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VOTE-BUYING IN NIGERIA ELECTORAL PROCESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Vote-buying involves the exchange of private material benefits for political support. This arrangement provides voters with incentives to reciprocate by voting for the provider or the candidate. It represents the trading of political rights for material gains. This work contends that vote-buying hinders and undermines free, fair, and credible elections, preventing the polls from accurately reflecting the wishes of the electorate. Given the role of vote-buying in Nigeria's electoral process, this work asserts that the phenomenon is detrimental to the very concept of democracy. The paper presents normative and prescriptive insights emerging from the relationship between democracy and vote-buying in Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigeria, Democracy, Election, Vote-Buying

Introduction

One of the core values that supports and determines the quality of democracy in any society is the electoral process. Modern states consider periodic and regular elections to be a fundamental attribute of democracy. Elections have become a significant requirement for the stabilization and democratization of any society. Elections form an essential pillar that places the power to govern in the hands of the people. They also serve as a litmus test for democratic institutions, determining the reliability of those electoral systems. It is crucial to understand that elections held under conditions that are free, fair, and credible give meaning to democracy's core values. Among the core values they uphold are political equality, legitimacy, and the accountability of those who govern.

The sanctity of choice embedded in modern democratic ideals presupposes that the electorate has the freedom to select those who will govern them in regular, free, fair, and credible elections. For a legitimate government to emerge, the people must have the liberty to choose their leaders through processes that are free, fair, and credible. This implies that fraudulent elections fall short of the accepted democratic norms. In other words, regular, free, fair, and

credible elections are essential for a political system to be regarded as stable, secure, and democratic.

The importance and centrality of election as one of the cardinal and fundamental features of representative democracy has elicited various difficulties in conceptualizing the term. Therefore, Egwemi (2014) conceptualized election as a process under democracy through which people or the electorates exercise their freedom and inalienable right to organize their lives and to choose those to whom they delegate their rights as representatives. Similarly, Animashaun (2010) argues that an election is “a democratic process that provides citizens with the freedom to choose their rulers and to decide on public policy.” Under any democratic system, citizens who are legally qualified to exercise franchise are provided with the opportunity to choose political alternatives and to make decisions that express their preferences. An election is a formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of connected antecedent and subsequent behavior, involving the participation of the people in the act of electing or choosing their leaders and participation in governance. This is to show that the elective principle is indispensable in a modern democratic setup. On the contrary, fraudulent elections are incapable of producing acceptable and legitimate leaders.

Election ensures that democratic pillars such as the rule of law, political equality, ballot secrecy, separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, and many more are strengthened. Electorates use elections to evaluate how leadership or governments have excelled in all facets of national life, such as education, economy, agriculture, corruption, standard of living, and others. It is, therefore, a cardinal process through which power is allocated and representative democracy is actualized. Voting is an essential mechanism for selecting leaders for political offices in every democratic society. The aggregate preferences help select better public officials and provide incentives for politicians to act in the interest of the voters they represent.

Several countries in the world currently select their national leaders through multi-party elections. In Africa, however, elections are viewed as struggles over who will have access to control the resources contracted by that state, which are the biggest prizes in society. Given these high stakes, politicians resort to a variety of means, whether fair or foul, to attain public office. In Nigeria, for instance, elections have been plagued with problems such as ballot fraud, intimidation, multiple voting, low voter education, snatching of ballot boxes, violence, giving out of electoral incentives or buying of votes, and others. Even though regular, free, fair, and credible elections are vital democratic ethos, the conduct of elections in Nigeria has been a thing of horror. Since Nigeria returned to the democratization process in 1999, the conduct of elections has left much to be desired because the election process has been characterized by electoral fraud, including vote buying and electoral violence, among other violations, undermining its legitimacy and that of government. Though monetary and other material inducements have been part of the electoral process in Nigeria, the incidence of vote buying and financial inducements has become glaring and alarming in Nigeria's electoral process. Vote-buying takes different forms in different societies. This is dependent on the country's cultural and political background and election history. But vote-buying has escalated in Nigeria as contestants and political parties have struggled to outdo their rivals and influence the electoral outcomes. This study interrogates the phenomenon of vote-buying and the effects it has on the prospects of credible elections and democratic stability in Nigeria.

Vote-Buying in Nigeria's Electoral Process

As an emerging phenomenon in the political and electoral lexicon, the concept of “vote-buying” has garnered significant attention from various scholars. A frequently referenced definition is provided by Etzioni-Halevy (1989), who defines vote buying as “the exchange of private material benefits for political support.” This definition highlights the acquisition of private material benefits by voters in return for their political support. It also involves offering voters certain benefits, such as gifts or incentives, to encourage them to reciprocate by casting their votes for the providers. Thus, this perspective views vote buying as an exchange where material gifts are given to the electorate with the expectation of votes in return for the givers.

Also, Baidoo, Dankwa, and Eshun (2018) define vote-buying as “the use of money and direct benefits to influence voters.” It is important to note that while the first definition did not emphasize the use of money, this one explicitly includes it. This definition indicates that vote-buying is not limited to money alone but also encompasses other material items such as food, clothing, motorbikes, and more. In this context, voters receive money and other direct benefits to sway their decisions at the polls. Additionally, voters may receive these direct benefits and might be expected either to abstain from voting, to vote in a specific way, or perhaps not to vote at all. Thus, any reward given to someone for voting a certain way or for choosing not to vote can be considered vote-buying.

Essentially, vote buying can be defined as 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. Suffice it to add that vote-buying is a fraudulent electoral practice in all democratic societies, including Nigeria. According to Ovwasa (2014), vote-buying is the exchange of voting rights by the voters with money from the candidates in an election. This postulation sees vote buying as a process whereby a voter's conscience and views are manipulated to the advantage of the political party or candidates in an election through the use of money or other material things to induce and appeal to the electorate directly or indirectly. Bryan and Baer (2005) give credence to this standpoint when they argue that vote-buying can be a direct or indirect act. According to them, direct vote-buying involves a situation where money is paid directly to voters by a political party, its candidates, or party agents to vote in their favor in an election. Indirect vote-buying, on the other hand, includes “(i) gifts from political parties and candidates to various opinion leaders, to secure their support and that of their followers, (ii) the act of buying voters card from the electorates and keeping them away from voting during election and (iii) cash or in-kind donations for local projects, such as funeral expenses and school fees, distribution of good items to an entire village or church congregation, such as canned meat or fish, maize, used clothing, and other commodities”. The conspiratorial involvement of the election management body in collecting bribes from godfathers and special-interest individuals to favor a candidate or party during an election is another form of indirect vote-buying. This is why people believe that their vote does not count, so the better thing is for them to sell their vote.

Vote buying appears in different forms in every society. It may take the form of direct payments to voters, as Schaffer & Schedler (2005) see vote-buying as a simple economic exchange. They aver that candidates “buy” and citizens “sell” votes as they buy and sell apples, shoes, or television sets. This shows that the act of vote-buying is a contract, or perhaps an auction, in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder. Parties and candidates who offer material

benefits to voters may generally aspire to purchase political support at the ballot box, following the idea of market exchange. Other forms may include offering employment before elections, giving out gifts, providing social infrastructure to communities at the “last minute,” and making conditional promises to individuals upon the election of a candidate (Baidoo, Dankwa & Eshun, 2018). Corroborating the above submission, the Punch Newspaper, in its editorial of September 27, 2018, avers that the Presidency, through the Office of the Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, began a process of giving out ₦10, 000 to ₦30, 000 to traders in Osun State through the ‘Tradermoni’ initiative of the Federal Government. The question on the minds of most Nigerians is, “Why ₦10,000 and why now?” Although the aides of the Vice-President refuted the claim, the practice was hiked and spread throughout the country in the run-up to the 2019 General Elections. This was considered by many as a governmental inducement of voters. The Punch avers that giving ₦30,000 to traders could appear small. Still, they have mothers, fathers, children, and friends of voting age who could simply be induced indirectly by such gestures of the All Progressives Congress (APC) controlled Federal Government to make the election table unbalanced in the country. Kramon (2009) is of the view that political parties employ specific strategies to buy the votes of electorates. The strategies may focus on demobilizing active opponents or on mobilizing passive supporters. The former is often described as “negative” vote buying or “abstention buying,” while the latter may be considered as “participation buying.” These strategies may be intended to restrain electorates from casting their votes or ensuring a high turnout. However, how the parties choose among the strategies when offering electoral incentives or buying votes remains a great question.

Again, Baidoo, Dankwa & Eshun (2018) submit that during the distribution of these “goodies” or “freebies,” political parties and politicians target or consider two specific issues. According to them, one of the factors political parties consider when buying votes is the type of voter. In this vein, Cox and McCubbins (1986) identified three types of voters: core supporters, swing voters, and opposition backers. Thus, in every electoral system, these three major groups of voters can be identified and they form the persons that are targeted during vote buying. Schaffer & Schedler (2005) identify the second factor as they assert that vote trading propositions may target either electoral choices or electoral participation. They may be intended to persuade individuals to vote in certain ways or to vote or not to vote in the first place.

However, extant literature and theoretical perspectives have identified three dominant arguments to explain the foundations of vote buying in elections. First, it is argued that socio-economic factors, especially poverty, unemployment and illiteracy, play a significant role in promoting the market for votes in any democratic society. Second, the voting methods in a particular electoral system may also guarantee the predominance of vote-buying during elections. The third explanation is predicated upon the belief that vote buying is a product of the nature of partisanship and party organization in a particular state. Another cause of vote-buying is when the electorates perceive that their votes don’t count; they will be obliged to sell their vote rather than vote for something that will not count.

Vote-buying is frowned upon in every democratic society. It raises questions about the quality of democracy. Given this, some arguments are usually made against the practice. First, they argue that because vote-buying gives wealthier individuals an unfair advantage, it violates the principle of equality. Second, there is a concern that vote buying may promote inefficiency. This

is because the interests of some voters are bought by parties before the election, and their needs or interests may, therefore be ignored by political representatives after the election. Buying of votes is also frowned upon in most economies. This is because once a nation becomes user-friendly to vote-buying and vote-selling, it ceases to be in the best books of foreign multinational companies seeking to invest in developing countries (Baidoo, Dankwa & Eshun, 2018).

It is noteworthy that vote buying is prohibited in Nigeria. Article 130 of the Electoral Act 2010, as amended, states that: A person who — (a) corruptly by himself or by any other person at any time after the date of an election has been announced, directly or indirectly gives or provides or pays money to or for any person for the purpose of corruptly influencing that person or any other person to vote or refrain from voting at such election, or on account of such person or any other person having voted or refrained from voting at such election; or (b) being a voter, corruptly accepts or takes money or any other inducement during any of the period stated in paragraph (a) of this section, commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of N100,000 or 12 months imprisonment or both. According to Article 63 of the 2022 Electoral Act: 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 pays money to or for any person for the purpose of corrupting or influencing that person or any other person to vote or refrain from voting at such election, or on account of such person or any other person having voted 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 N500,000 or imprisonment not more than two years or both.

In accordance with the above, 2018 Revised Code of Conduct for Political Parties in section VIII (e) provides that: “... all political parties and their agents shall not engage in the following practice: buying of votes or offer any bribe, gift, reward, gratification or any other monetary or material considerations or allurements to voters and electoral officials.” Despite these legal frameworks prohibiting it, vote-buying continues to be a widespread practice in Nigeria’s recent elections. The brazen nature of vote-buying in Nigeria, led to the description of Nigeria’s electoral politics as a “cash-and-carry democracy” (Onuoha & Ojo, 2018).

There is no doubt that the occurrence of vote-buying, understood as incentives or gifts given to voters before elections in exchange for their votes, is a corrupt electoral practice. The phenomenon seems to obstruct democratic processes yet remains pervasive in many developing democracies. Vote-buying is a threat to the conduct of quality elections. According to Akwetey (2016), electoral fraud, corruption, and unfair practices bring the reliability of the electoral process into question. It affects the legitimacy of the acclaimed elected officials. He said that the practice often leads to mistrust, violence and conflicts while robbing citizens of their need for expected peace and development. There has been widespread corruption in the sense that many African elections have not been centred on issues of policy or accountability. This has consequences for economic development since it is usually done through the giving out of electoral incentives.

Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, and since then, the country has organized and conducted six (6) general elections, comprising the Presidential, National Assembly, Governorship, State Assembly and Council elections. This is besides reruns and by-elections. All

these elections have been fraught with allegations of the distribution of electoral incentives aimed at buying the votes of electorates. Vote-buying seems to have become the norm of the day in Nigeria's electoral system, both at the national and internal party elections. The problem stems from the fact that there is a high rate of poverty and ignorance among the voting populace. According to the Civil Society Situation Room (2019), it is a cynical tactic that seeks to take advantage of widespread poverty and want by getting people to sell their votes to the highest bidder. The Situation Room reports blatant incidents of vote-buying across Nigeria, involving major political parties (wherein) Party agents stationed themselves at polling units, paying voters sums ranging from N500 to N5,000 to get them to vote in favor of their candidates.

The Concept of Democracy

Democracy is one of the lexicons of political vocabulary. It is a procedure or a process by which society organizes itself. It is seen as the best form of government. Its origin is traceable to the Greek City States. Defining this concept is a very difficult one, but we have a working definition, which means rule by the people. This definition tells us that the citizens of a democracy govern their nation. This is called popular sovereignty. The principal purpose for which the People establish a democratic government is the protection and promotion of their rights, rule of law, equality, liberty, interests, and welfare. Democracy requires that each individual be free to participate in the political community's self-government. Thus, political freedom lies at the heart of the concept of democracy.

Democracy has various variants, such as pluralistic democracy, elitist democracy, classical-liberal democracy, participatory democracy, etc. Still, for this work, we are concentrating on classical liberal democracy, which is the more conceptual of modern democracy. In the liberal tradition, the concepts of liberty, equality, rights, secularism, and justice are very fundamental. To realize these virtues, liberal thinkers have, from the beginning, advocated that it can only come through the democratic process.

After freedom from the power of monarchs and feudal lords, democracy was seen as the natural way of governing a society. It is seen as the best form of government. Macpherson has proposed that before democracy came to the Western world, concepts of politics of choice, competitive politics, and politics of markets had developed. So it was the liberal state in that sense that was democratized. Early traces of democratic ideas can be found in the writings of English thinkers like Thomas Moore and Winstanley and English Puritanism. Still, the actual birth of the democratic idea happened with the birth of the social contract theory because the idea of the social contract between citizens assumes the equality of all men. Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan* (1651), argued for the central democratic principle that the people create the government through a social contract. John Locke (1986) also supported him when he argued that the people form a government and aim solely for their good. Adam Smith's free market model was also advanced on a democratic basis, arguing for the freedom for all individuals to produce, buy and sell. The great utilitarian philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill supported democracy fully and created an intellectual basis for it along utilitarian lines. They argued that democracy maximizes utility or the greatest happiness for the greatest number because people need protection from their rulers as well as each other, and the best way of guaranteeing this protection is through representative democracy, constitutional government, regular elections, secret ballot, competitive party politics and rule by the majority vote etc. Mill had added another argument to Bentham's argument for democracy. He proposed that

democracy helps improve and develop mankind as a whole in moral terms, more than any other system. He saw democracy as a prime mechanism of moral self-development and the highest and harmonious expansion of individual capacities (Mill, 1991). Interestingly, though, neither Bentham nor Mills were unequivocally for the principle of universal adult franchise or one-man-one-vote.

Democracy can be defined as a Political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office. MacPherson (1972) defined democracy as 'merely a mechanism for choosing and authorizing governments or in some other way getting laws and political decisions made'. Schumpeter opined: 'The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will'. Abraham Lincoln, as quoted by NekaBari J. Ntete-Nna (2004), defined democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. The implication of this definition among others is that all governments not only derive their root from the consent of the people but are designed to protect the interest of the people. Beyond that, the policies of government are products of the people's collective decisions. This further means that the masses of the people are directly or indirectly involved in making decisions on issues that concern their lives. Democracy is further defined as the institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to make decisions by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote. Modern democracy has three principal pillars: (1) Democracy, which is Rule by the People through free and fair elections and other forms of participation, (2) Constitutionalism which is the use of constitutions to limit government by law, (3) Liberalism which is freedom, equality and dignity of the individual.

a. Rule by the People through Free and Fair Elections

Under this, we have (a) Popular Sovereignty, which means the idea that the People are the ultimate authority and the source of the authority of government. (b) The political equality of all citizens. (c) The just powers of government are based upon the consent of the governed. (d) Free elections and other forms of civic participation are essential to democracy. For example, (i) if the People are to rule, they must have a practical means of determining who shall exercise political power on their behalf. (ii) If they are to rule, the People must also monitor and influence officials' behavior while in office. (iii) Elections are at the heart of the practical means for the People to assert their sovereignty. (e) The Elections that fulfil the requirements of modern democracies are the ones that are free, fair, and sufficiently periodic. This is what will make People's will have an effect. (i) "Free elections" means all adult citizens can vote in elections and stand for office. Candidates for office are not in any way blocked from addressing the electorates. The electorates are not also conditioned or patterned by any means on where to vote. (ii) "Fair elections" means fundamentally honest elections. Voters must not be stopped from voting, and all votes must be accurately counted. The voters must not be coerced or induced in any way to vote in a particular manner that will be against their conscience. (iii) "Frequent elections" means that elections must be held periodically to enable the People to exercise their control of government.

b. Constitutionalism: The use of Constitutions to limit government by law

The People did not give their power to the government to oppress or abuse them but rather to protect their fundamental rights, interests, and welfare. Therefore, they limit government power by authoritative fundamental laws called constitutions. The constitution is a body of principles, rules and regulations stating how the powers of governing a country are given and how these powers are to be exercised. It is the means used to state what powers the government shall have. Constitutions limit these powers. This is so because governments exercise only the powers defined by the Constitution. A constitutional government is a government that, as a practical matter, is limited both in what it does and how it acts. The government is limited to acting within the law and cannot make up rules to suit its convenience. The law applies to everyone, including those who govern. No one is above the law. An essential means of limiting government is establishing a rule of law, beginning with the constitution itself, which is a fundamental law. Thus, the rule of law is a primary element of constitutionalism. The judiciary in political systems such as Germany and the United States has the power of judicial review in order to enforce constitutionalism. "Judicial review" refers to the power of the courts to declare laws passed by legislatures to be null and void if they contradict the nation's constitution. In these judicial systems, the rule of law begins with the rule of the most fundamental law, the constitution. Some legal systems employ further means to establish a limited, "constitutional" government. A "bill of rights" in constitutions, which, combined with judicial review, ensures that the legislation, legal decisions, and acts of government officials do not violate fundamental rights. The Electoral Act is another element of constitutionalism.

c. Liberalism: Freedom, equality, and dignity of the individual

Liberal democracy recognizes the moral primacy of the individual and that all persons have certain fundamental rights. A central purpose of democracy is to protect these rights in the practical world of everyday life. Examples of these fundamental rights are (a) Freedom of religion/conscience, the right to practice any religion or none. (b) Political freedom is the equal right, for example, of all citizens to participate in choosing those who govern and to remove them at will through elections. (c) Freedom of the press, including electronic media; (d) Freedom of individual expression, orally, in writing, and symbolically; (e) Right to privacy and a private sphere of life free from governmental interference. (f) Right to freedom of association in public and private, constitutionalism, liberalism. Modern democracy, particularly of the liberal variants, rests on a representative government. This means the democratic elements consisting of popular election and the possibility of dismissal.

Implications of Vote-Buying in Elections and Democracy in Nigeria

Having understood that Democracy is a better way of organizing the political process of any society, it is imperative to curb any impediment to its realization. Over the years, Nigeria's electoral process has been under serious threat due to the illegitimate means by which politicians acquire power. In societies undergoing transitions to democracy, like Nigeria, nurturing a democratic political culture is an essential requirement for bringing about consolidation of democracy and stability of the country. Similarly, understanding how Nigerians perceive democracy is an essential step towards knowing what measures need to be taken to nurture a democratic political culture and mindset amongst them, especially as it has experienced military rule over a long period and now is striving for democratic sustainability and consolidation. This long experience with militarism has implanted in her and her citizens

anti-social behaviors and undemocratic dispositions within the society, which convert them into perpetrators of armed banditry, criminality, anarchism, and unprovoked violence. All the anti-social behaviors mentioned above are what shape their attitude during any elections in the country.

Be that as it may, in a democracy, an election campaign is supposed to be a peaceful and open discourse of persuasion. Ideally, candidates compete for popular support by presenting reasoned arguments about why they are most qualified for election to office. They present the programs they have for the public good. Voters then choose the contender whose policy positions most closely resemble voters' own set of preferences. Vote-buying has eroded this virtue of democracy out of the electoral process, thereby introducing a shortcut to electoral victory.

Vote-buying is a threat to the conduct of quality elections. Electoral fraud, corruption, and unfair practices bring the reliability of the electoral process into question. It affects the legitimacy of the elected officials. The practice of this often leads to mistrust, violence and conflicts while robbing citizens of their need for expected peace and development. Again, vote-buying interferes with the independence and rights of voters to fairly assess candidates for electoral offices, which directly determine the quality of governance and social contract that citizens will experience. Also, it violates the principle of equality by giving wealthier individuals an unfair advantage. Vote-buying perpetuates corruption throughout the entire political system. When a candidate chooses to pay for support rather than compete fairly for votes, they show disregard for democratic norms and a willingness to use illegal means to acquire power.

Vote buying obstructs the democratic process by interfering with citizens' rights to decide who will represent them and their interests freely. This can result in the candidates with the deepest pockets winning the election rather than candidates who would best serve their constituents. Ideally, elections create a "social contract" between candidates and constituents, who vote with the presumption that the candidates will govern according to their stated policy platforms. But these things are violated. Vote-buying creates poor governance and undercuts citizens' ability to hold their elected officials accountable. If a candidate believes all they need to do to be elected is pay off voters and government officials, they will have no incentive to be responsive to issues their constituents care about.

More so, vote-buying deters aspiring political leaders from running for office because it suggests that money, rather than ideas, visions, or experience, is how to win an election. By this, qualified candidates are discouraged from running for office while entrenching corrupt officials in their positions. This has violated the constitutional and political rights of citizens, the right 'to vote and be voted for'. Consequently, vote-buying in Nigeria undermines political legitimacy, and this has made a mockery of Nigeria's democracy. It has created a fundamental problem of unaccountability and irresponsibility in governance. This is because voters have no moral ground to demand good governance from politicians.

The consequences of vote-buying are manifold, particularly for a developing democracy like Nigeria. It is paramount to note that vote-buying unduly raises the cost of elections, thereby shutting out contestants with little finances and promoting political corruption. When victory is purchased rather than won fairly, it leads to State capture. This implies that vote-buying can trigger corruption by politicians after they find themselves in power. This is because they

would want to recoup the money expended during the electioneering process. This can lead to the abuse of state resources.

Again, vote buying equally compromises the integrity of elections. It undermines the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidders and not necessarily the most popular or credible contestants (Adamu, Ocheni & Ibrahim, 2016). It therefore, discourages conscientious people from participating in the electoral process, and it causes citizens to lose faith in State institutions, and leads to political and voter apathy. When people believe that their votes do not count, voter apathy sets in.

Furthermore, vote-buying not only compromises the well-being of those who sold their vote for instant gratification but also the future of those who did not sell their votes but are inevitably exposed to bad governance that results from such a fraudulent process. For every vote traded, many people would suffer the unintended consequences when the traded votes make the difference between winning and losing in the election. For example, everyone is suffering from the subsidy removal in Nigeria; everyone is suffering it, both those who sold their votes and those who manipulated the election results and those who did not. If we had a ruler with a better understanding of subsidy, he would have known that you need to put palliative on the ground before you remove subsidy, not removing it and begin to scramble with what will be a palliative for the people, thereby putting people under suffering. Vote-buying vitiates the commitment of the “elected” government to the ideal of good governance like accountability, inclusiveness, and responsiveness.

However, vote-buying can contribute to the wrong political parties being elected to serve the State, and leadership positions become a prize for the highest bidder. It serves as a springboard to catapult unsalable, incompetent elements and unsuitable political parties to public elective offices. Once voters are paid to cast their votes in a certain way, they become enslaved by their political paymasters as, by default, their rights to challenge their vote-buying political paymasters have been emasculated. As vote-buying is so widespread, it raises concerns about the quality of emerging democratic institutions and how potential elections will help to deliver better and more accountable governments.

Vote-buying promotes the primacy of money in politics to the detriment of merit, ideology and free and fair political competition. The character and quality of persons seeking mandates are not questioned, and this does not feature in national discourses. This has made people with questionable characters occupy sensitive positions. However, vote-buying rears underdevelopment, stunts public service delivery to the people, institutes unpopular political parties with transactional leadership into power, raises despotic rulers, and emboldens ineptitude and bad governance. Insecurity of lives and properties, disunity amongst ethnic groups, secessionists’ agitations from various ethnic associations, the massive blood-letting in all parts of the country, and enormous deficit of infrastructures are the products of vote-buying. The plague generates inept leadership, and ineptitude yields poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy.

It is essential to know that this kind of unwholesome practice constitutes a serious hindrance to public policy, the legislative process, and other vital segments, which consequently brings the highest indignity to the democratic and electoral process. Vote-buying has completely removed every sense of free and fair elections and credibility in Nigeria’s electoral process. It

has defaced democracy in so much so that the parties and their candidates have demonstrated that good manifestoes, acceptability, and integrity of those vying for public offices are no longer convincing enough to guarantee electoral victory. Again, vote-buying has injured democracy so much by stultifying the electoral process, and based on this, Nigeria needs to have political parties and an electoral umpire that have democratic willpower for there to be a free, fair, and credible election, which will eradicate vote-buying and selling in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the bad governance that vote-buying brings is the source of political violence, secessionist agitations from various ethnic associations, insurgencies, militancy, political assassination, kidnapping, massive blood-letting, terrorism, and ethno-religious conflicts that happen between the societal groups that inhabit Nigeria and the divergent interests that besiege them. Also, bad governance destroys such ethos as economic welfare, environmental concerns, cultural identity, resource control, and political rights which are democratic. Vote-buying violates the three principal pillars of democracy which are: Rule by the People through free and fair elections and other forms of participation; Constitutionalism, the use of constitutions to limit government by law (rule of law); and Liberalism, freedom, equality, and dignity of the individual. It also deprives individuals of their fundamental human rights and individual freedom, which are the core values of democracy. This has prevented the 'visioned' intellectuals and people with proven integrity from entering politics or leading because the electoral process is prone to dishonesty, immoral people, unjust and vicious people, and the electoral process is unethical.

Conclusion

Inferring from the following, it is intelligible to say that vote-buying has removed complete credibility in Nigeria's electoral process and has eroded the principles of democracy, which has made Nigeria's democracy termed 'Cash-and-Carry-Democracy'. The stance of this paper is that vote-buying is one of the factors that conditions and encourages the flourishing of corruption in Nigeria's electoral process. It breeds bad governance, which is a significant source of political violence, secessionist agitations from various ethnic associations, militancy, insurgency, political assassination, kidnapping, massive blood-letting, and all forms of controversies and criminal activities that threaten national security. Based on the discussion above, it is not out of place to say that vote-buying which is electoral fraud, is the architect of developmental problems in Nigeria. This paper recommends that Nigeria should have an electoral umpire that will have democratic willpower. This will eliminate the buying over of electoral voters and INEC officials by candidates or political parties. Also, there be an electoral education through social and other media houses on the practical effect vote-buying has created in Nigeria. Also, they should be educated on the moral implications of voting conscientiously.

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