccurrence and consistent phenomenon in the Nigeria electoral system that becomes a cancerous to elections in Nigeria. This electoral malpractice has been widely practiced either during political party primaries or general elections. Musa and Umar (2022). Bunte and Ufen (2009, p.33) asserted that vote-buying has been highlighted in public debates and practiced in almost every election across the country.

Vote-buying is the practice of rewarding someone for casting a specific ballot. It is a simple economic transaction whereby voters sell their votes to the highest bidder in an election. In Nigeria, as in some African States, the practice of vote-buying among contestants, political parties to political offices and the electorate has become subject of discussion among scholars in recent time. Various analytical perspectives explain why the act of vote-buying inhibits good democratic governance and the electoral process. Vote-buying in Nigeria has reached an alarming state to the extent that contestants to political office have spread their tentacles of inducements to election officials, security agencies, even the media and the general public. Vincent and Benjamin, (2023).

The menace of vote buying on the Nigeria's electoral process has endangered good democratic governance and weakened the citizens' confidence in the electoral process and elected officials and encouraged corruption. However, the Nigerian electoral processes have been weekend by the electorate's high degree of illiteracy, lack of political education and awareness and poverty.

Statement of the problem

The menace of vote buying in Nigeria has undermines the integrity of our electoral credibility and values in recent time. The implications of vote buying have resulted into bad governance and unprecedented electoral outcomes which has eroded our democratic principles. The 2023 general election is particularly vulnerable to this menace which have threaten voter's autonomy, skew electoral outcomes in favour of highest bidders, entrench corruption and money politics and undermine trust in the electoral system. Hence, the study is to examine the causes, consequences of vote buying during the 2023 general election and as well provide way forward that tackle the menace of vote buying on our electoral system.

Conceptual and Review of literatures on vote buying

vote buying has become a recent phenomenon in the political discourse over time in countries based on their historical underpinning and electoral pattern (Schaffer, 2007: p.34). vote buying has become economic transaction and has become a tool in the hands of politicians and political parties for political supports, Musa & Umar, (2022).

According Efebeh and Ohis (2023) examined the overview effects of vote buying on the electoral democratic principles in Nigeria. Nigeria's democratic values are rapidly being undermined by the issue of vote buying. The integrity of Nigerians has been tarnished by the threat. There has been a deliberate restriction on the free expression of the people's will. The problem casts doubt on the election's credibility, integrity, and validity. Vote buying has led to bad governance; voters may not have the right to contest the process when things go wrong and the promises made are broken since the system that produced the leader was not constitutionally sound. There are instances when voting has far more costs than benefits, and the economy is the one that suffers not the children or the future. Then, as a cost of campaigning for government, politicians retrieve these monies from the system.

According to Ufen (2009, p.33 cited in Umar & Musa, 2022) stated that vote-buying has been discussed in public and used in nearly all elections across the country. Vote-buying is a common phenomenon in societies where party ideology and principles are questioned, political office holders fail to keep campaign promises, and rural communities are neglected in the provision of social amenities and infrastructure. However, in Nigeria's electoral process, the phenomenon is rooted in the politics of the elites and has become more prevalent in the general elections of 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023. In Nigeria large chunks of money are necessary to influence the electorate during party campaigns. 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. According to studies, 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. This is because there is a general belief that Nigerian politicians are neither accountable nor responsive because they do not fulfil their promises, so the only time they can be made to commit resources to the electorate is during their party campaigns. This belief contains some element of truth because most Nigerian politicians do not even visit their constituencies after they have been elected. To him, politicians and public office holders has failed in performing their primary assignment which has led to increase in vote buying over time. The phenomenon of vote-buying in Nigeria has become a common practice since the return to a democratic system in 1999. This electoral fraud has been widely practiced either during political party primaries or general elections has undermined electoral and democratic practices in Nigeria.

According to Ewum and Obi (2024), vote buying has undermined the process of free and fair elections, is uncommon in Nigeria's democracy. In recent time, other forms of electoral malpractice and fraud such as buying and selling of permanent voters' cards (PVC), ballot

snatching, bribing of INEC officials and security agencies, have eroded the nation's democratic practices. Over ambition of politicians and the unchecked desperation displayed by supporters have created a widespread occurrence of electoral malpractices and has undermine and weakens the basic tenets of democracy and reduces the confidence in the democratic practices. In a democratic society, electoral practices should be free from malpractices where citizens can participate without any compromise.

Bryant, 2005: pp.32-35(cited in Umar and Musa, 2022) sees vote buying as the trade-off between political support and personal material gains. Vote buying is any kind of material, financial, or promissory incentive or reward given by a political party, agent, or candidate to sway a voter's decision to vote or not to vote in order to increase the likelihood that a specific candidate will win an election. Vote-buying can therefore be defined as any conduct in which an individual is given an immediate or promised payment for casting a ballot or abstaining from casting a ballot. Vote-buying is seen as an election offense in most countries. In Nigeria, the purchase of votes has always been a crucial part of money politics. Vote-buying occurs during several phases of the electoral processes, including voter registration, the nomination phase, campaigning, and election day, as demonstrated by recent events. It is more common on election day, either right before or right after voting. The objective of vote buying, which is to obtain personal items or immediate advantages for voters in exchange for their political support, is emphasized in both definitions. To support the above submission, Fox (1994: pp. 38–40) contended that vote-buying is a component of the interchange between monetary benefit and political support, supporting the aforementioned claim. Put otherwise, it is the trade-off between material gain and political rights.

Bello-Imam (2007, p 4) explain the various forms of vote buying, Bello-Imam sees vote buying as a form of 'bribery consisting of money or other rewards for voting as directed'. He highlighted various form of vote buying which are; • Direct inducement of the electorate with money to influence votes in favour of a particular political party or candidate; • Inducement of local political elites with money or materials in order to gain the block vote of a particular constituency; • Providing wards or electoral constituencies with materials such as clothing or food with the intention of getting their votes; • Purchasing cars or motorbikes, building houses and providing contracts for traditional rulers and local elites in order to get the votes of their subjects; • Paying political thugs to intimidate and harass the electorate to force them to vote for a particular political party or candidate; • Paying political thugs to snatch ballot boxes; • Paying security agents to aid in electoral fraud; • paying electoral officials to aid in electoral fraud.

As notice by Bello-Imam, Vote buying can also be seen as: 'A gift or gratuity bestowed for the purpose of influencing the action or conduct of the receiver; especially money or any valuable consideration given or promised for the betrayal of a trust or the corrupt performance of an allotted duty, as to a voter.

A study by oliver and vasil (2022) examined the concept of vote buying and factors that necessitated the practice of vote buying. Vote buying is a breach of electoral campaigns that takes place throughout many nations, undermining democratic governance and the integrity of elections. Vote buying is a kind of election corruption that is illegal in the majority of nations. Election

procedures are compromised, but it is infamously hard to prove. Vote buying persists in some countries most especially in African countries because of limited state capacity, a lack of political will by political parties to comply with legislation or the politicization of oversight bodies. According to them, vote buying is the offer of financial or material inducements to voters by candidates or political parties during an election campaign period or on election day in exchange for electoral support. The explanation provided includes the distribution of inducements between the supporters of a party or candidate to encourage their turnout (also known as ‘turnout buying’, Nichter 2008). As stated by Oliver and Vasil, there are various factors that necessitated vote buying in the political circle. Such factors impact either the "supply side" political actors' decisions to purchase votes or the "demand side" voters' willingness to purchase votes or both. One of the supply-side causes of vote buying is politicians' attempts to build a clientelist connection with their voters by providing special privileges in exchange for political allegiance. Vote buying may be made possible by the electoral system, especially if it features single-member districts or encourages intraparty rivalry between candidates running in the same electoral district. This could encourage candidates to adopt unique electoral techniques. Voter anticipation that candidates running for public office will provide them cash, gifts, or other favors which they may view as a source of income is another factor that encourages vote buying. Poverty and social exclusion encourage voter's willingness to accept benefits in exchange for their vote. Since the same financial incentive is likely more valuable to poorer voters than to their wealthier counterparts, it costs less for political actors to buy the votes of the poor. Such voters may also be more politically marginalized and therefore more inclined to discount future benefits on which programmatic election campaigns are fought. A further consideration may be that voters who are not interested in politics and do not attach importance to civic values are more disposed to engage in vote-buying offers. To support this view, Etzioni (2011: pp.34-35) have put different arguments on why vote-buying takes place in Nigeria. He suggested that, vote buying happen as a result of some many reasons, Some of the covert causes of vote-buying in Nigeria include technological advancements, politicians' desperation to win elections at all costs, political parties' lack of ideology to implement comprehensive manifestos, high rates of poverty and illiteracy among voters, and issues with the attitudes of those engaged in both buying and selling, all of which make the act of buying votes an easy one.

Vote buying also has adverse effects beyond the immediate outcome of an election by increasing the cost of electoral campaigns and creating a barrier to entry into politics by individuals without significant wealth (Kramon 2013; Muhtadi 2019).

In a quantitative study done by Vande (2019), vote buying come in different forms in every society. It may take direct or indirect forms. He sees vote buying where 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 provide voters with tangible benefits typically aim to buy political support at the polls, in line with the notion of market exchange. According to his findings, poverty, unemployment and illiteracy play a major role in promoting vote buying during electioneering period in Nigeria. It is asserted that some electoral systems' voting procedures may also ensure

that vote buying will predominate during elections. Vote buying in Nigeria is a sign that the country's democracy is going to be mocked and its political credibility threatened. Voters won't have the moral authority to hold politicians accountable for their actions, which will worsen the basic issue of irresponsibility and lack of accountability. It will also damage the legitimacy of the electoral process. The integrity, legitimacy, and credibility of elections are all jeopardized by vote buying. Because the winners are frequently the greatest bids rather than always the most well-liked or reliable candidates, it compromises the credibility of elections. According to Adamu, Ocheni & Ibrahim, 2016 as cited in Vande, 2019, Vote buying undoubtedly has a negative impact on the political system overall as well as the electoral process. As a result, it dissuades moral individuals from engaging in electoral politics, erodes public confidence in government agencies, and results in political and voter apathy. Moreover, vote trading also tends to support incompetent leadership. It jeopardizes not just the welfare of those who exchanged their vote for quick money, but also the future of those who did not do so and will eventually be subjected to poor governance as a result of this dishonest procedure. When the traded votes decide whether an election is won or lost, many people would experience unforeseen effects for each vote that is exchanged. Stated differently, vote buying undermines the "elected" government's dedication to the principles of responsiveness, inclusivity, and accountability. Election integrity, legitimacy, and credibility are all jeopardized by vote buying. Furthermore, according to him, Vote buying was found to be one of the main electoral concerns for the 2019 general elections. Accordingly, out of the fourteen risk categories that could lead to tension or electoral violence, vote buying was ranked as the most important one by a security threat assessment poll conducted before of the 2019 Nigerian general elections. Vande, 2019 concluded that, In Nigeria, vote-buying has become more and more common in the political process. It is evident that Nigeria has a startlingly and scandalously high percentage of poverty, and as a result, political parties frequently target the poor in order to purchase votes. Hence, reduction of poverty, voter's education and sensitization campaigns and awareness, amendment of the electoral laws, and secrecy of the ballot will reduce the rate of vote buying during electioneering period which will enhance electoral credibility.

Corroborating the above submission, Efebeh and Ohis (2023), stated that, socio-economic conditions, illiteracy, poverty and a lack of honest electoral procedures, openness, and accountability in government significantly contributed and created menace of voting buying in the 2023 general election.

The existing literature on vote buying in Nigeria's electoral process lacks a comprehensive and up-to-date examination of the phenomenon, particularly in the context of the 2023 general election. There is a need for in-depth analysis of the consequences of vote buying on electoral outcomes, voter behaviour, and the broader democratic process.

Furthermore, the role of technology in facilitating or combating vote buying has not been thoroughly explored, leaving a significant gap in understanding the modern dynamics of this menace. Additionally, the literature lacks comparative analysis with other countries, which could provide valuable insights into best practices for addressing vote buying.

The perspectives of key stakeholders, including voters, candidates, and electoral officials, are also underrepresented in the existing literature, limiting the understanding of the complexities of vote buying. Moreover, the long-term consequences of vote buying on Nigeria's democratic development have not been fully explored, making it difficult to develop effective strategies for addressing this challenge.

Overall, the existing literature provides a foundation for understanding vote buying in Nigeria, but significant gaps remain, highlighting the need for fresh research to address the evolving nature of this phenomenon and its consequences on electoral practice in the 2023 general election.

Theoretical framework

The clientalism argument is used to explain vote-buying and Nigeria's electoral system. The main thrust of this theory's claim is that clientalistic practices revolve around using any kind of inducement to win political support and public loyalty. Accordingly, clientalism is defined by Stokes, Dunning, and Nazareno (2013) as the return of goods and services for political support, frequently entailing an implied or explicit quid pro quo.

The theory emphasizes a set of actions based on the principle of 'take there, give here' with the practice allowing both clients and patrons to gain advantage from others' support (Graham 1997).

Democratic politics in Nigeria have primarily included electoral clientalism. Generally speaking, electoral clientalism is defined as a relationship in which politicians provide voters with tangible advantages in return for their political support, which may involve casting a ballot. (Gallego, 2017).

The theory is relevant to the current research because it establishes a clear connection between vote-buying in a democracy like Nigeria and the electorate process. Vote buying has influenced elections in the past. Vote buying has been used by the ruling party, other opposition parties, and their candidates to sway voters' decisions in the run-up to previous elections. In order to gain political support from the beneficiaries at the expense of appropriate democratic participation, legitimacy, and respectable election outcomes, candidates for various elective posts at the federal, state, and local levels promise favors to their friends and engage in cash-for-votes or votes-for-cash transactions before, during, and after the elections (Orizu, 2018).

Furthermore, the cronies rally political support and allegiance for their patrons in exchange for promises or gifts. Vote buying is a political tactic employed by politicians of all stripes to hold onto or seize power. It also impedes legitimate political competition, makes it harder for voters to make informed decisions, and ultimately fuels political indifference.

The electoral process in Nigeria is similar to the notion put out by the clientalism theory; the country's politicians, who utilize vote-buying apparatus to sabotage the democratic process, have a vested interest in holding fraudulent elections in Nigeria. Vote-buying is therefore more common and more intense before and during elections in Nigeria due to the severity of the country's power struggle (Musa & Umar, 2022).

Methodology

The primary focus of this qualitative study was the secondary method of information collection from pre-existing sources. Documents that have important information about the subject under study are examined descriptively as the foundation of the documentary technique. The study adopts journal article, textbook, literature on electoral practice, newspapers and online publications.

Historical Background of voting buying in Nigeria

Vote buying has been in the game of electoral practice in Nigeria since colonial era. The British colonial authorities introduced electoral politics in Nigeria and political powers were concentrated in the hands of colonial administrators, but it was marred by manipulation and bribery to serve their interests. Nigerian politicians and traditional leaders were co-opted by the colonial authorities, and elections were often rigged to favour pro-colonial candidates. (Ihonvbere, 2002). After the independence in 1960, Nigeria's political environment was characterized by the fight to construct a stable democratic system. A number of political parties came into being in the early post-colonial era, and they frequently depended on clientelistic networks to seize and hold onto power. Ethnic and religion became an important tool to win elections because the political parties were formed based on ethnic line, vote buying also became political tactic as a result of the rivalry between these parties (Ake, 1996). Vote buying and electoral fraud became an issue of concern, with politicians using money, gifts and other materials to influence voters. Politicians distributed T-shirts, Caps, Badges with party emblems and foodstuffs to their supporters during campaigns and political rallies. The ruling parties, particularly the Nigerian People's Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG), were accused of using state resources to bribe voters and rig elections. Money politics and vote buying became more popular to a large extent during the second republic (Jimoh, 2020).

The military era between 1966-1979 undermines democratic processes and institutions. Nigeria's political history includes several periods of military rule, which significantly impacted electoral practices. During these periods, the lack of transparency and accountability in governance created fertile ground for corrupt practices, including vote buying (Suberu, 2001). The military governments suppressed electoral politics, but vote buying persisted in local government elections that was conduct during these periods. Military rulers often handpicked candidates and rigged elections to favour their allies. (Odetola, 1982).

The Second Republic between 1979-1983 witnessed increased corruption and electoral malpractices with political parties and politicians using state resources to influence voters. The ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was accused of using oil revenues to bribe voters and rig elections (Diamond, 1988). The transition to civil rule in the 1990s saw a rise in vote buying, with politicians using money and gifts to win elections (Omotola, 2006). The ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) was accused of using state resources to bribe voters and electoral officials.

The transition to civil rule in 1999 was to restore democratic governance to the country, but corruption's legacy remained, there was widespread reports of electoral corruption and manipulation. Vote buying remained a tactic used by political parties and candidates to win elections aside other electoral fraud practices like bribery, intimidation and violence. Research by

academics like Adejumobi (2007) shows how the ingrained practices of electoral fraud did not vanish right away once democracy was restored.

Vote buying and 2023 General Elections: An assessment

The phenomenon of money politics and electoral malpractice has become a watchword of politics in the Nigeria's fourth republic. The previous republics witnessed other factors that influence electoral victories like ethnic and religious sentiments, intimidation, bribery and violence but vote buying has occupied the central focus in the fourth republic. The role of money cannot be overemphasized in political affair but it has been abused by politicians and political parties as stated by the laws guiding the conduct of elections (Jide,2007). Reports shows that there were cases of vote buying in the elections conducted in the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011,2015, 2019 general elections but the 2023 general elections witnessed tremendous cases of vote buying.

In Nigeria, the purchase of votes has always been a crucial part of money politics. However, recent events demonstrate that vote buying occurs throughout the electoral cycle and has been clearly seen during the nomination process, election day, voter registration and during campaign time (Nwakpu, Dick & Alozie, 2024). Concerns have been expressed by both candidates and election observers due to previous incidents of political party representatives and agents buying votes for their candidates using cash. (The Tribune of Nigeria, 2023)

Vote buying and electoral fraud has undermined our democratic process, despite the prohibition as stated in the Electoral act 2010 as amended and its categorized as a dangerous act. For instance, Article 130 of the Electoral Act 2010, as amended, states that:

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

Despite its prohibition, vote buying became a major problem during the 2023 general elections across the country (Nwakpu, Dick & Alozie, 2024). According to National Bureau of Statistics confirmed that there was a prevalence of vote-buying and selling during the 2023 general elections. NBS report titled: Corruption in Nigeria, affirmed that, the 2023 general elections recorded 22% of vote buying, which is five per cent higher than the 2019 general elections with 17%

(Punch,2024). It was disclosed that 22 percent of citizens that participated in the elections reported that they were offered money, foodstuffs, cloth and other gift items in exchange for votes. Report also shows that, in 2023 general elections compared to 5% in 2019, 10% of respondents stated that they were approached by a household member rather than directly offered cash or another favor in exchange for their vote in 2023. But according to NBS, their poll showed that some voters remained unaffected by their choices to vote even after receiving gifts or favors. In the general election of 2023, just over half (55%) of the voters who were personally offered money or another favor in exchange for their vote stated that the offer had no bearing on their decision to cast their ballot, while 40% of those voters claimed that they had voted for the candidate or political party that had made the offer specifically because of the offer (Punch, 2024).

According to report, there were little to no changes in the vote-buying zones' predominance in the South-West, South-South, and North-Central regions of the nation between 2019 and 2023. According to the NBS, the North-West saw an increase from 23% in 2019 to 44% in 2023. It also noted that "a relatively high share of 55% of citizens who were offered money or another favor in exchange for their vote" was reported in this zone (Punch,2024). Vote buying is seen as a treat Nigeria's democracy. Observers in all seven states in the North-West region observed an increase in vote trading, primarily involving political party agents. Along with other commodities including food items, wrappers, and a "credit voucher," which could be redeemed for goods or services, currency was used (Gabriel & Owa, 2024).

In the Northeast, Political party agents in Taraba used a technique known as "queue infiltration," where they pretended to be voters and took advantage of the situation to offer rewards in exchange for votes. Agents of the APGA and LP parties were allegedly using materials, phones, and other keepsakes to entice and convince voters in the Southeast area of Anambra State (Gabriel & Owa, 2024). Some states in the South-South region have stated that voters must show proof of their vote in order to be paid. In Esan Central LGA, Edo State, it was alleged that party representatives were compiling a list of their supporters. Votes were being swapped in some parts of the states of Edo and Benue for sums ranging from ₦1,000 to ₦2,000. Because money was still in short supply, equivalent products were frequently used in place of cash. Vote buying took many different forms in the area, including the delivery of clothing, toiletries, and "I-owe-you" vouchers', and food products (Vanguard, 2023).

Prior to the 2023 general elections, the Naira redesign policy by the Central Bank of Nigeria was implemented to limit vote buying by candidates and political parties during the elections. Politicians offered more of non- monetary like foodstuffs, cloth and other gift items as a result of the Naira redesign policy. Compared to monetary interaction, non-monetary exchange lessens the guilty feeling of the dishonest actor for unethical and corrupt behavior. Politicians may also use this non-monetary reciprocity as a justification for wrongdoing and a means of avoiding breaking the election law, which makes vote-buying illegal. When politicians gave non-monetary presents, over half of the recipients accepted them. It's interesting to note that a significant percentage (43%) of people who took the gifts did not vote for the politicians as predicted (Akinwunmi, Ajibola, Jane, & Niyi, 2024).

Factors that Influence Vote Buying in the 2023 General Elections

Studies provide extensive data on factors that influences vote buying during the 2023 general elections. Scholars provide various factors which include, poverty, political corruption and voter apathy. These weaknesses could be used by politicians or political parties to buy votes, skewing the results to their advantage. According to literatures, the inability of candidates and political parties to provide a solid comprehensive manifestoes to the citizens has made vote buying and money politics a common practice in our electioneering process in Nigeria (Davies, 2006). Vote buying in modern Nigeria is attributed to a number of factors, including poor institutions, a lack of voter education, the political class's eagerness to hold onto power, and the general failure of the Nigerian state (Adamu, Ocheni, & Ibrahim, 2016). Poverty, a lack of political education, and shoddy institutions are common in Nigerian society.

The factors are:

Poverty and economic instability -Nigerians live on less than \$1 a day on average, according to UN estimates of poverty in the country (Efebeh &Ohis, 2023). The rate of poverty was on the high side prior to the 2023 general elections and the prevailing issue of new naira redesign increase the rate of vote voting, the politicians took advantage of the issue on ground to increase their chances to win at the poll by buying votes with cash and other gift items (Ojo,2023). Those who are extremely poor might find some relief from their suffering for a week if they receive material things and cash incentives on voting day. People in Nigeria are more likely to exchange their votes for a token than to consider the possible consequences since a larger proportion of the voting public are poorly informed. Olanrewaju & Coastman, (2023) found a link between vote buying and poverty in their study. They came to the conclusion that vote buying has a substantial impact on voters who are vulnerable and from low-income backgrounds. The results of multilevel regressions show that voters in poverty are much more likely than voters in wealth to be the target of vote buying, according to Jenson & Justesen (2014). In highly competitive elections, this effect is amplified even more. Vote buying is largely caused by micro-level poverty in Africa, which has detrimental effects on democratic democracy. Due to the general voter's ignorance and poverty, (Efebeh & Ohis, 2023) claim that vote buying and other forms of electoral inducement are widespread in Nigerian politics. The appeal of unrestricted electoral rewards, like cash or merchandise, is too strong for many people to resist. Voter buying and selling is a practice that is compatible with political parties' ongoing wrongdoings. While wealthy people are also involved in these unethical practices, lower-class people are more frequently the victims of political parties' efforts to buy votes. (Daily Trust, 2023). Vote buying is prevalent Nigeria because an average voter is poor and cannot resist the challenges of uncountable electoral bribes in cash or kind. Poverty, unemployment and illiteracy have been identified by scholars as the major causes of vote buying (Musa & Umar, 2022).

In Nigeria, the vast majority of people live in abject poverty as a result of vote buying (Adetula, 2008). Poverty and illiteracy contributed to the increasing rate of vote buying before and during elections. As a matter of fact, majority of the people citizens are ready to sell out their votes and mandates for personal gains and monetary values (Edegbo, Obi and Alilu,2022).

Inability of Political Parties and Candidates to Project Comprehensive Manifestoes- political parties and candidates do not sell out comprehensive and comprehensible manifestoes that will help them make rational political choice to the electorates (Davies, 2006). They do not have a clear-cut policy and programmes that will enhance the well-being of voters. Voters are rather interested in money politics and vote buying.

Political corruption-Circle of corruption undermines electoral and democratic process in the 2023 general elections. Vote buying is an end product of political corruption that affect the credibility of the electoral process and democratic consolidation and thus brings about inefficient public service delivery, poor public services. (Edegbo, Obi and Alilu,2022). political corruption played a significant role in influencing vote buying in the 2023 general election in Nigeria (Obi, 2022). The country's history of electoral problems, including vote buying has been well-documented (Adebayo,2020). Widespread corruption and impunity among politicians and electoral officials perpetuated vote buying. This is partly because the average voter is often swayed by financial incentives, which can undermine the integrity of the electoral process. Vote buying was evident during primaries conducted by political parties in 2022. This helped most candidates wins primaries (Charles, 2023). We failed to abolish vote buying in the 2023 general elections as a result of corruption. The efforts put in place by government and INEC was not effective, politicians still develop other ways to encourage vote buying. Exorbitant cost of nomination forms is blamed for vote buying.

Lack of Electoral Integrity-Nigeria's electoral system lacks transparency and accountability, creating an environment conducive to vote buying. This includes inadequate voter registration, poor ballot security, and insufficient electoral officer training (Transparency International, 2022).

Desperation of Politicians- In recent time, most politicians are desperate to win election at all cost, so they go extra miles to ensure they win elections even at primary elections. They engage in all sort of malpractices including providing financial inducement and material needs like giving foodstuffs, cloth, jobs and money before and even on election day which is against the existing electoral laws (Davies, 2006).

Consequences of Vote Buying on the Nigerian Electoral Practice in Nigeria.

Poor Governance- Politicians who buy votes may feel less obligated to their supporters and put their own interests ahead of the good of the public. Widespread corruption and inefficient government may result from this. They focus on how to pay back whatever they have spent during the election without putting the electorates at the foreword of governance which the main reasons why they are elected. In recent time, we notice that most politicians who represent focus on what they can benefit without focusing on what will benefit the citizens at large

Developmental backwardness- Vote buying has become menace that hinders the progress of our democracy, which has been in place for 25 years. Selling votes is equivalent to selling the social advantages that voters would have reaped. The community's poor roads have been bought by avaricious politicians who give voters between 5,000 and 10,000, in some cases 15,000 or 20,000 naira depending on the situation and position in exchange for their votes (Efebeh & Ohis, 2023).

The resources projected towards vote business would bring about development key areas (infrastructures, providing health care facilities, reducing poverty level and others). Billions of dollars are invested in carrying out vote buying in the last elections.

Undermining Democratic Governance- voting buying has been proven to be one of the dangers to democracy and our electoral system in Nigeria. It has undermined our democratic and electoral processes. Over the years, ballot snatching, bribing of electoral officials and other electoral offenses was the other of the day, but in recent years scholars, have proven that another serious electoral offence is voting trading which has been popular in our electioneering practice in Nigeria. Vote buying has affected our electoral integrity which has led to loss of believe on our electoral institutions and practices. Vote buying has becoming more common in Nigeria, which has led to many voters losing faith in democracy. Vote selling became a deciding role in the recent Edo State election that took place in September 2024, leading many people to lose faith in the results. Allegations of vote buying, voting manipulation, and anomalies plagued the election (Punch, 2024).

Voter Disenfranchisement- Vote buying has the potential to diminish the voices of individuals who refuse to sell their votes, which leaves different groups in society with less representation. A lot of people no longer trust our electoral system. Today, most people believe that the highest bidder wins in elections. In democratic elections, vote buying is a common occurrence that compromises the integrity of the voting process and denies voting rights to marginalized populations (Schaffer, 2007). Votes are traded for personal material gain in this behavior, which turns democracy into a market transaction (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007).

Cycle of Poverty- Candidates who engage in vote-buying may rationalize their focus on personal interests' post-election, potentially perpetuating cycles of poverty and hindering economic development in the impacted regions. It has been proven by the United Nation that Nigerians live below estimate standard \$ 1 per day (Efebeh & Ohis, 2023). It has made Nigerians depend on the monetary politics of politicians for survival. It has been evident in the previous elections (2015, 2019 and 2023) that politicians offer clothing materials, cash, food items to voters for exchange of votes. The aftermaths of vote buying and selling has brought perpetual poverty to Nigerians which is so evident, the poverty rate has increased as a result the menace of vote trading.

Widespread Corruption- vote buying damages democracy's foundations and feeds the cycle of corruption. Furthermore, vote buying can lead to a lack of accountability because politicians may put the needs of the general public last and give priority to the interests of those who have paid for their votes (Ewum and Obi, 2023). It is important to note that leaders who gain political power through financial inducement often priorities their interests over the welfare of the country. This is because their rise to power is driven by commercial objectives, which can lead to a focus on self-serving behaviour while in office. It has been determined that vote buying can lead to corruption among politicians once they are elected into office.

Compromise the integrity of election- Studies on Vote buying in different literatures have revealed that vote buying and selling has undermined the integrity and legitimacy of election in Nigeria. According to Vande, (2019), vote buying has a major negative implication on the electoral and political system. 2023 elections have been categorized as monetized election in which the highest bidder wins and not necessarily the most popular candidate with the capacity to deliver. It discourages people from participating in elections because of the fraud associated with election in Nigeria. Vote trading has impacted the quality of free and fair election in the country.

Conclusions

vote buying remains a significant challenge to Nigeria's democratic process, undermining the credibility, legitimacy and results of election. The 2023 general elections were no exception, with widespread reports of vote buying and electoral malpractices across the country. Vote buying come in form of giving money, jobs, clothing materials, motor bikes and food items to seek for votes from the electorates. Politicians and political parties distribute the items before and during election day. Studies revealed that vote buying occurred as a result of certain factors, poverty and economic instability, lack of electoral integrity, corruption and inability of political parties and candidates to project a comprehensive manifestoes. Vote buying has brought about bad leadership and bad governance where politicians do not care about the well-being of the citizens and development in the country, they rather focus on personal gains. The aftermath of vote buying has resulted into poverty, underdevelopment, unemployment, fraudulent electoral practices and undermined democracy.

Recommendations

To combat the menace of vote buying in Nigeria, certain measures must be put in place to ensure total eradication of the disease that has eaten up our electoral values and integrity. They include:

- **Address poverty and economic inequality-** In order to prevent vote buying and maintain fair election procedures in Nigeria, it is imperative that poverty and economic inequality be addressed. The general elections of 2023 brought attention to the necessity of sustainable development programs to lower poverty and promote economic empowerment. There is need for government focus on education, healthcare, and infrastructure development to improve living standards and reduce economic disparities. Government should implement programs that provide financial support to vulnerable populations, promoting economic stability and reducing reliance on vote buying.
- **Strengthen Electoral law and enforcement-** it is necessary for government to review and amend existing electoral laws to explicitly prohibit vote buying and also set laws and penalties for vote buying offenses. It's necessary for government and other government agencies to establish specialized electoral crime units to tackle the menace of vote buying in the country.
- **Improve voter education and civil engagement-** The government, political parties and civil society organization should engage and conduct comprehensive voter education programs to

sanitize the electorates on the effects and consequences of vote buying. Its also necessary to encourage civic participation and volunteerism support voter registration drives.

- **Transparency and Accountability-** The government should implement transparent campaign financing regulations that will monitor the expenditure of candidates and political parties as stated in the Electoral act. The government should establish asset declaration requirements for politicians and to strengthen auditing program in political parties.

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