

VOTE BUYING AND ELECTION ADMINISTRATION IN KOGI STATE: A REVIEW OF THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTION IN LOKOJA METROPOLIS

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Abstract

The menace of vote buying in elections in Nigeria is one that cannot be overemphasized. This is because elections are conducted every 4 years and if votes are been bought in each and every election, it raises questions about the integrity of any elections conducted in the country. Kogi state is not left out. This study assessed the 2019 general elections in Lokoja, Kogi state with the main aim of understanding the causes of vote buying and its impact on the credibility of elections. The theory adopted by the paper is the rational choice theory which shows the extent certain persons go to gain and retain political power. Primary and secondary sources of data were used as methods of collecting data. While questionnaires were distributed to get primary source, secondary sources were derived from books, journals, newspapers, internet information etc. The study discovered the existence of vote buying in the start due to high poverty rate and low political orientation and the consequence of vote buying is that it erodes the credibility of elections which invariably impedes on the growth of democracy. The study recommends that the electoral umpire needs to educate the electorates prior to any election on the dangers of vote buying and all other election malpractices

Keyword: Vote-Buying, Election, Election Administration, General Election and Democracy.

Introduction

Election constitutes one of the core attributes of a democratic process worldwide. It is the medium by which people are elected into political offices in democracies globally. It is modern and universally accepted process through which individuals are openly or secretly elected into public offices, depending on the state involved to represent a body or community. Election is one of the cardinal features of democracy. This is because it validates the positions held by those elected by the citizens. Democracy itself is been advocated to be the best form of government today as it is believed to offer the best and widely accepted process of governance and representation, tends to preserve, promote and defend the interests of the governed. However, the practice has been constantly abused in Nigeria due to some varieties of ill-practices one of which is the phenomenon of vote buying among others which seems to have taken over the centre stage of electioneering process in the Nigerian politics (Duruji & Joshua, 2014).

Vote buying, simply put, can be explained as the economic exchange between aspiring candidate(s) and voter(s) “buy” and “sell” votes, as they buy and sell groceries, stationaries, and electronics. The act of vote buying by this view is a contact or perhaps an auction, in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder and parties involved in this transaction mostly carry it out at the venue of ballot box in accordance with the idea of market exchange to ensure compliance from both sides (Schaffer and Schedler, 2005). Bursco, Nazareno and Stokes (2004) also explain vote buying as a transaction whereby candidates distribute private goods such as cash and gifts in exchange for electoral support or higher turnout. Etzioni - Halevy (1989) gave an often quota definition of vote buying as “the exchange of private materials benefits for political support”.

Although vote buying has become prevalent in recent elections, its history predates the return to democracy in May 1999. There have been allegations of vote buying in the electoral history of Nigeria. It was present during Social Democratic Party (SDP) presidential primary in Jos in 1992. Indeed, vote buying was part of the reason stated by Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida for the annulment of the 12 June 1993, presidential poll which has been credited to be the freest and fairest election ever in Nigeria’s history. The Head of State had alleged that “with evidence available to the government, the 2 aspiring president candidates, had spent ₦2.1 billion and that the monies was use to buy vote during the primaries as well as the presidential elections” (Freedom and Jide, 2018).

Vote buying has become an integral part of Nigerian politics and is becoming a yardstick to gaining votes from electorates and how elections is won in Nigeria. Studies have identified that vote buying takes place at multiple stages of the electoral cycle and has been observed during voter’s registration, the nomination period, campaigned and Election day, it is more predominant during the short period before individuals cast their votes on election days.

However, irrespective of how much vote buying has eaten deep into the polity, one cannot ignore its negative consequences on democracy in Nigeria. The business of vote-buying and selling is detrimental to the political development and which questions the country’s readiness to embrace an ideal democracy. One of the main effects of this is the promotion of money over merit, ideology, and creativity. However, a level playing ground would be sacrificed for imposition and intimidation which tells on the legitimacy of government.

As argued by Danjibo and Oladeji (2007), vote buying makes politicians to see themselves as investing in a greater political harvest, thereby encouraging the entrenchment of corruption in the polity which erodes the very basis of democratic governance. Where candidates have invested much before being elected into public office, simple economic rationality will compel them to make the money they have ‘invested’ in multiples. Where that is the case, accountability and transparency known to be the hallmarks of good governance and democracy is discarded to the detriment of the system (Ojo, 2008).

This consequences of vote-buying in Nigeria is what this paper intends to look study. Its continual growth in range and brashness cannot be overemphasized. Vote buying promotes elitist politics and weakens popular participation. This according to Dung (2008), will only place persons with the resources to get access to political offices in Nigeria and will discourage the masses who have no strong financial backing from participating in political leadership, hence, political handicap. Nearly all relating to politicking in Nigeria have become monetized and this monopolizes power by ensuring that the financially strong political elites become members of a political party. This has classified Nigerian elections as one in which is ‘bought by the highest bidder’. If restraint is placed exigently on this situation, it will hamper the country’s already fragile democracy

In view of this anti-democratic practice, this paper examines the effects of vote-buying and election administration in Lokoja Local

Government Area during the 2019 General Election in Kogi State. This paper is divided into five parts. The first part is a detailed introduction which is closely followed by conceptual clarification of what election and vote-buying entails in Nigeria. The part three of this paper reviews a few literatures under the themes of the history of election in Nigeria and the play out of vote in the country since the inception of democracy in 1999. The fourth part of this study portrays how elections and vote buying played out in Kogi state Nigeria and the implications on its democracy. The final part of this study recommends few solutions in tackling the menace of vote-buying in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Democracy

As an ideal form of government, democracy has been defined in various ways as it suits the phenomenon been explained. Democracy, particularly ‘representative democracy’ where the people elect their leaders, and ensure meet their demands and if they don’t, the electorates have the power to vote them out of those offices without resulting to any form of violence (Jarvie & Milford, 2006). This is what representative democracy entails meaning that sovereign power lies with the people who in turn lend it out to a delegated few to ensure order in governance. This is the nature of democracy. Also, every citizen irrespective of class, social status has equal right to vote and be voted for. Therefore, democracy can be said to be the form of government where every citizen has a say in the decision making process of the society (Nwogu, 2015). Thus, democracy is a form of government where political power resides with the people who cannot not and should not be coerced through whatever means to lease out this power to anyone

Election

This is the process whereby individual decide to choose a person or persons to represent them, air their opinions and protect their interest in a country, state, or an organization. In a country with a democratic dispensation, election is

required for transition from one democratic tenure to another. It constitutes the fundamental institution of any democratic government, because of the fact that the authority of government is solely derived from the governed (Guizot, 1949). It is also needed for that society that has level of competitive political participation which is prevalent in Nigerian politics (Omotola, 2010). Election can thus be described as a necessary action needed for citizens to produce legitimate representatives who are also accountable to those who choose them. Therefore, elections importance cannot be over-emphasized in any democratic setting especially in ensuring that efforts are made in protecting the interests of the majority in a heterogenous state.

Vote-Buying

The process where electorates or votes exchange their votes for immediate gains which could be in monetary form like money or other items such as jewellery, cars, landed properties, clothes, etc. This is a measure political aspirant employ to get votes of party delegates and citizens whom they feel will not ordinarily cast their votes in support for them during elections. Similarly, it can be termed as any reward given to a person or group to derive their votes during any form of election (Vande, 2020). It can be described as an open method of bribery which in Nigeria’s fourth republic is carried out with impunity and total disregard for the rule of law (Oladapo, Oyewale & Abayomi 2020). Hence, vote-buying can be described as the act of perpetuated by individuals interested in obtaining votes to get into elected offices who do this by giving certain compensation to those from whom they expect to trade their votes.

Theoretical Issues

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the Rational Choice theory. Although this model is believed to be a prevalent paradigm in the study economics, it is also used in other social sciences such as modern political science and sociology. As a theory, it was argued to be developed alongside the behavioural revolution in the field of Political

science in the 1950s-1960s to assist researchers in discerning individuals' behaviour with the aid of empirical tools. Though hyped in use by Gary Backer (a Nobel Memorial Prize Laureate) in 1992, the first proponent to apply this model was Anthony Downs (1957). He used it in explaining electoral behaviour and party competition. This is believed to have aided in advancing studies in election.

Understanding individuals' interest is what starts this theory. It argues that it is individuals' interest that generates and is magnified to larger social group interests (Green, 2002). The basic assumption of the rational choice theory is that it portrays the individual as an actor with an initial concern only about him or herself as well as his or her welfare. It further argues that humans in every society act and behave as rational beings; self-calculating, self-maximizing, self-interested and these actions leads to larger social outcomes (Green, 2002). The next assumption is the optimization of the human action who do the best they can, given their circumstances as they perceive it. These decisions taken, though considered the best by the rational being, may not necessarily be right or wrong but circumstances had triggered such action.

Structures and norms in a society is assumed as the next factor that could dictate the choices made by an individual which should be regarded different from the impact circumstances places on one. The rational human's action is also assumed to solely depend on his or her welfare. Some have purported that when an individual engages in charitable ventures and give alms, it is for his or her selfish interest which involves receive praise and accolades from people or simply to make one feel good about himself or herself. Finally, the theory assumes that whatever decision taken by an individual is likely to benefit them more; Therefore, an individual will always act in a way that is significantly to their advantage (Down, 1957).

The pertinence of this model to this study can be viewed based on the struggle insured among political parties or individual vying for one political office or the other. The invent ways-

good, bad, or desperate measures to ensure they acquire their desires. This theory which studies human behaviours helps in establishing to a large extent, why political parties and their flag bearers engage in vote-buying during elections with the sole aim of achieving their objective.

Although, it has been criticized that human actions and interactions is complex and that they may adopt other ways in making decisions which may not be termed 'rational'. Yet, one cannot ignore some of the assumptions noted this theory which comes to bear as reasons why persons engage in vote-buying which is relevant to understanding the relationship between the former ad elections in Nigeria.

The History of Elections in Nigeria

Elections in Nigeria has its origins in colonial rule. By 1922, the colonial administrator, Sir Hugh Clifford, for administrative convenience, introduced the first constitution of Nigeria which is popularly known as the "Clifford's constitution of 1922". Amongst the provision of the Clifford constitution was the "elective principle" which ushered in a new development in the political history of Nigeria. This development meant that elections were to hold and was first conducted in Nigeria in 1922 by the British colonial government in response to the pressures of the nationalists who were agitating for participating in the colonial administration (Enojo, 2010)

The first election in the country, made provision for four elective positions in the legislative council and it was allocated on the basics of three for Lagos and one from Calabar exempting the Northern region. Despite that the franchise was given to the indigenous people and the elective positions were limited, the emergence of the constitution, at least brought something tangible that later formed the foundation for the modern Nigerian state. By 1946, the Richard's constitution which was next after Clifford's in the series of constitutional development in the country modified the voting criteria by reducing the amount required to be qualified to be voted vote from £100 to £50 per annum. It also saw the increment in the number of seats for

Nigerians in the legislative assembly (Brown and Iseolorunkanmi, 2014). The earliest political parties were Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) led by Herbert Macaulay, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM). Others that joined later were Northern people's Congress (NPC), Action Group, National Council of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC), United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), and the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). The trend of electioneering continued throughout the colonial years in a multi-party system basis till Nigeria got her independence in 1960.

The later parties that existed towards Nigeria's attainment of independence were classified as nationalist parties since the major intent was to wrestle power from the colonialists. Those parties were regional in outlook (Uyo, 2000). The major political parties in the First Republic were National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons/National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), and Action Group (AG), while other include United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) among others. The party system of the First Republic was still multi-party though most of them were regional parties and election was conducted across Nigeria in the year 1964. The first republic ended abruptly as the military seized powers in 1966 and the trend of events that followed lasted till 1979 when the Nigerian second republic was ushered in by the military government headed by General Olusegun Obasanjo as a fulfilment of the promise made by the Murtala/Obasanjo military regime to return the county to civilian rule when he assumed office as military heads of state in 1975 (Uyo, 2000).

Moving to the second republic, the multi-party system continued and the political parties then included, National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigerian People Party (NPP), Nigerian Advance Party (NAP) and the Nigerian National Congress (NNC) (Brown and Iseolorunkanmi, 2014). Elections conducted in the second republic were in 1979 and 1983, respectively. By 1984, General

Buhari/Idiagbon military regime seized powers from Alhaji Musa Shehu Shagari who was the then democratic president of Nigeria and in 1985, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida toppled Buhari's military government and took control over the reins of government in the county.

On assumption of office, Babangida set up a transition committee which was expected to bring in the third republic. The military government under Babangida decreed two party system for the third republic and the parties then were Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Democratic Party (NDP). The elections took place in 1993 to produce a new civilian government for Nigeria but was later annulled by the military government on the excuse that the results which declared the Late Chief MKO Abiola as the winner of the polls was stirring unrest in the polity. This led to the constitution of an interim National Government headed by Ernest Shonekan which lasted for 82 days and was replaced by General Sani Abacha in yet another military coup in November 1993. In 1998, General Sani Abacha died in office as the military head of state, and the Supreme military council appointed General Abdulsalam Abubakar to head the National Government. While in office, Abdulsalam worked towards returning the country to democratic rule with the establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which conducted the 1999 General Elections that brought on board Chief Olusegun Aremu Mathew Obasanjo as the executive president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Brown and Iseolorunkanmi, 2014). Elections that have been conducted by INEC in the current (fourth) republic are; the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections respectively and since 1999, the country has maintained multi-party system with an open secret ballot system of election.

In summary, elections in Nigeria can be broadly categorized by the colonial government in 1922, 1951 and 1959; and those organized by the military regimes in 1979m 1991, 1993 and 1999, and the ones organized by civilian governments in 1964, 1983, 2003, 2007, 2011,

2015 and 2019. Among the three categories, the elections organized by the civilian regimes appeared to be more crises ridden compared to the other two. (Lawal, 2003)

Demonstration of Vote Buying in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Vote buying differs in from one society to the other. It may take the form of direct payments to voters, that is, giving cash rewards or exchange of commodities (such, materials, food stuffs, properties etc) for votes. Vote buying in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange where candidates “buy”, and voters “sell”. The act of vote buying is a contract, or perhaps an auction, in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder. Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has seen vote-buying escalating to an extent where it is done with such impunity despite knowing it is an electoral crime. For instance, in the 2019 elections, a preliminary report on the election, that vote-buying was noticed in states such as Kano, Lagos, Bayelsa, Anambra, Imo, Akwa Ibom, Oyo, Kwara and some area in Ondo states as well as the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja where political parties had opportunity to seduce voters with food items, clothing and cash to vote their party's candidates (Oladapo, Oyewale & Abayomi, 2020)

Parties and candidates who offer material benefits to voters may generally aspire to purchase political support at the ballot box in accordance with the idea of market exchange. Other forms may include offering of employment before elections, giving out of gifts, provision of social infrastructure to communities on the “last minute” and conditional promises to individuals upon the election of a candidate. Political parties employ certain strategies to buy the votes from electorates, the strategies may focus on demobilizing active opponents or on mobilizing passive supporters. This is hardly the situation in Nigeria because “participation buying” where votes prove to the buyers in during polls by ‘stylishly’ showing them their ballot papers before rewards are given, is the case here (Ovwasa, 2014).

Furthermore, vote-buying is considered a form of ‘palm-greasing’ which if not cocktailed, which has over the years corrupted the Nigerian electoral process and how election is administered. Unfortunately, no form of serious sanctions seems to be meted out to anyone found guilty of this election malpractice in Nigeria. Perhaps, the electoral umpire (INEC) is not empowered to dish out such sanctions. However, the legislature seems to frown at formulating electoral laws which may come back to haunt them. They crush agencies that probe and investigate to verify that electoral vote-buying and selling are done away with.

Nowadays, there has been a major turn in the way electoral vote buying and selling are done. By distributing of money and other luxury goods, the rich and powerful candidates sway and influence the people and public opinions with materialistic benefits. Consequently, has made the ‘vote buyers’ unaccountable to those whose votes they have bought. This is again unchecked due to prying eyes of the parties or candidates who can easily manipulate everything that the government does to prevent or check on election malpractices (Dung, 2008).

Vote buying undermines any democracy and may developed into a greater danger across Nigeria if not checked. Although, the Independent Electoral Commission has introduced constructive changes to curb electoral crimes, such as using NYSC corps member and university teachers as adhoc staff, a lot still needs to be done as regards eradicating vote buying. This may need a good orientation of the people to change their mindset. (Sakariyau, et'al, 2015). Though literatures have done notable works in understanding what vote-buying is, its causes and effects on the society, much has not been done with reference to Kogi state. This is the gap this paper intends to fill.

Vote-buying in Kogi State in the 2019 General Elections

The trend of vote buying in Nigeria's elections is not limited to a part of the country. Every part of the country from the centre to the grassroots has been afflicted with this election malpractice for which Kogi state is not left out. For instance, it was alleged that the North-Central of which Kogi state is a part of, recorded 21% of the rate of vote-buying while 64% of those surveyed perceived vote buying had affected the election (Kunle, 2019). Sadly, as argued by Davis (2006), that this can be linked to the inability of the political parties and the contestants to put in place comprehensive and comprehensible manifestoes for security by the voters is aiding vote buying in the country. Instead of clear cut manifestoes that would enable the electorate to make a rational political choice, meaningless slogans, unattainable promises, and few campaign recycled speeches are made. Also, Ayoade (2008) confirms that candidate's ignorance of their own political party's programme is embarrassing. As he has rightly observed, candidates spin the issues they can think attract votes, which may sometime deny party positions. Candidate ignorance produces representatives but not participatory democracy which consequently encouraged vote buying.

Similarly, poverty and illiteracy also contribute to the unfortunate trend of vote buying in the society. Illiterate and poor citizens are vulnerable and due to the low level of political awareness in the country, the use of fake promises, intimidation and manipulation became an easy tool to the people. As a matter of fact, majority of the poor in the villages in the state, sold their vote mandate for monetary benefits as low as ₦2000 and ₦5000. For example, it was alleged that a person was seen putting on a T-shirt with the emblem of a preferred candidate sharing money to voters in Abache ward situated in Ankpa local government area while some politicians were seen in Ogugu ward situated in Olamaboro local government area distributing ₦6000 per voter (Akinremi, 2019) They became blindfolded by the token given to them by the business of politics (selling of votes). Although this issue

can as well be attributed to the economic depression in the country, education is the mechanism of political consciousness and rational political behaviour. Unfortunately, the meagre amount could not have taken care of their needs for the 4year period for which they sold their votes.

Another reason for vote-buying in Kogi state and Nigeria generally, may be one suggested by Ojo (2008), which is political cynicism among the electorate. This is the impression that political office holders are incurably corrupt, self-centred and lack competency has made people to view politics as dishonourable enterprise. Also, that politics in the nation is synonymous to fraud and betrayal of public trust. This wide-spread notion is an excuse for accepting money or voting criteria which they believe will be the only opportunity to get anything before elections as the best time they can benefit from the politicians. This is done on the premise that once elections are concluded, and results declared, most politicians, despite winning the polls, renege on the promises made prior election period

Lastly, the nature of Nigerian politics also encourages vote buying, whereby "the winner takes all" syndrome deviates moral principle. The nature of politics practices in Nigeria seems to give room for mediocrity and discourages morality which poses threat to democratic sustainability in the country. This is because politics is viewed as a dirty game and allows a do or die electoral contest, this tells on the level of political culture in the country. In as much as the rulers could lead by example, the ruled cannot be easily cautioned. A vigorous enquiry into exiting body of literature on the subject matter of this research has revealed quite an expressive findings and logical explanations on the evolution and dimensions of the practice, but no work has been able to offer an insight into or unravel the link between the phenomenon of vote buying and its impacts on the perceptive and psychological disposition of the electorate in the selected area of study. And at the end, bring to the knowledge of all the perceptions and opinions of the people of the area on how best the system of elections administration can be

improved to further strengthen the democratic system and make our representative system of government really representing of the people’s choice and opinion. (Sakariyau et’al 2015).

An Outlook of 2019 General Elections in Lokoja, Kogi State

Ensuring the true situation of things in Kogi state during the 2019 general elections, this study distributed 200 questionnaires randomly in Lokoja metropolis among eligible voters who exercised they franchise to ascertain their view as regards vote-buying during the elections. The tables below highlight the results gotten from the questionnaires distributed and the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents after they were retrieved and interpreted.

Socio-Demographic Data of Respondents

Table 1.

S/N	Age Distribution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	18 – 30	76	76%
2	31 – 45	15	15%
	46 and Above	9	9%

Source: Field Work by Researcher 2021

Respondents view on whether there was vote buying during the last General Elections in Lokoja Metropolis in Kogi state.

Table 2.

S/N	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly agree	62	62%
2	Agree	28	28%
3	Neutral	1	1%
4	Disagree	6	6%

5	Strongly disagree	3	3%
	Total	100	100%

Source: Field Work by Researcher 2021

The table above shows a high percentage from the views of electorates who admitted to the presence of vote-buying during the conduct of the 2019 general election in Kogi state. 63% of the respondents attributed the cause of vote-buying in the state to the high poverty rate and unemployment bedevilling youths in the state. 23% of the respondents blamed vote-buying on illiteracy and greed of the people. While, 14% of the respondents were neutral. Sadly, this has also created a negative impact on the electoral process of the state. Elections has now been seen as a period to ‘make money’ for many and this is because of the persistence of vote buying and selling. Furthermore, due to the low economic status of most of the citizens of the state, poverty has been weaponized by rich political aspirants who giving the people who are majorly poor, few thousands of naira to secure their votes. Consequently, after these rich politicians win the elections, they are neither transparent in the government office they occupy neither are they accountable to the people who voted them into the political positions.

Conclusion and Way Forward

As a result of this prevalent problem of vote buying witnessed in elections in Kogi state and Nigeria as a whole. The study recommends the following:

1. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) needs to educate the electorates prior to any general or bye elections on the implication of vote buying.
2. The government of the day needs to apply more stringent sanctions on anyone caught in the act of ‘vote buying and vote selling’. This will reduce the number of those involve in the electoral malpractice.

3. The legislative arm of government should enact an Electoral Act that classifies vote buying and other electoral misconducts capital offences and make it strictly binding on all political parties and its members.
4. Political parties should shun vote buying and instead provide credible candidates with well-articulated manifesto for elections and note elite members of the society who have nothing offer the people.
5. Security agents should be trained to be more professional on the handling of elections matters and be provided the proper institutional apparatus to carry out their designated responsibilities during elections.

Conclusion

Vote buying has a significant adverse effect on the Nigerian democratic system. The practice obstructs the electorates from freely voting candidates of their choice as presented by political parties for elections into political offices and this, by implication, results in lack of compatibility between the aspirations of the electorates and the decisions of political office holders who come to office through vote buying. This practice discourages a considerable number of persons with sense of civic responsibility and patriotism from participating in the electoral processes either as future political aspirants or voting in subsequent elections thereby fanning the flame of political apathy. Most Nigerians now have compromised trust on the political system and processes.

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