

Vote-Buying: Propelling Electoral Flaws and Violence in Nigeria, Causes, impact and Solutions.

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Abstract

This work examines politics of vote buying with a view to discussing the Causes, impact and Solutions. The National Integration otherwise known as National Unity of any nation is a function of genuine policy of government that is expected to display high sense of indices of acceptable governance such as: transparency, accountability, responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness, popular participation, service delivery, zero tolerance to corruption and so on. Paradoxically, the reverse has always been the case with Nigeria. Verily, every Nigerian is adversely affected by Nigerian factors which are predicated on corruption, greed, selfishness among others. As a corollary, the much expected dividends of democracy is nothing but a ruse. The work relies on both primary and secondary sources of information. The data sources were complemented with the administration of questionnaires and oral interview with relevant stakeholders and members of the public to elicit more information about vote buying in election. Data were also sourced from the internet, governmental organizations and other related agencies with the objective of assessment and comparison. The study raises critical question about the persistence of vote buying so as to ensure corruption free society in Nigerian political system. It noted that the aims of establishing the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have not been fully realized owing to various election frauds including vote-buying among others. The study therefore concludes that for the attainment of good governance, Nation building, societal development, corruption free society in Nigeria, there must be conscious efforts on the part of the government to ensure that citizens are well informed via political awareness while ensuring credible people are employed to work in Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in order to engender promotion of accountability, transparency and probity. This will serve as model for every Nigerian to follow.

Keywords: Vote-Buying, Election frauds, Politics, Good Governance and National Integration.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Politics of vote buying and selling has found its way into virtually everybody's ways of life in Nigeria. It is no longer a gainsaying that all over the globe, elections are the fundamental hallmarks of democracy. This is because liberal democracy permits or gives room for open political participation that epitomizes political competition of philosophies, civil and political rights with freedom, transparency, accountability and answerability to the electorates. Indeed, in free competitive political system, election serves as a legalizing and unifying mechanism to effect proper change of policies, projects and government. According to (international IDEA,2000:216), the credibility of an election is a function of three principal factors which are: *openness, regularity and the assurance of a level ground for all candidates*. This is justifiable on the ground that all parties involved are given the avenue to contest elections after attaining the basic needed requirements for qualification notwithstanding their ideological differences on leanings, manifestoes and views/opinions.

However, from the experiences all over the globe nowadays, the place of election at institutionalizing and effecting change of government that captures good governance is known to have been eroded by electoral flaws and frauds. Ideally, place of election among others are : recruiting politicians, enhancing public decision-makers, educating voters, making government, provision of exemplary succession in leadership and building

transparency with accountability (Babatola, 2019). Election is said to perform its function as expected when it is held constantly and regularly without any unwarranted interference or postponement from anybody unlike nowadays when elections are branded “inconclusive”. Most often than not, inconclusive elections are propelled by electoral frauds which includes buying and selling of votes and so on.

It is in the light of the above that this study investigates vote-buying as an agent of electoral frauds which has been precipitating post election violence with a view to providing workable panaceas capable of arresting election violence in Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

Election violence should be handled seriously with caution this is because of the damage it portended on the nations globally especially in Nigeria. (Anwuna, 2007). This indeed is well noticeable especially after elections are said to have been concluded. A lot of destruction of lives and property are mostly attributed to election violence. The fundamental responsible factors for this violence development is because “political contestations in Nigeria adopt the zero-sum game type where the winner takes all at stake and leaves nothing for the losers.” (Olujimi, 2007) Considering the afore submission, it is apparent that the bottom-line is that political violence becomes inevitable given the character of the Nigeria state and the nature of its political contestation. This clearly implies that due to the currency in underdevelopment which the country is subjected to, it would be impossible to make any progress in an acrimonious situation. This study therefore examines the analysis of the phenomenon of political violence in the Nigerian federalism with the sole objective of drawing out factors responsible and the import for the country’s progressive stability.

Research Questions

The following questions are answered in this study.

- (i) What is vote-buying?
- (ii) To what extent has the vote-buying been causing electoral flaws and violence in Nigeria?
- (iii) What are the implications of vote-buying and selling on the county’s integration and development?

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives among others which are to:

- (i) define the concept of vote-buying as practiced in the Nigerian politics
- (ii) analyze the extent to which vote-buying been causing electoral flaws and violence in Nigeria
- (iii) examine the implications of vote-buying and selling on the county’s integration and development.

Conceptualizing Electoral Flaws and Violence Being the Products of Vote-Buying In Nigerian politics.

It is worthy of note that more people globally are subscribing to the fact that citizens are beginning to term with the fact that democratic elections have lost their relevance. (Anwuna, 2007). This is not unconnected with the following factors: (i) Election Rigging, (ii) Corruption (iii) insecurity of lives and property; (iv) Determination of winners before elections (v) Legitimate Violence (vi) Problem of Logistics (vii) Personal interest of political gladiators.

(i) Election Rigging: this implies unscrupulously manipulating poll results. According to Jimmy Carter, the former USA President. “There was a wide disparity between the number of voters observed at the polling stations and the final result that has been reported from several states”. He made this statement while reporting developments during the 1999 March Presidential election that ushered in Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. (www.cartercenter.org/viewdoc.asp)

(ii) Insecurity of lives and property: The stage of insecurity now and especially this democratic dispensation is worrisome and alarming. It has been observed that since independence, electoral frauds, voting irregularities, killing of electoral officers, riots have characterized Nigerian elections (Oyediran, 1984).

(iii) Corruption: This is the most prevalent feature of Nigerian politics to the extent that the military have always seen it as an invitation for their intervention in politics. It should be mentioned however that disunity among Nigerian politicians, pursuit of personal and self interest among others have been the major basis for corruption.

(iv) Determination of winners before elections: another fundamental cause of violence either during or post election has been the tendency to assume that candidate “A” must win at all cost even against the choice of the people. Therefore, voting in reality doesn’t seem to be the an expression of power but an admission of powerlessness because those who win seem to have been determined before the elections are concluded. In (Ebegbulem, 2010), “*in such a structure, voting is only a means of legitimizing an illegitimate government*”. As it has been observed in Nigeria that election results only and usually favors the ruling party. Of course the electorates are made to believe that their votes would make no significant impact unless they join the voice of the ruling party.

(v) Legitimate Violence: It must be said that the ruling party tends to have the monopoly of legitimate violence and can be used at any point in time to perpetrate what ill its desire. This is because the security apparatus are in its custody such as the police, armies, civil defence etc For instance, the present democratic government in Nigeria places a shutdown, restriction on all meetings, gatherings, schools, churches, mosques, shines with a view to combating coronavirus (COVID'19) using the instrumentality of the security personnel. From March 31st till April 13th, 2020. During the period in question, a lot of riots, legitimate violence erupted that claimed lives in Abuja (Dailypost, 1st April, 2020)

(vi) Problem of Logistics: There are lots of difficulties associated with voters' registration. Long queues at the polling booths, late arrival of registration materials, inadequate voting materials and polling stations are some of many problems challenging/confronting voters in the exercise of their civic rights and responsibility in Nigeria. (Ebegbulem, 2010)

(vii) Personal interest of political gladiators: over the years, elections have not focused on issues and ideological reforms; rather, it has placed emphasis on personality and the struggle for power to advance individuals' personal aggrandizement. All these are capable of fomenting violence in politics.

In addition to afore-mentioned factors among others, the following can also be seen as some of the causes of vote-buying which have been precipitating post election violence in Nigeria: The desire to win elections at all cost; Poverty and hunger; Greediness; Unemployment; Lack of political awareness/education; The belief that politicians going there to make money; The politicians themselves see those positions as a means to enrich themselves; Cash and carry syndrome /mentality; Failure on the part of law enforcement agents to implement laws appropriately; Poor leadership;

Closing Remarks

Having gone through the responsible factors of vote-buying, it apposite to submit at this juncture that the following factors are some of the solutions to contain vote-buying in Nigeria which are: Cash and carry syndrome /mentality should be discouraged; Mechanism of political awareness/education should be encouraged; Leadership by example; Election by capacity and ability to deliver; Open door policy by electoral officers: INEC should make themselves available to people; Criminalization of both the sellers and buyer of votes; Judiciary must be independent; Law enforcement agents must remain determined and uncompromised; Diversification of economy; Creation of jobs; Self-discipline; Unity of purpose; System of government must be characterized with the features of good governance; Application of criminal laws as contained in the criminal code and panel code: what is required is for political will to apply and enforce these provisions. (Young, 1976)

(i) Cash and carry syndrome /mentality should be discouraged: the philosophy of using money to purchase the voting rights of the electorates should be highly discouraged and abated. Voting exercise should be freely done without the interference of bribing and kick-back. Like it was witnessed in 2018 general elections in Nigeria, there were wide spread purchase of votes from the electorates.

(ii) Mechanism of political awareness/education should be encouraged: Public awareness and education should be created in such a manner that every Nigerian would know his /her political responsibility and the essence of voting. Indeed, Nigerians should be made to realize the implications of vote-buying.

(iii) Leadership by example: our leaders either temporal, political, or spiritual should lead by example. According to (Cooper, 2002), the philosophy should be "*do as I do, not do as I say*"

(iv) Election by capacity and ability to deliver: People should be elected based on the ability and capability to render service delivery to the electorates and their constituencies should feel the impact of voting them into power.

(v) Open door policy by electoral officers: INEC should make themselves available to people ; and be ready at all times to discharge their duties without any let, favor or compromise (Cooper, 2002). INEC should be characterized with transparency, accountability, and probity always.

(vi) Criminalization of both the sellers and buyer of votes: whenever anyone is caught engaging in vote-buying, both the seller and the buyer should be dealt with seriously and prosecuted.

(vii) Judiciary must be autonomous: the fact that judges are appointed by the executives should erode the place of the judiciary. There are usually three arms of government; and by the stipulation of the constitution they are supposed to be independent of one another in order to perform creditably well.

(viii) Creation of jobs: government should endeavor to create job for the masses so that the score of the poor would reduced hence the philosophy of receiving money before anyone exercise his/her voting rights would no longer arise. (Ayo, 2007)

(ix) Self-discipline: this is a culture that must be strictly adhered to by all. No matter the situation we find ourselves, we should discipline ourselves and be ready to protect and project our good image and that of our nation respectively.

(x) System of government must be characterized with the features of good governance such as: accountability, openness, transparency, constitutionalism and service delivery.

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