

Vote Trading and Elections in Nigeria: Democracy as an Article of Trade?

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Abstract

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This paper is underscored by the commodification and trading of votes in Nigeria which poses a threat to credible elections, democracy, and good governance. Domestic and global studies including election observers have established that there has always been widespread exchange of votes for money in Nigeria. In this regard, this paper looks at the issue of voting commodification in the country with a view to highlighting its attendant implications for present and future elections, democracy, and governance. Using descriptive and content analysis with data gathered through secondary sources the paper sought to answer the following questions: What is behind the narrative of vote trading in Nigeria? Why do politicians buy votes? Why do people sell votes? Is vote trading conditioned by individual beliefs or social norm? What are the consequences of vote trading on governance? What are the possible solutions to the problem? The paper argues that candidates and political parties engage in material gratification and vote trading during elections and that vote trading is propelled by independent, individual decision and mainly driven by material circumstances. It further contends that the more politicians engage in vote buying and gratification the more unstable the electoral process becomes as that prevents credible candidates from running for political office as they may not have the humongous amount required to contest in election. The study concludes that material vote selling and buying, and gratification pose negative tendencies for Nigerian political system, democracy, and good governance if not properly handled. The paper recommends among others taking political financing seriously with the electoral umpire- Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) more proactive in fighting vote trading and the electorates through political education be encouraged to avoid all kinds of inducements from political parties and candidates.

Keywords: Vote buying, Commodification, Democracy, Election, Vote Trading, Corruption

Introduction

In many countries of the world, election has often been conceived as the most suitable and appropriate means of replacing a government in a democracy. Described as consisting of organized group of people with almost same views and opinions that are primarily concerned with influencing public policy by essentially seeking for power and by presenting candidates for elections in a democracy, election is viewed as fundamental to democracy and by extension, good governance. Even before Africans' acceptance of western democracy, the people of Africa had their own democratic system dated to the period before

colonialism with inherent checks and power separations amongst level of governments (Adeyeye, 2011; Magaji & Umar, 2022; Malomo, 2006).

Election is conceived as fundamental because it is perceived as germane to political representation and election of officials into governments. It is recognized as the mechanism for electing representatives of the people who are vested with the responsibility to push their demands through to the governments and to cater for their rights and needs. Emphasizing this position Ojo (2008), argues that the all-inclusive proposition of democracy is representative through fair and free election that is incompatible with electoral hostilities and corrupt practices, therefore for any political system to be described as democratic, elections must be seen to be free, fair and credible. However, not every election fulfills these criteria particularly in Nigeria. This is because the narrative of election and electoral system dating back to Nigeria's democratic expedition has revolved around concerns over free, fair, and credible elections. Generally, beginning from the post independent electoral process to the present democratic dispensation the main problems confronting the country's elections and electoral process has been electoral corruption of different degree and magnitude evident in purloining of voters cards and voters papers, multiple registration of voters, manipulation of electoral rules and processes, electoral violence, election rigging, vote selling and vote buying, assassinating electoral opponent including many problems associated with the Independent National Electoral Commission-INEC (Ugoh, 2004; Danjibo & Oladeji, 2007; Alemika, 2007; Ojo, 2008; Sha, 2008; Ovwasa, 2013; Animashaun, 2015).

Of the above state vices, the issue of vote trading -vote buying and vote selling is the main concern and the core of this paper. This is because vote trading has posed negates the essence of Nigeria's elections and democracy because the commodification and monetization of votes does not only harm Nigeria's democracy, but also interferes with the independence and rights of Nigerian voters to have a fair assessment and opportunity of choosing their preferred electoral aspirants and candidates (Agaba, 2015). Vote trading has often led to the bringing into position and entrusting untrustworthy, unacceptable candidates with position of power to make and take binding policy decisions thereby committing governance into the hands of insincere, corruptible, and devious politicians. These issues have not only been recurrent in elections in Nigeria but have been playing dominant role in determining who wins elections, since the second republic of 1979 (Ojo 2008, Ovwasa, 2013). Overall, the consequence of flawed elections occasioned by the commodification of elections has raised the question of

whether democracy is for sale in the country. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the commodification of votes and vote trading in elections and electioneering process in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification and Literature Review

Democracy: The conceptual discussion of democracy begins with a fundamental question bothering on what the actual meaning is, or rather what the meanings of democracy are. The thrust of the above questions is that the concept of democracy is perhaps the most dominant ideology or system of government that has attracted varying interpretations in the contemporary world. Many countries today at least, pretend to be democratic albeit in the most minimal sense of holding elections. Even authoritarian some regimes often claim to be democratic. Surely democracy is an elastic concept whose description and conceptualization attracts varying degree of opinions, views, interests, and fundamental ambiguities, that is, the word does not have a generally accepted definition because of the eclectic nature (Adeyeye, 2011a; 2011b, 2006; Sargent, 2009: 90; Danjibo, 2010; Kasselmann, Krieger, & Joseph, 2010; Inokoba & Kumokor, 2011).

That is why scholars and students argue that virtually all aspects of useful norms and standards of political, social, and economic lives, are credited as descriptive character or features of democracy: accountability, participation, equality dignity, rationality, security, and freedom etc. (Adeyeye, 2011a and b). For this study, democracy is defined from the view of the procedures used to select top governmental officeholders and that for a political system to be democratic, those who occupy offices of the state must be selected through viable, clear, and acceptable electoral processes.

Election: Flowing from the description of democracy above and in tandem with the nearly generally accepted assumption, election is viewed as fundamental to electing political leaders and replacing government in a democracy. The assumption is also captured by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that globally, election is viewed as an important mechanism for choosing political leadership and the formation of governments vested with the political power to make laws and policies on behalf of the people (United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2010). The overarching proposition of democracy is a viable, clear, and acceptable electoral process that is free from electoral hostilities as well as corruption. However, experiences show that several elections in Africa do not meet these criteria (Ojo, 2008; Animashaun, 2015; Adeyeye, 2011). Be that as it may, election has been

described as a powerful and vigorous apparatus in the affirmation and acceptance of presence of a democratic institution - just as prizes in competitions are, elections are fundamental to the democratic process. To be sure, the take-off of all democracies is by conducting and management of voting, selection, and emergence of political leaders through votes. Frictionless transfer of political powers must come by elections in which the people confer on elected officials, lawfulness and legality to act in government on their behalf. Voting in elections is the power of the electorate to elect government officials, change government and validate a government. It is the recognition of this power of the electorate that makes politicians try all means and opportunities to induce and gratify them during political campaigns and elections.

Vote buying: In developing democracies such as in Nigeria, vote-buying has been very prominent. To this end, the description of vote buying, vote trading, vote transaction (turnout buying and persuasion buying), and the commodification of votes has received several attention and interpretations. This is so because such practices are prominent features of the electoral processes resulting from the negative craving of the political elite to be victorious in election and occupy political office. Literally vote buying represents an economic exchange used for the exchange of private materials for the purpose of exerting influence on eligible voters to curry their support and votes. It could be in the form of finance and/or materials exchanged privately for inducement either by political parties, candidates, their agents, or supporters (Magaji & Umar, 2022; Schaffer, 2007). From the foregoing, it can be argued that contestants in election engage in the buying of, and citizen trade their votes just like purchasing appliances and personal effects in the market. Political groups and politicians purchase votes just like in commercial and marketplace transaction using tangible and intangible materials and benefits, usually as political perquisites for political patronage. Analytically, it should be important to state that the trading objective of the seller and purchaser of votes often faces objective and subjective obstacles. Objectively, vendors and merchants of votes cannot be relied upon, they are unpredictable and undependable, as trading in votes is unlawful, illegal, and illegitimate. Therefore, it is not a conventional merchandise that has the protection of law and organized standard. The pragmatic narrative of those who participate in vote trading shows that that the act of selling and buying of votes can be described in several ways arising from the numerous viewpoints and historical accounts of elections in the country. This is because the occurrence of vote trading, vote-buying is not peculiar to specific society, political environment, or institution, it takes place in many countries especially in Africa (Ojo, (2006), What differentiates its

occurrence in different societies is the degree and dimension. For this paper, the description of vote buying in Nigeria means a phenomenon whereby candidates in elections give out handouts in form of monies by politicians for the purpose of inducing electorates with a view to influencing their voting decision rather than allowing them to vote based on their thoughts and wishes. Whatever kinds of monetary, or recompense -tangible or intangible, given to electoral bodies, party agents and members for the purpose of inducing electorates to cast their votes or to influence the success of any candidate, or the using monies to during campaign or election day, constitutes vote buying.

The commodification and purchase of votes in Nigeria covers campaign and election days. It is commonplace to find various groups including political parties adopt all means and mechanisms to achieve their political objectives including offering of material and financial inducements to achieve their parochial political goals. The intention to hold onto political power and influence, makes vote trading a fundamental discourse in the country. The 1999 constitution and the Electoral Act of 2010 conceptualised vote buying to mean the act of: “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”.

Because the trading and commodification of votes is the process of buying and selling votes during elections, such buying connotes the process of giving incentives in exchange for votes. When giving items, monetary offer, and promissory notes to electorates to influence them to either vote or not, politicians often hope that voters who have been compromised will do so for them or their preferred candidates. In the first place, politicians who offer money for votes often anticipate producing influential obedience from the electorates in the achievement of their objectives.

Firstly, givers might hope to produce instrumental compliance. In the case of success, the politician would have been successful in influencing the voters in a desired voting direction. Otherwise, the electorates politically behave against the

candidate because the bid or bidding price is not enough to convince the electorate, or the candidate does not command any political relevance. Also, politicians who offer money for votes sometimes wish to compel the electorate through coercion using bully which will force those who collect money or material gratification to change their political behaviour. In case the politician can generate and induce forceful compliance, it is because the electorate who have been paid off are afraid of the penalty of not rejecting the money and material given by the politician whom they know possess armed thugs to carry out attack on them. To the receiver, collecting money has varying interpretations which may be that it is a form of a contractual agreement, collecting political perquisite, receiving an offer, recognition of potentiality, revising or reneging on moral values and standard, acknowledgement of benevolence, among others. When offers are rejected or accepted, including if electorates' behaviour is modified or influenced, recipients of money or material gratifications for votes are likely to be behaving the way they do, due to anxiety and panic, obligation and allegiance, shame and humiliation, appreciation, uprightness, and sometimes parochial desire. To generate or strengthen the types of conformity either singly or combined, several plans are usually at the disposal of the politicians. This includes that politicians who have given money to electorates will keep eyes on how they (electorates) who have been paid vote during elections, even if the payment is promissory payment after voting or payment before voting. In some instances, electoral officials may have also been paid to take note of how electorates voted (Hoffman and Patel, 2022). Trading of votes is viewed as commercial undertaking connecting electorates as sellers, their liberties and rights and the buyers-politicians, that purchase electorates 'power of electoral self-determination. These politicians purchase votes with the desire to win elections and recoup their investments when they get to public office. To the citizens, the election time is the period they enjoy equitability and justness and when they can have the benefit of getting financial support from politician's benefactors (Ibana, 1996). A more helpful characterization of vote buying holds that it is more than ordinary commercial undertaking; instead, it encompasses remunerative, profit-making, and organized routine and tradition.

Theoretical framework:

Discussion on vote-buying in Nigeria can be situated using various theories. This paper adopts the clientelism and the rational choice theories.

Clientelism and Political clientelism: A look into the literature on the political economy relating to governance and government accountability in Africa

concentrates on the distortions in the political apparatus that possesses the tendency to retard the progress of pro-development and people-oriented policies by public political officials. To be sure and obvious are inequalities between dissimilar and contrasting socio-economic classifications regarding issues of political rights, political participation, awareness, capacity to contribute to election campaign and conduct lobbying for votes. The inequalities often result in higher implicit welfare weights to the affluent, rich, and wealthy elites in the making and implementation of policies which is described as elite capture.

Clientelism has been defined as strategic transfer carried out by political elites, political parties and/or their agents and sometimes governments to the disadvantaged poor with the sole purpose of securing their votes and to consolidate power by the sitting governments. The issue with this transfer is that it appears as if public policies- education, health are targeted at the poor but in the real sense often at the expense of long-term development because of its bias towards the personal interests of the political elites though in the long run even when it looks like people oriented at the initial stage. The main consequence of this is that it creates vertical inequality. It has also been mentioned that clientelist exchange usually requires patrons to make private goods available to the clients, creates lower development, excessive poverty among the people who are the voters and this poverty often make clientelism very easy because it is easy to buy the votes of the poor. It is nothing more than a powerful instrument used by political elites and sitting governments to consolidate their hold power (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2012; Stokes, 2009). The position of this conjecture captures the discourse on vote-buying in Nigeria in that socioeconomic hardship reflecting in poverty, citizen's disenchantment with government and lack of confidence and trust in the electoral umpire and corruption are factors that have been severally mentioned to be at the forefront of vote-buying in country.

Rational Choice Theory of Democracy:

The core of this theory as a derivative of the field of economics is based on the idea of rational choice of consumer theory or behaviour in determining how to efficiently use the scarce resources at hand for a better choice and satisfaction. Downs (1957) conceived the concept of "Economic Theory of Democracy" that later became the "Rational Choice Theory of Democracy". This conception represents the discovery of electoral behaviour as significant determinative of the rational choice amongst voters. Goods and services resource allocation and economic indicators relate to the after-effects of the political alternatives during elections. The core of the argument of the theory is that decisions made by

individuals in the society will invariably produce collective aggregate social behaviour. Therefore, everyone makes a decision that is premised on their preferences and the limitations they face. The assumption here is that provided rational choice can clearly explain the market, then it can effectively explain the political functioning with regards to the elections in Nigeria. This is so in that a similar relationship between the consumers of goods and enterprises and services can also be established between voters' political parties and politicians who engage in vote trading. The contention here is that just as companies desire to boost their financial gains so also do buyers aspire for maximization of benefits in the same way electorates desire to increase their political benefits and advantages, so also political organizations desire to increase their political gains during elections. There are two main dimensions of the rational choice theory- the evaluative and non-evaluative. The former is premised on the assumption that electorates assess the worth and effectuation of government including their own self-satisfaction as determinants of voting behaviour and pattern during elections. The latter on the other hand assumes that clientelist contemplations like patronage, tribal and cultural bonds, family relationship including one's own interest and gain accrue to the electorates for casting votes for certain contestants in form of money or material gain either immediately or in the future.

The shortfall of the theoretical assumption lies in the argument that electorates are logical, well-reasoned and reasonable in the choices they make. The perspective of the rational choice theory requires few arguments to pass for diligent and conscientious explanation of the motivation of people or group of people that trade their votes. While some have advanced poverty and unemployment as factors, there are instances some people collect money or items and vote other candidates essentially because of other factors such as religion and ethnic and tribal issues. Also, some electorates vote for contestants who pay higher not minding their status and integrity and politicians who pay less often receive lesser votes. Equally, the supposition on the idea that internal assumption that domestic political system is sustained and continual like in merchandise domain as it is in consumer choice thesis is consistently faulted. It is possible to have situations that have the possibility of modifying the thinking and reasonableness or options chosen by electorates. Nonetheless, despite the shortfall the rational choice proposition on election, ideally explains and describes the way voters behave and the analysis of elections and electorates deportment in the country. This is because voting has largely been influenced by highest bidders and political leaders occupy political offices largely at the backdrop of commodification and who offers higher gratifications before, during and/or after elections. Therefore, it

is safe to conclude that electorates and voters in elections in the country are logical, reasonable, and shrewd. They are pragmatic when it comes to issues of money in their pockets and stomach like a customer and shopper will do in a market transaction reality and politicians are also logical in their transactions and expenditure just like businessmen do. Therefore, economic factors do not provide a holistic explanation of the motivations for vote selling. However, it can explain the motivation for vote buying by politicians who are sure of recouping their 'investments' once they win election and occupy the office through corrupt practices.

Methodology

This paper examines vote trading and the commodification of votes as article of trade in Nigeria. In doing this, the paper employs qualitative content analysis research methods. Data were obtained through survey of extant literature on the subject matter under investigation, texts, journal articles, informed opinions in newspapers, magazines, and official documents and data were analysed using thematic content analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Elections, Vote Trading, Commodification of votes and Material gratification in Nigeria

Essentially, this section looks at the questions raised in the paper. The first question borders on the historicity of vote trading in the country.

Examining vote trading narrative in Nigeria

One Yoruba adage says: "Amúkunn ẹ̀rù rẹ̀ wọ; ọ ní ìsàlẹ̀ ní kí ẹ̀ wò", that is, when we complain of the load borne by someone who is challenged on his lower limb (legs), he will draw our attention away from the load to the legs that make the load on his head to bend side-way. The above statement succinctly captures an important finding of this paper. This is premised on the almost general agreement that the story of elections in the country has been tortuous with long years of negative tales and that finding solution to the problem will be very complex. Findings show that the history of elections in Nigeria depicts a narrative of different tales of negatives and positives. A fundamental negative tendency of elections in the country is electoral corruption evident in vote trading, material gratification and inducement. The first republic (1963-1966), Second republic (1979-1983), Third republic (1992-1993) and the ongoing fourth republic (1999-date) have been marred by same issues of corruption.

Even though the phenomenon of vote buying and vote selling has history in the post-independence (political system-1960-1966) politics in Nigeria, the incidence was low compared with the dimension in the succeeding republics. For instance, Nigeria's politics witnessed very high incidence of ethno-religious, tribal and commodification of votes in the second republic 1979-1983. Political elites at this point employed varying mechanism for electoral victories. Davies (2006) summarizes that monetization and commodification of election was predominant to the extent that political leadership that emerged at the various elections (conventions, primary and general), of all the major political parties-Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigeria People's Party (NPP), were mainly political businessmen. The political scenario of 1993 was atrocious in terms of money politics as the issue became almost a political culture. This is so because all the electoral processes were found to be dominated by trading of votes at all levels. It was claimed that the two main political parties-Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republic Convention (NRC) were accused of parties of political merchants (Nwosu, 1996). The 1993 elections did not fare better as reports have it that over 2.1 million naira was involved in vote trading activities (Ojo, 2000). In the same manner, commodification and trading of votes was high in the fourth republic-1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023 (Suberu, 2001).

This is evident in the statement of Obasanjo (2005) when he asked: Can we not move from politics of money materialism to politics of ideas, issues, and development? Vote trading, commodification and monetization of votes cases have been found in all gubernatorial elections in all states of the federation and have crept into the judiciary. For instance, the governorship election in Osun State in 2007 and 2011 was particularly reported. In 2008, *The News Magazine* of 6th July 2008 made damaging allegations against the Tribunal members and the counsel to Governor Oyinlola. It was reported that two judges of the Osun State First Elections Tribunal, namely, Thomas Naron (Chairman) and J.F. Ekanem were alleged to have "Slipped into Cesspool of scandal" by their very regular telephone calls and text messages to Kunle Kalejaiye (SAN), (The News Magazine July 2008).

Without doubt since the return of democracy in May 1999, vote selling and vote buying at all levels of elections in Nigeria has been a fundamental issue for discourse and has attracted the concern of scholars. The various reports of local and international observers on the 2019 and 2023 elections show that voters openly bargain to exchange votes for money of different amount with politicians

and political parties and their agents competing to outwit one another. Also, while reporting on the 2019 elections in the country the UNODC reveals different dimensions of bribery and reports that twenty-one percent (21%) of the people were directly offered monetary reward for votes and that eighty-six (86%) of the citizens thought that electoral fraud frequently occur in the country (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2019; Election Analysis Centre, Final Election Report, 2019; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime-UNODC Report). Vote trading takes different marketing dimensions and forms in forms of open negotiation and bargaining, closed methods, snap; show and payment and the targeting of electoral register to target voters with cash and gifts.

Why do people sell votes and why do politicians buy votes?

Evidence from the literature reveals that even though many people believe it is not right to engage in vote trading which they know is a corrupt practice, but they engage in it. The question one would then ask is why do they sell their votes and why do politicians engage in it? It has been affirmed that vote trading is propelled by an independent, individual decision and mainly driven by material circumstances. Political parties and candidates often pay people during elections due in part, to the problems of corruption, control of party financing and election monitoring (Hoffman and Patel, 2012:1). It has also been argued that people sell their votes due to shared experience of real socio-economic hardship and citizen's perception that they are being cheated by the political elites including citizen's lack of trust in the electoral system and institutions. It is without doubt that selling of votes- vote trading, is a form of corrupt behaviour that is basically based on independent decision undertaken by individuals highly driven by socioeconomic reality of the country which includes extensive poverty. Specifically, vote trading reflects routine exchanges that can appropriately be situated within the context of socioeconomic relations, scarce opportunity, poverty, and elite competition.

Also, citizen's disillusionment with the government and the entire political institution including electoral competition in the country has been identified as reasons people sell and buy votes. Situating the above factor, the 2018 survey data, focus study and interview conducted in 2022 by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, reveal that the reasons why people trade their votes in Nigeria are largely due to practical considerations and norms that are connected with some personal beliefs such as the belief that the cash and gift they receive is the only benefit they can get from their political leaders and the electoral process. Also, issues relating to personal conditions like the status of insecure and perilous socioeconomic and socio-political status including the

influential preponderant norms of transnational and re-distributive politics that bedevil the country's governance system are factors that promote trading of votes including economic hardship, and the precarious political environment essentially funded through public office.

Is vote trading influenced by individual beliefs or social norm?

Another fundamental question is whether vote trading is influenced by individual beliefs or social norm, that is, a personal choice made by the citizens or influenced by the general or collective interdependent behaviour. The concept of social norm is described as shared understanding regarding actions that are obligatory, permitted or forbidden that regulate everyday lives of the people including economic, political, and cultural decisions and practices (Hoffman & Patel, 2012:6). This is usually driven by the beliefs people have or hold about the way those (people) that are important to them such as parents, religious leaders, friends, and colleagues think and behave including the way they expect us to behave and think (Apffelstaedt, Freundt & Oslislo, 2021). Two distinctions have been made in the social norm discourse- the empirical and normative norms. The former is predicated on behaviours that are presumed to be habitual, common, and customary or those people think, and other people do. The latter is described as those behaviours viewed to be acceptable socially or what we assume other people do. The moral motivation justification that makes citizens sell votes is predicated in the believe that they are morally compelled to do so. They feel that trading votes for money or material gain is acceptable because they do not have confidence in the political process and institutions. The empirical or practical motivations of people selling votes is premised on and influenced by practical expectations and beliefs within the context of economic challenges, poverty, insecurity, and bad governance (Hoffman & Patel, 2012:12).

What are the consequences of vote trading?

Although in Nigeria, buying of votes is considered an electoral offence but electoral votes have almost assumed an article of trade. Consequently, democracy and governance has seemingly become weaker in structure and processes and have seemingly failed to serve its purposes due mainly to electoral corruption arising from vote trading, commodification of votes and inducement which have taken the place of productive leadership. Duru (2002) corroborates this when he asserted that political leaders being conscious of the spoils of office buys people's conscience with incentives rather than rendering developmental service to the nation. This practice affects the emergence of true leadership capable of delivering dividends of democracy and good governance to the electorates.

Without doubt, vote trading is a consequential impediment to all aspects of the country's electoral processes, democracy, democratic institutions and by extension, good governance. This in part corrodes citizens' trust through the sending of wrong gesture in the nature and value of the country's leaders and leadership style.

While in an ideal democratic clime, effective and efficient government are expectedly to be legitimate and enjoy the trust of the citizens, in Nigeria, due to vote buying people's trust, legitimacy and support have been eroded because majority of those who win elections are not the people's choice. Citizens believe that those who should be in government (rulers) must do so based on popular consents that are freely expressed not rulers who assume power through electoral fraud. Obviously, lack of legitimacy leads to lack of trust and absence of trust results in lack of support. Vote buying, commodification of vote and money politics have negatively affected the outcome of election results and performance by political office holders because effectuation and achievement of politicians are not justifying elements in electoral outcome in the country and the motivation to perform is fundamentally weak. While vote trading is highly effectual in the achievement of electoral success political elites constantly resort to it, thereby spending humongous amount of money to acquire electoral victory and when this is secured, the desire is to recover their 'investments' through corrupt practices by syphoning public funds.

Conclusion

This paper established that vote trading and commodification of votes during elections in Nigeria has been a recurring decima since the beginning of elections in the country and a problem to Nigeria democratic processes. Vote selling and buying has been motivated not only by the desperation of politicians to win elections but due to several other factors that include practical considerations and norms that relate to some personal beliefs on the part of electorates who are of the view that the cash and gift they receive is the only benefit they can get from their political leaders and the electoral process. The personal conditions of people, the insecure and perilous socioeconomic and socio-political status including the influential preponderant norms of transnational and re-distributive politics that bedevil the country's governance system. Also, economic hardship, and the precarious political environment essentially funded through public office promote vote trading and commodification of votes to the extent that votes has seemingly assumed an article of trade in Nigeria' political landscape.

Recommendations

Having established that vote trading has been a consistent paradox of the Nigerian politics and as a form of conclusion, a fundamental question will be how to find solutions to the menace. It is suggested here that consistent campaigns against and information on the ills of vote selling, locally mandatory and required rule of law and community actions backed by public dedication against vote trading including citizens faithfulness to collectively eschew vote buying tactics will go a long way in dealing with the scourge rather moralistic appeal. This method will help to change vote trading from independent to interdependent choice thereby creating a different voting standard (Hoffman & Patel, 2022). Also, enforcing the section of the electoral and the 1999 constitutional framework without compromise will be required. Political elites and electorates who engage in vote trading should be made to face strict, harsh, and severe weight of their actions.

Over time, the political financing issue has always been problematic, this should be taken seriously with the electoral umpire- Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) more proactive in this regard. Equally, election security and the secrecy of ballots should be given high priority. Also, efforts at curbing vote trading and commodification in Nigeria should include reducing the political privileges, lagniappes and benefits connected to political offices should be reduced considerably. The national and state electoral umpires should make secret voting follows a good set up that will discourage vote trading at the polling areas. The electorates through political education be encouraged to avoid all kinds of inducements from political parties and candidates. And, political parties should be encouraged to set up internal mechanisms that will be capable of controlling money politics. And the law on vote trading should be fully implemented through a special electoral court that will sanction erring electorates and political candidates.

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