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POLITICS OF VOTE-BUYING IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF 2019 AND 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN BAUCHI STATE

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Abstract
The incessant nature of vote-buying phenomenon during the conduct of every election in Nigeria since the emergence of the fourth republic in 1999, has engaged scholars of social sciences for inquiries. The outcome connotes vote-buying as mostly a pre-voting matter. The 2019 and 2023 general elections in Bauchi state provides glaring cases in point where the activities of the politicians in vote-buying was referred to as "see and buy" phenomenon. Symbolically, this means that voters display or surrenders their voter cards or even ballot papers before proceeding to collect money. Qualitative method is employed to collect data, which was sourced from secondary materials such as reports of local and international election observers and media sources. High incidence of poverty, desperation of politicians and complacency of the security operatives have been adjudged as the major findings. The implications of vote-buying in democracy is that it has the capacity of truncating the electoral process paving way for the emergence of incompetent rulers or illegitimate leadership in government. The paper concludes with the recommendations that perpetrators of vote-buying (no matter their positions) should be prosecuted based on the established law to serve as deterrence to others.
Key words: Vote – Buying, Election, Politicians, Contemporary Nigeria.

Introduction

Scholars of repute, particularly the likes of Lindberge, (2000:87) posits that in any representative democracy, election was the primary means of leadership recruitment whose main task is decision making on behalf of the generality of the people, and it is inconceivable to think of democracy without the idea of election. Judging from this perspective, it is clear evidence that contemporary democratic practice is absolutely concern about the way elections are conducted. Either because of its focus in the determination of who will be in control of power and allocates resources (as theorised by David Easton, (1965) who sees politics as the authoritative allocation of values), or as a means for the practice of governance in most states of the globe, election continue to face some challenges. One of the serious challenges of election in Developing countries is vote - buying. In this sense, scholars have observed that agents of political parties distribute cash and material benefit to people in preparation for election, so as to look good in their estimation. This practice has been variously explained as exchange of cash for votes before election, distribution of material benefits to individuals, according to Nitcher (2008), or pre-election provision of gifts as goods and money in the words of Ruz, et al. (2016), with the purpose of influencing voting behaviour and decision. This is the fundamental characteristics of the emerging democracies with high level of poverty and mass

illiteracy, particularly in African states, where a study conducted by Kramon (2009) confirms that 45% of the people are offered bribes in exchange for their votes.

It is also a point to note that, Nigeria's electoral process has always been known for its crude nature, often characterized by rigging, manipulation and predominance of vote buying, which according to Onapanjo, et al. (2015) was a reflection of the nature of a dependent economy. These electoral problems have been noticed over the years, manifesting in different styles and forms. For instance, in the first republic, the pattern and main method was distribution of food items to would-be voters during rallies, while in the second republic of 1979 the style of vote buying to induce voters, security operatives and electoral officials was used Ovwasa, (2014); Hassan, cited in Okakwu, (2019). This trend leads to massive rigging in several parts of the country which also triggered violent conflict, especially in Oyo and Ondo states in the 1983 elections.

The same trend manifested in the aborted third republic in 1993 as reported by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD). The report revealed that in the primary elections that heralded the popular 12 June, 1993 election, confirmed that between ₦120 million ($309) and ₦1 billion ($2,575 million) was spent to buy votes, Hassan cited in Okakwu, (2019).

It has also been noticed that the incidences of vote buying, experienced in previous republics was a snap short when compared with prevalence of the phenomenon since the return of democracy in 1999. Videos and images have appeared showing politicians and other party stalwarts distributing money, food or gift items to eligible voters in exchange for votes in different parts of the country (Onuoha and Ojo, 2018). In line with this view, Idayat (2019) states that between 2003 and 2007, the price value of one vote ranged between ₦1,700 and ₦2,500, but in 2019 and 2023, it skyrocketed to ₦2500 and ₦14,000. This procedure continues to influence, if not determine, election outcomes in many cases. In particular, the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria were greatly influenced or affected by this menace. This therefore, makes this study important to profile some solutions towards improved polls ahead of 2027.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

The main objective of this paper is to examine the politics of vote buying in contemporary Nigeria, with particular focus on the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Buachi state.

i. To identify the factors and actors that aided vote buying in Nigeria.
ii. Examine the effect of vote buying on national development.
iii. To proffer a lasting solution to the problem of vote-buying in contemporary Nigeria.

As a collar, the paper attempts to answer the following questions:

i. What are the reforms in the electoral administration?
ii. How did this lead to technological changes in the electoral process?
iii. What is the dynamic of response to the frequent technological changes?
iv. What does this scenario of response say about the Nigerian political elites?
v. What are the consequences for the electoral system in Nigeria?

Conceptual Clarification

Vote – Buying

Vote-buying has enjoyed a robust interrogation in the literature of political science and economics Vincente & Wentchekon (2009). It is a phenomenon that is neither culture bound nor nation specific. In other words, it is widespread phenomenon that knows no border. However, in spite of its universal occurrence, its manifestation differs in terms of style, forms

and magnitude Sakariyau, et al., (2009) cited in Azeez, (2020). Historically, it was a common feature in the Roman Republic as well as elections conducted in Britain and the US up till the nineteenth century O'leary, (1962); Yakobson (1995). In economic terms, it is usually viewed as an exchange activity in which the electorate (voter) sells his / her vote to the highest bidder. This perspective is related to the material benefit derived by the electorate occasioned by his precarious condition. In political terms, however, it is related to the influence of politician on the behaviour of the electorate because of the weakness of political culture. Hence, vote-buying connotes offering of money, goods, or services in order to influence the recipient to vote or not to vote, for a particular candidate. For instance, givers might hope to produce instrumental compliance, and when they succeed, the recipients change their electoral behaviour in exchange for tangible rewards. Or when doing that, givers may hope to generate normative compliance, and when they succeed, recipients change their electoral behaviour because they are convinced by the goodness or worthiness of the candidate. Lastly, by doing that, givers may hope to generate coercive compliance by bullying recipients into changing their electoral behaviour, and when they succeed, recipients fear retribution if they decline the offer. Thus, in accepting or rejecting offers, or in changing or not changing their electoral behaviour, recipients may be acting, among other things, out of fear, duty, indignity, gratitude, righteousness, or calculated self-interest Schaffer (2002).

Literature Review

An overview of the Phenomenon of Vote – Buying in Democracies

In the 2008 municipal elections in Nicaragua for example, all the major parties were reported to have distributed food items, such as rice, beans and 25,000 stoves to electorates to secure their votes Gonzalez and Ocantos, (2010). In the Philippines, every election cycle is an opportunity for voters to take as much money from rival parties as possible Felongco (2019). In the country, politicians supply food, money, free medical care, scholarships and discounted funerals to electorates (Scafler, 2002). In fact, the problem of vote-buying was so pronounced, that, the president of the country Rodrigo Duterte, described it as an integrated part of election in Nicaragua Ronero and Regalado (2019).

In the 2019 general elections in India, voting was cancelled in a constituency in the southern state of Tamil Nadu following the seizure of over 100 million Rupees meant for vote-buying Aljazeera (2019). The average range of vote buying rate per family in the country was estimated to range between 75 and 100 US dollars Bari (2018).

In Pakistan, people see the election cycle as an opportunity to claim their share of electoral largess, and candidates in addition to cash payments, dig-well, pave the streets and distributes solar panels and fans or pay large amounts to welfare organizations, mosques, seminaries, shrines or other religious places in the name of donations, and also send people to Mecca for Pilgrimage Ali (2018).

In other countries, such as Mexico, voters are wooed with gift cards, eyeglasses, building supplies, washing machines and cheap tortillas Linthicum (2018). In the 2007 general elections in Kenya, 23% of the voting population was confirmed as being influenced by vote-buying, according to a list experiment conducted by Kramon, (2016). In the February, 2015 general elections in Uganda, it was reported that elections were won by candidates who gave the paltriest amount of money to voters. Indeed, a 2011 report by DEM group, a consortium of civil society organization, confirms that politicians in Uganda are known to offer citizens cash, food drinks, salts, soap, mattresses, plates and cooking pans to induce voters Segama (2016).

The universality of vote-buying as shown in the foregoing example, represents a major threat not only to representative democracy but also to the emergence of credible leadership.

However, a number of studies have emerged doubting the possibility of vote-buying in that, it is conventionally used. The puzzle has led to doubts about whether what is called vote-buying is really the issue Abdulazeez (2020). It is in this sense that Mictter asked a fundamental question that, if parties are unable to monitor voting decisions why can't individuals accept rewards and then vote for their preferred candidate anyway? Mitcher (2008), cited in Abdulazeez, (2020). This question becomes plausible in the face of secrecy of vote choice which is the basic philosophy of a secret balloting systems. The problem of enforcement, captured in the literature as commitment problem, therefore, remains a major puzzle in discourses on vote-buying.

In an attempt to unravel the puzzle, Simon Mitcher introduced the concept of turnout buying as a way of explanation. To him, the issue at hand is more of turnout buying rather than vote-buying, arguing that much of what scholars interpret as vote-buying (Exchanging rewards for vote choices) may actually be turnout buying (exchanging rewards for turnout) Mitcher, (2008). The basic argument is that since it is practically impossible to enforce the commitment of voters, vote - buying as a means to win elections is not plausible. Rather, what is plausible is for politicians ensuring their supporters turnout to vote. In a sense, Mitcher sees all the monies and material being distributed to voters before election as mobilisation strategies to bring supporters out for voting on the Election Day. Before Nitcher's work on vote buying, the perspective of turnout buying has gained traction in the literature, with a number of scholars subscribing to it. Studies have emerged to prove that vote buying enhances voter turnout. Adeagbo and Olumide (2019) cited in Abdulazeez, (2020) call attention to the problematic nature of the concept of vote-buying, describing it as "concept stretching". To them, what is being referred to as vote buying is nothing but election gifting. The argument is based on the fact that word "buy" connotes sort of consensual or legal contract or agreement between two parties which is absent in the case of vote buying. Vote buyers are not under any obligation to fulfil their own side of the bargain. In that sense, whatever politicians offer to people can only be regarded as gifts. The question is why given on the election ground to give extent? Even though such gifts cannot be criminalized. This perspective still flows from the problem of commitment, identified earlier by Simon Nitcher.

But the arguments of turnout buying and election gifting as plausible as they are, may not be a sufficient explanation. They do not take into consideration several strategies put in place by vote buyers to overcome the problem of commitment. According to findings by Finan and Schechter (2011), posits that, politicians bought votes through third parties. The strategies involve reaching out to voter through hired respected community leaders. Money and other material incentives are passed to the voter through these community leaders who in turn will monitor the voting patterns of the voters who have received money. Voters now cast their votes out of respect for the community leaders. In Pakistan, voters after collecting money, are made to take an oath on the Qur'an to vote for them and also invoke something for graver in terms of socio-cultural and religious significance (Ali, 2018). In these circumstances, candidate who make them pledge that if they don't vote for them, their marriages would stand annulled and wives divorced through the Talaq- a rite divorcing a spouse that comes with the weight of social and religious sanctions (Ali, 2018). To overcome the problem of commitment, the Argentine peronist party uses the strategy to deep insertion in voter's social networks which entails rewarding weak opposition parties for switching votes (Nitcher, 2008, P. 19). In this sense, opposition parties are bought over so as to weaken them and bring them to the side of government party. It is in this context of working around the problem of commitment that the vote buying phenomenon in Nigeria's 2019 and 2023 general election is best situated.

Theoretical Framework

This work adopted the rational choice theory of election in explaining the context of this work. The rational choice theory of election is a political economy approach towards understanding the nature and pattern of voters' choice during election in a particular democratic setting. The theory originate from the writings of Anthony Downs (1957), and Kenneth Arrow (1986 in separated discourses on "Economic theory of Democracy". This view has been consolidated by Farber (2009).

The rational choice theory of election identifies that political behaviour and voting patterns of the electorates is a rational choice based on some indicators such as economic benefits, resources allocation, distribution of goods and services, allocation of juicy political offices and favour (Downs, 1957, Arrow, 1986). Rational choice theory of election is either evaluative or non-evaluative in the words of Downs (1957), Arrow (1986) and Farber (2009). The concept of 'Evaluative' means the process of measuring and evaluating the performance of regimes to determine whether they deserve voters' choice or not and, in this regard, rationality is based on performance measurement. However, many voters nowadays prefer to be induced or collect money to vote for the highest bidder, during election. In the case of 'non-evaluative' is based on client elastic considerations such as vote-buying, favouritism, patronage, ethnicity, religion, regionalism, and family. Lindberg and Morrison, (2008) observed that elections in African countries are mostly considered on clientele or material benefit rationalism where the ethnic, tribal and religious cleavages are given much consideration. Furthermore, Lindberg and Weghorst (2010) identified what they called "swing votes" in developing democracies like Nigeria where they analysed that vote – buying, ethnic and religious patronage as well as clientele satisfaction of the voters when measured with performance evaluation of the leaders in office can influence the outcome of an election.

The theory is directly applicable and justifiable within the context of this study, since voting is recognized as a rational choice based on performance, material benefit, and clientele considerations. The results of the recent past general elections in 2019, and that of the recently concluded 2023 general elections are cases in point of how the politicians and voters give much emphasis on buying and selling of vote; ethnic, regional and religious cleavages than performance or credibility of candidates.

Methodology

This study employed the qualitative method of data collection. In other words, data for the study were elicited from secondary sources such as text books, academic journal, article, reports and newspapers.

Study Area

Bauchi state was created in 1976 and is located in the northeast geopolitical zone bordering seven states, Jigawa to the north, Yobe to the northeast, Gombe to the east, Taraba and Plateau to the south, Kaduna to the west and Kano to the northwest. It is the fifth largest state in area and seventh most populous with an estimated population of over 6, 530, 000 as of 2016.

In the state, like many other states in the northeast, vote – buying syndrome was noticeable in the two general elections in 2019 and 2023. At many instances, political party agents, mostly women, followed voters to their home and distributed food items such as, Spaghetti and Maggi cubes as well as other items like detergent, soap, salt and in more sophisticated circumstances like in urban areas, dished out wrappers to women particularly during the 2019 governorship and state assembly elections. On the day of election, party agents used to infiltrate the queue, pretending to be voters and used the chance to offer cash for votes,

and distribute credit vouchers to entice voters. These activities cut across all political parties; even though, the party in office in each state is always the major culprit. The voters' turnout in Bauchi state was relatively high on the two occasions compared to some states in the northeast because of the level of challenge by the opposition, a factor that also makes the competition very top and vote buying possible.

On the count down to the 2023 governorship and state assembly elections in the state, concerned groups and citizens have voiced out against alleged violence and vote-buying. For instance, some INEC accredited observers have expressed their concern in a report by the Sun News Paper on March 22, 2023. These observers led by the Center for Child Care and Youth Development alleged that the election was characterized by 'vote-buying, over-voting and violence' in many areas. Rebecca Maimako, the group's representative stated that, irregularities and malpractices trailed the election in many local government areas in the state, claiming that the polls was below the standard of the 'Electoral Act 2022'. According to the group, in some local government areas, for instance, in Alkaleri, Bauchi, Kirfi Toro and Warji, there are places where cases of over-voting and vote - buying were reported. Furthermore, the group alleged that, ballot papers used were not carrying the official stamp, in addition to pre-thumb printing of ballot papers prior to the commencement of elections. Cases of violence and vote-buying have been recorded in places like Kafin Iya and Bara wards in Kirfi local government; Birshi and Miri wards in Bauchi local government; while viral video showed how in Warji local government, a commissioner was alleged to have shot sporadically to scare voters away to enable over-voting and vote- buying. In addition, another viral video showed a local government Chairman sharing N2000 cash to voters on the cue in Toro ward of Toro local government area (The Sun News Paper, March 22, 2023).

In another development, the Guardian News Paper reported that the erstwhile speaker of house of representative, Yakubu Dogara, alleges that the elections in Bauchi state were characterized by vote-buying. The former speaker according to the paper alleged that massive vote-buying occurred in some local government areas of the state during the governorship and state house of Assembly elections conducted on March 18. Specifically, the case of vote-buying in Darazo, Alkaleri and some local government areas in Bauchi North was mentioned.

Discussion

Factors and Actors Aiding Vote-buying

Scholars among them, (Adamu, *et al*., 2016; Matenga, 2016; Onuola and Ojo, 2018; Ovwasa, 2014), identified factors that aid vote buying in contemporary Nigeria, in 2019 and 2023 general elections to include high incidence of poverty, desperation of politicians, illiteracy, high return of elective posts, complicity of security operatives and electoral officials as well as willingness of electorates to sell their votes. These have been identified to be the basis of politics of voter-buying in the country. The issue is that with the improved sophistication on the existing on the existing electoral process notwithstanding, the level of vote buying still persist in ensuring that election position is occupied by all means. In this sense, what is yet to be done is to locate vote buying within the context of improve electoral proves in Nigeria. That is, beyond the factors identified in extant literature, vote buying can be explained as a response of the political class to changes in electoral conduct. Specifically, reforms in the electoral administration have resulted in growing sophistication of the electoral process to the extent that traditional malpractices such as ballot snatching, ballot stuffing and result manipulation have become difficult. In essence, vote buying appears to be the only feasible option deployed by desperate politicians to win elections.

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Vote Buying Incidences in 2019 General Elections

Vote buying has emerged as a major blight on elections in Nigeria. According to Onuola and Ojo (2018), the practice comes in two formats; cash for vote and vote for cash, also known as prepaid and post-paid. Under the prepaid or cash for vote strategy, prospective voters are given some money before the election with trust that the receiver will deliver on their promise.

At times, the voting pattern is monitored by agents of the giver. This pattern of contract is based on hopes and trust. The problem with this strategy is that there is limitation to the amount of punishment the money giver can muster in the event of a breach of contract by the receiver. There are several instances where people collected money and failed to deliver on their promise, or even failed to turn up for voting. As opposed to the prepaid approach, the post - paid strategy involves giving money only after voting is done. Under this approach, money is not given until it is proven that the voter actually vote for the designated party. It is always preceded by a gentlemen's agreement between patron and the client. To show evidence, the voter either stylishly displays a thumb printed ballot paper for party agents to see or uses a smartphone to take a photo shot of the ballot paper after thumb printing which will be presented to collect an agreed amount of money at designated places located within the vicinity of the polling station or inside the house of the party leader (Onuoha and Ojo, 2018).

The countdown to 2019 general elections was characterised by prepaid forms of vote buying. At the People's Democratic party (PDP) presidential primary election held in Port Harcourt, newspaper reports showed that delegates to the primary election were offered inducements, with amounts ranging from 1000 to 5000 US dollars, with some of the delegates going home with about 9000 US dollars, having collected from many aspirants (Fabiyi, *et al.,* 2018; Vanguard, 2019). During campaign, the two major political parties, All Progressive Congress (APC) and PDP engaged in the distribution of materials such as T-shirts, food items and alcohol to electorates as a way of mobilization. In Ekiti state, one of the parties even distributed TVs and cell phone(s) to people as part of the campaign. Also, a pre-election field report conducted by the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement **(**YIAGA) revealed that politicians engaged in outright purchase of permanent voters cards (PVCs) at ₦10,000 ($27) and ₦20,000 ($54) each in states such as Edo, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Zamfara, Abia, Akwa Ibom, Niger, Imo, Rivers, Oyo, Yobe, Kogi and Nasarawa (YIAGA – African Initiative, 2018, p.7).

Two major factors explain why politicians buy PVCs; the first is that the card can be distributed to supporters for multiple voting, with the connivance of electoral officers; the second is to remove the possibility of people voting for their opponents. The Trader - Moni scheme was also used a subtle campaign strategy of giving ₦10,000 ($27) to female petty market trader. However, the fact remains that it was seriously promoted in the course of political campaign. The fact that the scheme was stopped immediately after the election indicated some political motive behind the scheme.

It is also evident to note that dominant form of vote buying in the 2019 elections was the post-paid method. This method had been tested in earlier election in Ondo and Ekiti states. It was code named "dibo ko sebe" (vote and cook soup) and was said to have swayed the victory in favour of the APC candidate. Each vote attracted a sum of ₦5,000:00 ($13). Same was used in Ekiti state when the dominant parties made it an integral part of balloting under slogan "See and Buy" (Nwankwo, 2018, Punch, 2018). Early on the morning of the election, state workers were credited with ₦3,000 ($8) by the state government led by the PDP. Again, as the election progressed, it was observed that the two dominant parties paid between ₦5,000 ($13) and ₦3,000) ($8) to each voter, after the voters showed evidence of their thumb printed ballot papers to party agents who were stationed around the polling stations (Punch, 2018; YIAGA,

2018). In this process, APC won the election as a result of offering higher price for votes, which is why YIAGA described the APC victory as "hard bought" (YIAGA Initiative, 2018).

The contribution of post-paid vote buying to electoral victories in Ondo and Ekiti states seems to have given an added impetus to politicians to make more use of the strategy in the 2019 general elections. As a result of the post-paid vote buying, electoral outcomes in the 2019 elections became a matter of the highest bidders (Maclean and Egbejule, 2019). Institute No. 1 2019, reports that post-paid vote buying cases was identified in Bayelsa, Enugu, Kano and Osun states. In this places, party agents not only eligible voters and negotiated with them over prices of their votes, they were also seen writing down names and phone numbers of eligible voters for the purpose of paying them after being shown evidence of voting for their parties. According to CDD (2019) reports that in the 2019 elections, a single vote purchased by politicians ranged between ₦250 and ₦4,000 respectively. And the prices of votes in the governorship and state assembly election stood between ₦3,000 and ₦4,000, similarly, in some polling units in Madobi LGA in Kano state.

A study of elections since the return of democracy in 1999 shows a gradual increase of vote buying in gas, a determinant of electoral fortunes while it was not so pronounced in the 1999 elections, it started becoming pronounce in subsequent elections. It did, however, assume a dangerous dimension in the 2019 general elections when politicians resorted to the post-paid method of vote buying (Abdulazeez, 2020). A major reason for this is located in the changes recorded in election administration in Nigeria. In this sense, it can be argued that vote buying is a form of response of the political elites to reforms carried out in electoral administration of the country.

Vote Buying Incidences in 2023 General Elections

According to a political think tank, the Center for Democracy and Development (CDD), the 2023 general elections in Nigeria was marred by malpractices such as public sale of votes, violence and intimidation. This position was incorporated in the report of over 1,500 observers deployed by the group across the country as reported by the Punch News Paper's edition of March 19, 2023. Thus, incidence of vote-buying was more prevalent during the governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections conducted on March 18, compared to the Presidential election of February 25 (Punch ng.com). During the process, money was used alongside other materials such as food items (Maggi cubes, spaghetti and table salt), credit vouchers, wrappers, detergent and soap.

Allegations of vote-buying during the 2023 governorship elections became glaring with the revelations by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission EFCC, that a total of 65 persons were arrested for vote-buying across the 28 states where governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections took place on March 18. This was disclosed by the commission in its post-election report. The brake down of the figures indicated that 13 people suspected of vote-buying were arrested on election day at the Kaduna zone, 20 at the Kwara zone, 12 at Port Harcourt zone, 4 at the Calabar zone, while the remaining were arrested in Sokoto, Kebbi and Gombe zones. One of the strategies, used by the party agents particularly during the cash less period was the use of electronic transfer method. According to the EFCC operatives, the incidences were traced in some places through search. A search of their persons and phones revealed that most of them (agents of political parties) transferred money into the accounts of some voters. The operatives of the commission recovered some items believed to have been used in the process such as, voter cards, monies, list containing names and account details of voters and recharge cards. In the Gombe zone of the command, a total of ten arrests were made

and items recovered including 43 pieces of wrappers and cash of money amounting to about N1.9 million (Vanguard News Paper, March 18, 2023).

YIAGA Africa, a pro – democracy group, reported that its observers have been able to track down about 15 cases of vote-buying across eight states including Bauchi, the study area. In Sarkin Mudu Polling Unit (016), in Giade local government area of Bauchi state political party agents were sighted bribing accredited voters with cash and some items including wrappers and packs of spaghetti. Each voter was given N1000, a wrapper and a pack of spaghetti in exchange for his/her ballot paper or voter card. Similarly, in Polling Unit (006) in Ranga ward of Warji local government, voters were enticed with cash and items to exchange their voter cards or ballot papers. The sum of N2000, Wrappers and Packs of Spaghetti were openly distributed to voters. Thus the group emphasized that voters were seriously induced during the presidential and governorship elections against the provisions of the '2022 Electoral Act' which affects the credibility of the polls.

The International Center for Investigative Reporting has indicated that there was alleged vote-buying during the February 25, Presidential and National Assembly elections and the March 18, Governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections in many states. In Bauchi for instance, the group observed that party agents were paying some voters to vote for their candidates. In Misau local government, and in Gudari Polling Unit (063), agents of a political party were caught on camera buying votes from voters (Premiumtimesng.com).

Analysis of Vote -Buying incidences in the 2019 and 2023 General Elections

From the above analysis it is evident that incidences of vote – buying occurred in both the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria. However, the level of involvement of politicians in the act was more wide spread and prevalent in 2023 than 2019, at least in the area of this study, Bauchi state. This can be explained in terms of the calibre of people contesting for the election and the economic situation of the country. For instance, the presence of Muhammadu Buhari in the political arena during the 2019 general election (as a candidate or contestant), together with his pre – disposition against vote – buying might have played a role towards minimizing the incidences in 2019. But in 2023 changes were experienced in the political terrain due to absence of Buhari from the contest. This manifests during the party primaries as well as the general elections.

Another reason was that the level of poverty has increased due to economic crisis faced in the country exposing many people to difficulties in their struggle to survive. More so, the country has not fully recovered from the menace of COVID – 19 pandemic that has devastated families across the nation, particularly the low income earners. Therefore, the menace of vote – buying increase despite the measures adopted by the government including cashless policy and investigations by the anti-corrupt agencies. Abdullahi (2022) observe that some of the measures introduced by the Buhari administration to fight poverty like N – Power, YESSO, Trader Money, Conditional Cash Transfer and Agricultural Revitalization Programmes, have not yield good results making life to become unbearable for the average citizens who find it difficult to get food on their tables. Therefore, during the elections majority of them could not withstand the temptation of vote – buyers.

Thirdly, the inability of the government to implement some of the reform policies like those aspects of the '2022 Electoral Law' that provided for sanctions against those who engaged in vote – buying and vote – selling, contributed to the incidence of vote-buying. There was also the negative attitude of politicians who always want to win elections at all cost. This jeopardises some electoral officials and law enforcement agents who at times abuse their offices to allow rigging and manipulation of the process.

After the 2019 general elections, civil society organizations and election observers have made suggestions on how to improve the credibility of future elections in the country, but some of their observations or recommendations were not implemented. This also contributed to the perpetuation of buying and selling of vote syndrome in the country.

Effects of vote-buying on National Development

Vote buying like any virus, has severe consequences on Nigeria's national development. These effects are examined socially, economically and politically as follows:

i. Vote buying undermine the credibility of elections and democracy: This is so, because people would not attach value to the election process in future since the election outcomes is not the true reflection of the credibility of a can didate or contestant. It also erodes public confidence in the electoral process, because when elections are not seen as free and fair, citizens may lose confidence in democracy.
ii. Perpetuate corruption: Vote buying perpetuates corruption in Nigeria's political system. It enables politicians to buy their way into power, which can result in this entrenchment of corrupt practice and policies. Particularly offering money gifts, food items against their conscience.
iii. Vote buying divide Nigerian along ethnic and regional fragmentation. The 2019 and 2023 testified to this assertion. Many voters cast their votes purposely for materialism, and along ethnic and religion lines.
iv. Vote buying syndrome discredit the Nigeria's image at the international scene. The reports of the international election observers discredited Nigeria's electoral system on account of incidence of high-level of corruption.
v. Vote buying affect democratic values such as rule of law; fundamental human rights, free, fair and credible elections.

Conclusion

This paper did a comparative analysis of vote-buying pattern in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria with particular reference to Bauchi state. It has identified vote-buying as one of the most prevalent tactics employed by political gladiators in the 2019 and 2023 election. Several studies blamed the practice on poverty of the populace, desperation on the parts of political actors, compromised security operatives and the zero-sum nature of election in Nigeria have been given as contributory factors. This is quite plausible. The paper however, advances the argument that, vote buying is a response of the political class to the growing technological advancement of the Nigeria's electoral system. The point here is that it was difficult for politicians to engage in traditional rigging style of ballot snatching, ballot stuffing and figure manipulation. Consequently, both prepaid and post-paid vote buying strategies have emerged as a response of political class to the changes or reforms in the election administration system. But while vote-buying while vote buying may be a negative response of political elites to growing improvement in electoral conduct in the country, it however, also indicate that positive changes are taking place in to electoral administration in Nigeria. What remains is for the Nigerian state to devise new strategies to deal with those who engage in vote-buying, particularly the post-paid method.

Recommendations

In order to avert the recurrence of vote-buying in subsequent general elections in Nigeria, far reaching reforms need to be implemented. It is the opinion of this paper that the democratic

system in the country would be strengthened if the following recommendations are implemented in Nigeria in general and Bauchi state in particular.

i. There should be strict enforcement of laws, to deter politicians from engaging in vote-buying. Anybody who engages in a physical vote - buying (buying and selling of vote) should be arrested, prosecuted and punish in line with the stipulated law established under the '2022 Electoral Act' and the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria..

ii. There should be high level of security personnel in all the polling stations of the 20 local government areas of the state as well as the 36 states of the federation to curtail the scourge of vote-buying, particular buying and selling of vote on the Election Day.

iii. There should be intensive awareness/advocacy on the dangers of selling of vote or vote-buying in addition to workshop and seminars to politicians. Those selling the vote have to realize that they are auctioning their future for peanuts that will not solve their problems. Sale your vote for a small amount of money that will only last for few days and prepare to suffer for four years.

iv. Poverty reduction programmes or a comprehensive scheme on youth should be implemented across the state and the country at large. Bauchi being one of the poverty ridden states in the country needs rapid response in this direction. This can be achieved by empowering the youth with skill acquisition and encourage them to use their talent to build their own future. Youth's dependency syndrome has the tendency to perpetuate the menace of poverty that encourages buying and sale of vote during election.

v. Political Party agents must be enlightened and educated to understand the implication of vote buying on the development of the state and the nation in general. They should also be sensitize to understand the negative consequence of the menace across all calibre of people, particularly youths.

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