

VOTE TRADING AND ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: DEMOCRACY AS AN ARTICLE OF TRADE?

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Abstract

This paper is underscored by the commodification and trading of votes in Nigeria which has been pointed as posing a negative tale to elections, democracy, and good governance. Domestic and global studies including election observers have established that there has always been widespread vote buying and vote-to-sell in Nigeria. To that extent, this paper examines the issue of vote trading in Nigeria to highlight its attendant implications for present and future elections, democracy, and governance. Using descriptive and content analysis methods of investigation and gathered data through secondary sources the paper observes the following questions: What is 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 the 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 decisions and mainly by material circumstances. It further contends that the more politicians engage in vote buying and gratification the more unstable the electoral process becomes because it prevents credible candidates from running for political office. After all, they do not have the humongous amount required to contest an election. The study concludes that material voting selling buying, and gratification pose negative tendencies for the Nigerian political system, democracy, and good governance if not properly handled.

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

Introduction

In many countries of the world, an election has often been conceived as the most acceptable means of changing a government in a democratic system. Described as consisting of an organized group of people with almost the same views and opinions primarily concerned with influencing public policy by essentially seeking power and presenting candidates for elections in a democracy, the election is viewed as fundamental to democracy and by extension good governance. Even before Africans accepted Western democracy, the people of Africa had their democratic system dated to the pre-colonial government systems having separation of powers and checks and balances (Adeyeye, 2011; Magaji and Umar, 2022; Malomo, 2006). Elections are

conceived as fundamental because it is seen as the most peaceful means of electing representatives into government who are vested with the responsibility to push their demands to the highest level of policymaking and to cater to their rights and needs peacefully. Emphasizing this position Ojo (2008) argues that the holistic idea of democratic self-government is representative through fair and free elections that are incompatible with electoral hostilities and corrupt practices, for any political system to be described as democratic, elections must be seen to be free and fair. However, not every election fulfills these criteria, particularly in Nigeria. This is because the narrative of elections and the electoral processes since Nigeria's democratic expedition has revolved around concerns over free, fair, and credible elections. Generally, beginning from the first republic to the fourth republic the main problems confronting the country's elections and electoral process have been electoral corruption of different degrees and magnitude evident in stealing of ballot boxes, multiple registrations of voters, manipulation of electoral rules and processes, electoral violence, election rigging, vote selling and vote buying, political assassinations among other institutional issues blamed on the electoral body in Nigeria (Ugoh, 2004; Danjibo and Oladeji, 2007; Alemika, 2007; Ojo, 2008; Sha, 2008; Ovwasa, 2013; Animashaun, 2015). Of all these 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 impacted negatively on the country's electoral process. After all, it does not only harm democracy in the country, but it has also interfered with the independence and rights of Nigerian voters to fairly assess and choose candidates and while individuals benefit personally, the cumulative negative costs are usually not scrutinized (Agaba, 2015). Vote trading has often led to the bringing into position and entrusting untrustworthy, unacceptable, and implausible candidates with positions of authority where they can authoritatively decide who gets what, when, and how thereby committing governance into the hands of insincere, corruptible, and devious politicians. These issues have not only been a recurring decimal in elections in Nigeria but have been playing a dominant role in determining success in, and, who wins elections with increasing proportion 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 concern that this paper focuses on the commodification of votes, and vote trading in elections and the electioneering process in Nigeria.

Conceptual and theoretical issues: Elections, Vote Trading and Democracy

Democracy: The conceptual discussion of democracy begins with a fundamental question concerning 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 and even authoritarian regimes often claim to be democratic. Surely democracy is an elastic concept whose description and conceptualization attract varying degrees of opinions, views, interests, and fundamental ambiguities, that is, the word has not lent itself to a generally accepted definition due to this eclectic nature (Adeyeye, 2011a; 2011b, 2006; Sargent, 2009: 90; Danjibo, 2010; Kasselmann, Krieger, and Joseph, 2010; Inokoba and 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 are descriptive characters or features of democracy: accountability, participation, equality dignity, rationality, security, freedom, etc.

(Adeyeye, 2011a and b). For this discourse, democracy is defined from the view of the procedures used to select top governmental officeholders and that for the political system to be democratic those who occupy offices of the state must be selected through free, fair, and credible elections.

Election: Flowing from the description of democracy above and in tandem with the nearly generally accepted assumption, the election is the most acceptable means of changing a government in a democracy. The assumption is also captured by USAID, (2010) that elections all over the world are seen as a peaceful means of electing representatives into government to push the demands of the people to the highest level of policy-making (USAID, 2010). The holistic idea of democratic self-government is a free, fair, and credible election devoid of electoral hostilities and 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, the election has been described as a potent instrument in validating the existence of a democratic entity-just as trophies in competitions so is also election to democracy. To be sure, the starting point for any democratic process in any country is the conduct of peaceful and credible elections. The peaceful transition of power into new hands must come through an election by which the electorates bestow legitimacy on such government to serve in a capacity that gives a good life to those they are representing. Voting in elections is the power of the electorates to elect government officials, change government, and validate a government. It is the recognition of this power of the electorates that makes politicians try all means and opportunities to induce and gratify them during political campaigns and elections.

Vote buying especially in developing democracies such as Nigeria, 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 have received several attentions and interpretations. This is so because the practices are prominent features of the electoral processes resulting from the desperation of politicians to win elections. In its literal sense vote buying is an economic exchange used to describe the exchange of private materials to influence eligible voters for political 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 and Umar, 2022; Schaffer, 2007). Emphasising the above statement, it can be argued that candidates 'buy' and citizens/electorates 'sell "vote, as they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets". The act of vote-buying from the above statement points to the view that it is a contract or perhaps an auction in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder. Parties and candidates buy votes by offering particularize material benefits to voters. Candidates may generally aspire to purchase political support at the ballot box by the idea of market exchange. For analytical purposes, it is necessary to point out, that the commercial aspirations of vote buyers may run into two barriers, namely, objective, and inter-subjective barriers. On the objective side, seller compliance is uncertain, as vote buying is an illicit business and as such does not take place within a "normal" market protected by social and legal norms. On the inter-subjective side, empirical accounts of participants' perspectives revealed that those electoral practices we describe as vote buying may carry different meanings. This is so because, from both historical and comparative perspectives, vote-buying as a phenomenon is neither system-specific nor space-bound (Ojo, 2006). In all systems, be it developed or developing, medieval or contemporary, vote buying occurs in all regions and climes. The only difference is that it differs

in magnitude and manifestation from one polity to the other. For this discourse, the description of vote buying in Nigeria is used to mean a phenomenon whereby candidates in elections use money or money is used on their behalf as an inducement to sway their support which is not based on persuading the electorates to vote according to their wish and conviction but on the force of money that has changed hands. Any form of financial, material, or promissory inducement or reward by a candidate, political party, agent, or supporter to influence a voter to cast his or her vote or even abstain from doing so to enhance the chances of a particular contestant to win an election. The use of money to buy votes does not even stop at election time. It is a common practice in Nigeria elections as it is in many other countries, for numerous private interest groups and political action committees which seek policy goals and legislation to serve their narrow private needs. They continue to use all the means at their disposal including money, to solidify or expand their influence on the elected officials. To the extent that the issue of vote buying has been very critical in the discussion of elections and electoral processes it has been defined and indeed criminalized in the country's 1999 constitution and the Electoral Act of 2010 as: "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 to corruptly influence 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".

Since vote buying is the process of buying and selling votes during elections buying connotes the process of giving incentives in exchange for votes. In offering money, goods, or services, there are three ways in which givers might hope to get recipients to vote, or not to vote, for a particular candidate. Firstly, givers might hope to produce instrumental compliance. If successful, recipients change their electoral behaviour in exchange for tangible rewards. Secondly, givers may hope to generate normative compliance. If successful, recipients change their electoral behaviour because the offer convinces them of the goodness or worthiness of the candidate. Thirdly, givers may hope to generate coercive compliance by bullying recipients into changing their electoral behaviour. If successful, recipients fear retribution if they decline the offer. To recipients, the act of accepting an offer may hold a variety of meanings. It might constitute making a contract, securing amends, receiving a gift, accepting an auction bid, recognizing power, compromising one's principles, acknowledging goodwill, or more. 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. To generate or reinforce these forms of compliance (alone or in combination), there are a few strategies available to givers. For one, givers might monitor how individuals vote as either a condition for post-voting payment or as a prelude to post-voting retribution if the recipient does not do as instructed. Sometimes election officials can be counted on to observe how voters fill out their ballots (Hoffman and Patel, 2022). Vote to buy and vote selling can be understood as an economic transaction between those who sell their freedom and those who buy them in the hope of regaining their investments when they get into power and from the standpoint of ordinary people, elections are the times when equality and justice are temporarily achieved as their patrons fulfill their financial obligations to support them in times of need

(Ibana, 1996). A more helpful characterization of vote buying holds that it is more than a mere economic transaction; instead, it is a combination of economic exchange and social ritual.

Theoretical framework: The discussion on vote-buying in Nigeria can be situated using various theories. This paper adopts clientelism and rational choice theories. Clientelism and Political clientelism: A view of the literature on the political economy relating to governance and government accountability in Africa concentrate 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 the 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 consolidating power by the sitting governments. The issue with this transfer is that it appears as if public policies-education and 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 clientelistic exchange usually requires patrons to make private goods available to the clients, creating lower development, and excessive poverty among the people who are the voters and this poverty often makes 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 and Mookherjee, 2012; Stokes, 2009) The position of this conjecture captures the discourse on vote-buying in Nigeria in that socioeconomic hardship reflected in poverty, citizen's disenchantment with government and lack of confidence and trust in the electoral umpire and corruption are factors has been severally been mentioned to be at the forefront of vote-buying in the country.

Rational Choice Theory of Democracy: The core of this theory as a derivative of the field of economics is premised on the notion of rational choice of consumer theory or behaviour in determining how to efficiently use the scarce resources at hand for better choice and satisfaction. According to Anthony Downs (1957) who coined the term "Economic Theory of Democracy" which later became commonly known as "Rational Choice Theory of Democracy", rational choice theory is the identification of electoral behaviour as the major determinant of rational choice among the electorates. Economic indicators, resource allocation, and goods and services distribution are related to the aftermath of political choice in an election. The core of the argument of the theory is that decisions made by individuals in society will invariably produce collective aggregate social behaviour. Therefore, everyone makes a decision that is premised on their preferences and the limitations they face. It is assumed here that if rational choice can clearly explain the market, then it can effectively explain the political functioning of 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 notion is that while corporations or organisations seek to maximise profits, consumers seek to maximise utility and it is the same with voters who seek to

maximise the utility of their votes as the parties seek to maximise electoral benefits from power control and public resources. The two main dimensions of the rational choice theory are evaluative and non-evaluative. The evaluative dimension is anchored on the premise that voters' evaluation of the regime's performance and their satisfaction determines their votes in the election. The non-evaluative assumes that clientelist considerations such as patronage, ethnic ties, family kinship, and personal benefit accrue to the voter for voting for a particular candidate either in cash or kind and instantly or later.

The weakness of this theoretical assumption is that voters are rational and that there is rationality in their choices. The perspective of the rational choice theory requires few arguments to be able to meticulously explain the motives of individuals or groups who sell their votes. While some have advanced poverty and unemployment as factors, there are instances when some people collect money or items and vote for other candidates either because of other factors such as religion and ethnic and tribal issues. Also, some vote for a candidate who pays higher irrespective of the credibility of the one with less money to buy their votes. Equally, the assumption that the domestic political system is constant just the way the market environment in consumer theory is constant is faulty. There might be circumstances and changes that can alter the rationality or choice of a candidate by voters. Nonetheless, despite the weaknesses the rational theory of election is a good explanation of voting behaviour and discourse of election in Nigeria. This is so because electorates vote for their democratic leaders based on who paid his way into power with money. Issues of vote buying, offering of food items, clothes, and other material gratification often occur before and on election days in the country those who offer such materials and cash better than their counterparts win the election. This means the voters in Nigeria are rational with their pockets and stomachs just like consumers of a product while the politicians are rational with their resources or investment just like corporations. The politicians pay while the voters sell their votes for those who will pay better. 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 a politician who is sure of recouping their 'investments' once they win the election and occupy the office through corrupt practices. The issue can also be situated within the contents of social exchange theory. The theory of social exchange postulates that the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible and rewarding or costly between at least two persons. The key tenet of social exchange theory is that human behaviour is, in essence, an exchange, particularly of rewards or resources of primarily material character (wealth) and secondarily of symbolic attributes. Presumably, such exchange transactions permeate all social phenomena including group processes and inter-group relations, which are conceived as sets or joint outcomes of voluntary individual actions induced by rewards (Ogu, 2013; Blau, 1964).

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 Nigeria.

What is the narrative of vote selling and buying (trading) in Nigeria?

One Yoruba adage says: "Amúkun ẹ̀rù ẹ̀ 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 the study on the narrative of electoral processes in Nigeria. 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 a solution to the problem will be very complex. Findings show that the narrative of elections in Nigeria is a story of different tales of negatives and positives. A fundamental negative tendency of elections in the country is electoral corruption evidence in vote trading, material gratification and inducement which has a long history in Nigeria's electoral processes. The first republic (1963-1966), Second republic (1979-1983), Third republic (1992-1993) and the ongoing fourth republic (1999-date) have been marred by the same issues of corruption.

Even though the phenomenon of vote buying and vote selling has a history in the first republic-1960-1966) politics in Nigeria the incidence was low compared with the dimension in the

succeeding republics. For instance, Nigeria's politics witnessed a very high incidence of ethno-religious, tribal and commodification of votes in the second republic 1979-1983. Political elites at this employed varying mechanisms for electoral victories. Davies (2006) summarizes that there was so much display of affluence and use of money by the wealthy contractors and the mercantile class to the extent that politicians who emerged victorious in the conventions and the primaries of the political parties, notably the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) belonged to the business managerial group. The situation was particularly worse in 1993 as the act of money politics and vote-buying took very firm roots in the political activities of contestants. This was because the political campaigns for the conduct of the 1993 election demonstrated excessive use of money during the party primaries and the presidential elections, even though the elections were conducted under the watchful eyes of the military. The rich had hijacked the two political parties decreed into existence by the military, namely the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). At the primaries, for example, the use of money to win party nomination was pervasive while complaints of bribery trailed the results. As one of the contestants who lost out claimed. "Money was paid to party functionaries, who were demanding and negotiating the amount of money to be given to them for payment to win offices and others, and for how votes will be allocated to aspirants" (Nwosu, 1996). The noticeable excessive use of the money during the 1993 presidential election was ostensibly adduced by President Babangida to annul the election. In annulling the 1993 election, he declared, that there were authenticated reports of election malpractice against agents, officials of the NEC and voters... there was proof of manipulation, offers and acceptance of money and other forms of bribery. The amount of money spent by the presidential candidates was over 2.1 million nairas (Ojo, 2000). Similarly, money politics and vote-buying reached their pinnacles in the elections that ushered in the current democratically elected government in 1999 and the civilian-civilian transition elections of 2003, 2007 and 2011, as one political scientist once observed, "if the use of money in the 1999 elections was open and shameless that of 2003 was outrageously indecent (Suberu, 2001). This seemed to have ironically pricked the conscience of former President Obasanjo, who was a beneficiary of the sordid act in the two elections to admit though, belatedly that with so many resources being deployed to capture elective offices, it is not difficult to see the correlation between politics and the potential for high-level corruption. The greatest losers are the ordinary people, those voters whose faith and investment in the system are hijacked and subverted because money, not their will, is made the determining factor in elections. Can we not

move from the politics of money materialism to the politics of ideas, issues, and development (Obasanjo, 2005)? Money politics and vote-buying assumed a frightening and exploitative dimension in the 2007 elections. This is because the use of money to buy conscience appeared to have been extended to the judiciary. It will be recalled that the Governorship Candidate of the Action Congress (AC) now Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) Engineer Rauf Aregbesola had dragged the Osun State Governor Olagunsoye Oyinlola, of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to the Osun State First Elections Petitions Tribunal to challenge his election as the Governor of Osun State for the second term. The News Magazine of 6th July 2008 made damaging allegations against the Tribunal members and the counsel to Governor Oyinlola. The news magazine reported how two judges of the Osun State First Elections Tribunal, namely, Thomas Naron (Chairman) and J.F. Ekanem were alleged to have "Slipped into a Cesspool of scandal" by their very regular telephone calls and text messages to Kunle Kalejaiye (SAN) (The News Magazine July 2008) the lead Counsel to Governor Oyinlola. Although these were mere allegations, they were weighty enough to cast the Judiciary in a bad light since it is unethical for the judges of the tribunal to have private discussions regarding the case without the presence or the representative of the petitioner. As widely expected, and perhaps, because of this "Unholy Marriage" between the tribunal judges and the lead Counsel to Oyinlola, the verdict was given in favour of Oyinlola. In rejecting the judgment, the ACN said "the discredited election petition tribunal in Osogbo delivered its obnoxious judgment without any atom of moral scruple or an eye for Justice (Fayeniwo:2008). It took another two years of legal battle before this ugly situation was resolved. This is because, the Appeal Court sitting at Ibadan set aside the First Elections Petitions Tribunal Judgment and decided the case in favour of ACN candidate Rauf Aregbesola on the 26th of November 2010, and directed that he be sworn in as Osun State Governor on the 27th of November 2010. This was why there was no governorship election in Osun State on April 26th, 2011. The fact is that the use of money or any other inducement for that matter, to perverse justice creates problems for good governance. Commenting on the high use of money in Nigerian politics the Guardian of May 31st, 2008, has this to say "In a country where money politics is very high, the opposition candidates are in disadvantaged position before the polls. The fact that a politician is out of power, having lost patronage easily loses followership makes matters worse. And because most politicians of today cannot look beyond their nose, they soon become orphaned" (The Guardian, 2008). It is without doubt that 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 amounts 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 per cent (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, they engage in it. The question one would then ask is why they sell their votes and why politicians engage in it. It has been affirmed that vote trading is propelled by independent, individual decisions 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 vote 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 a doubt that selling of votes-vote trading is a form of corrupt behaviour that is based on independent decisions undertaken by individuals highly driven by the socioeconomic reality of the country which includes extensive poverty. Specifically, vote trading in the country reflects routine exchanges that can be appropriately situated within the context of socioeconomic relations, scarce opportunity, poverty, and elite competition.

Also, citizens' disillusionment with the government and the entire political institution and the issue regarding electoral competition in the country have been fingered 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 the people trade their votes are largely due to practical considerations and norms that are connected some personal beliefs such as the belief that the cash and gift they receive is the only benefit they can get from the electoral process. Also, issues relating to personal conditions like the status of insecure and perilous socioeconomic and sociopolitical standing including the influential preponderant norms of transnational and re-distributive politics that prevail in the country are factors that promote trading of votes including economic hardship, and precarious politics that is essentially funded through public office.

Is vote trading influenced by individual beliefs or the social norm?

Another fundamental question is whether vote trading is influenced by individual beliefs or social norms, 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 a shared understanding regarding obligatory actions, permitted or forbidden that regulate the everyday lives of the people including economic, political, and cultural decisions and practices (Hoffman and 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 and Oslislo, 2021). Two distinctions have been made in the social norm discourse 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 on the belief 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 are premised on and influenced by practical expectations and beliefs within the context of economic challenges, poverty, insecurity, and bad governance (Hoffman and Patel, 2012:12).

What are the consequences of vote trading?

Although in Nigeria, vote buying is considered an electoral offence electoral votes have almost assumed an article of trade. Consequently, democracy and governance have seemingly become weaker in structure and processes and have seemingly failed to serve their purposes due mainly to electoral corruption arising from vote trading, commodification of votes and inducement acts 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 electorates. Without a doubt, the kind of noxiousness of what has seemingly become a tradition in the country's electoral processes amounts to a consequential impediment to all aspects of the country's electoral processes, democracy, democratic institutions and by extension good governance. This in part corrodes and gnaws citizens' trust through the sending of wrong gestures in the nature and value of the country's leaders.

While in an ideal democratic climate, effective and efficient governments are expected 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 the 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 consent that is freely expressed not rulers who assume power through electoral fraud. Lack of legitimacy leads to lack of trust and absence of trust results in lack of support. Vote buying, the commodification of votes and money politics have negatively affected the outcome of election results and performance by political office holders because the effectuation and achievement of politicians are not justifying elements in electoral outcome in the country and the motivation to perform is fundamentally weak. While because vote trading is highly effective in the achievement of electoral success political elites constantly resort to it, thereby spending a 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.

What are the possible solutions to the problem?

Having established that vote trading has been a consistent paradox of Nigerian politics and as a form of conclusion, a fundamental question will be how to find a solution 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 and 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 the 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.

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