

Vote Selling and Buying: A Threat to National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the effect of vote selling and buying on national development in Nigerian politics. Money politics and vote buying in Nigerian politics has devastating impact on the phenomenon of the body politics. The Nigerian state often experiences governmental instability in the forms of bad policy options and implementation. The basic necessities of life such as electricity supply, water supply, employment and quality education are lacking in the Nigerian society. The recent gubernatorial election in Ekiti State has shown Nigerian are desperate in winning elections at all cost. The election was marred by massive vote selling and buying as a vote go's for between #4,000 to #5,000 as the case may be depending on the political party offer (Eniola,2018 & Kamarudeen & Oladime,2018). Money itself has become a dominant factor in Nigerian politics. Money seems to have taken the centre stage in the political process in most countries and in the Nigerian politics. It is, sadly, now playing an increasingly critical role. It even appears to be so dominant in the electoral process to such an extent that the word 'money politics' with a pejorative connotation, has crept into the country's political lexicon. It is now a critical variable when assessing the level of political corruption in the country. This paper made a way forward for national development which includes. Electoral and other institutional reforms should be effective, Anti-corruption agencies need to collaborate with banks and other financial institutions to monitor the movement of cash during elections, Also essential is a culture of democratic citizenship that begins with a citizenry that is ready to insist on credible and transparent elections, Democratically elected leaders should ensure development, and improve the conditions of the ordinary people, Voters should have moral objections to vote buying, Thus, there is less need for voter education than for a system of incentives and capabilities that will allow ordinary people to resist these misguided efforts to appropriate their votes, The Government should establish a National Commission on Electoral Offences with the responsibility of investigating and charging electoral offenders to court, Enforcement of the existing electoral regulations on party finances including campaign programmes should be implemented and Electorates should resist any attempt by politician to induce them of money bag at polling station during elections.

Keywords: Vote, Selling, Buying and National Development

Introduction

The concept of vote selling and buying as pointed out by many Scholars such as (Beetseh & Akpoo, 2015, Ojo 2007, Walecki 2006, Davies, 2006, Schaffer 2004, Schedler 2005.) have written on money politics and vote buying in Nigerian politics because of the devastating impact of the phenomenon on the body politics. The Nigerian state often experiences governmental instability in the forms of bad policy options and implementation. The basic necessities of life such as electricity supply, water supply, employment and quality education are lacking in the Nigerian society (Ugwuanyi, 2018). The recent gubernatorial election in Ekiti State has shown Nigerian are desperate in winning elections at all cost. The election was marred by massive vote selling and buying as a vote go's for between #4,000 to #5,000 as the case may be depending on the political party (Eniola,2018 & Kamarudeen & Oladime,2018).

Paradoxically, money itself has become a dominant factor in African politics. Money seems to have taken the centre stage in the political process in most countries and in the Nigerian politics. It is, sadly, now playing an increasingly critical role. It even appears to be so dominant in the electoral process to such an extent that the word 'money politics' with a pejorative connotation, has crept into the country's political lexicon. It is now a critical variable when assessing the level of political corruption in the country.

Money politics (vote selling and buying) can be defined as the phenomenon in the Nigerian electoral process whereby contenders for elective positions use money or money is used on their behalf as an inducement to mobilize and get the support of the electorates 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. Related to this, is outright vote-buying. Vote-buying in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange (Ovwasa, 2013, Alabi,2008

& Asobie,2007).

The Nigerian state often experiences governmental instability in the forms of bad policy options and implementation. The basic necessities of life such as electricity supply, water supply, employment and quality education are inadequate in the Nigerian society. Democracy which is adjudged to be the best form of government all over the world is also being constantly assaulted in Nigeria due to the phenomenon of money politics and vote buying. Although, Nigeria enthroned democratic governance in the fourth republic on May 29th, 1999, the dividends of democracy to the people are very scanty and far apart. This is because the concept and practice of democracy appears to be at variance in Nigeria. Actually, money and vote selling and buying have vitiated the good qualities of democracy in the country. In fact, the destructive power of money politics has been fingered as one of the factors that undermine good governance in Nigeria.

The role that money and vote buying play in Nigeria politics today have earned them a dominant position in the election of officers into position of authority where they can authoritatively decide who gets what, when and how. Money seems to have taken the center stage in the political process in most countries and in Nigerian politics. It is, sadly, now playing an increasing critical role to such extent that the word, 'money politics with a pejorative connotation, have crept into the country's political lexicon', (Davies: 2006:5). The problem with this situation is that the electoral process is often compromised resulting in elections not being free and fair. It is pertinent to observe that it is not in any way being suggested that the use of money by political parties or any person or group of persons in politics has inherent corruptive influence. The truth is that, money is needed for sundry services and logistics such as mobilization for political campaigns and rallies, printing of posters and manifestoes, production of party emblems and other symbols etc. The only worry, however, is the noticeable corrupting influence of money on vote selling and buying, and their negative impact on good governance in Nigeria.

Conceptual framework

Concept of Vote selling and buying

Money politics can be defined as the phenomenon in the Nigeria electoral process whereby contenders for elective positions 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. Related to this, is outright vote-buying. Vote selling and buying in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange. According to (Fredrick & Andrea's 2005) candidates 'buy' and citizens/electorates 'sell "vote, as they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets"'. The act of vote-buying by this view is a contract or perhaps an auction in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder. Parties and candidates buy vote by offering particularistic material benefits to voters. Candidates may generally aspire to purchase political support at the ballot box in accordance with the idea of market exchange. For analytical purpose, it is necessary to point out that, the commercial aspirations of vote buyers' may run into two barriers namely: objective and intersubjective 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' perspective revealed that those electoral practices we described as "Vote selling and Buying" may carry different meaning in different cultural context. This is so because, in both historical and comparative perspective, vote-buying as a phenomenon is neither system specific nor space bound (Muyiwam2018 & Ojo, 2007:5). In all systems, be it developed or developing, medieval or contemporary, vote selling and buying occurs in all regions and climes. The only difference is that it differs in magnitude and manifestation from one polity to the other. Regions or locales where episodic, electorate-related gift giving or favour rendering is common include: Benin, Taiwan, Japan, Northern Portugal and the slums of Metro Minica (Ojo, 2007). Moral debts can be created in more efficacious or obliged manner as well.

This practice which rests upon pay offs that are not directly and explicitly tied to reciprocity in the polling booth, is sometimes referred to as indirect vote selling and buying. This practice was well known in 19th century England and early 20th century in France and is common today in the Philippines and in the squatter settlements of Quito, Ecuador. In Taiwan, vote brokers typically approach relatives, friends and neighbours. A similar tactics is also employed in Thailand. For example, in the 1992 election in Thailand campaign workers for one candidate sought in each village "to recruit the person best placed to deliver support, generally someone with significant social status in the village. Other qualifications include: being respectable, well known, a local leader (either official or unofficial), the candidate's relative or close friends, or some other characteristics that would make people honour their vote promises (Callahan,2000).

The use of money to sale and buy votes does not even stop at election time. It is a common practice in Nigeria as it is in many other countries. For numerous private interest groups and political action committees seek policy goals and legislations to serve their narrow private needs continue to use all the means at their disposal including money, to solidify or expand their influence on the elected officials (Bratton, 2008 & Wright:

1985). It is observed that the relative ease with which the elected officials show their gratitude by endorsing the legislative and policy proposals of campaign contributors seems to support the hypothesis that there is a correlation between special donations to political parties and candidates and legislative votes. Consequently, according to Vanberg (2008) “money has, in fact, been made to become the mothers’ milk of politics, which the political gladiators must drink to remain in business”.

The Concept of National Development

Development is associated with modernization, material advancement, industrialization scientific and technological progress, the emergence of nuclear energy, electronic and biological revolution, new knowledge about man and the universe. It means urbanization, socio-cultural transformation, mass literacy, vertical and horizontal mobility, employment opportunities and the emergence of specialized and independent occupational roles (Umuru, 2002).

A nation is a large community of people sharing common language, common culture, common history and having a common constitution and government. Nigeria is a nation and the national share common characteristics of a nation such as binding principles and policies. The ultimate aim of national development must be to bring about sustained improvement in the wellbeing of the individual and bestow benefits to all self-reliance and mobilization of domestic resources, the transformation of the structure of rural production, the development of small-scale industries and the acquisition of technological and scientific skills. These objectives are stale, but well-conceived, planned and directed policies and programmes are required for their realization (Umaru, 2002). This means that developments are about self-reliance in every aspect of national life.

As soon as the individual are made to acquire specialized skills that will enable them to help develop the society, then the society becomes developed. This accounts for the difference between the developed countries and the underdeveloped nations. According to Alabi (2002) the major factor responsible for the wide gap in the level of development between the so called developed and the developing nations is the level of development of pure and applied science in these nations.

Theoretical framework

Structural functional theory

The structural functional approach provides a useful framework for categorizing and comparing data. It was not very useful for analyzing or predicting change; the issue of why, how, when, and in what direction, political development occurs. This issue of development, or change, is, of course, crucial for the Third World. Structural functionalism is a tradition of social analysis that sees society as a mosaic of functions and structures that perform them. For example, in order to survive, a society needs to educate its children, produce goods, govern its affairs and provide security for its members. These are functions and they necessitate a number of structures such as schools, industries, parliaments, courts, armed forces, etc to perform their roles. Understandably, when these structures perform their roles or functions properly, there is order in society and in fact, society inherently moves in the direction of order and stability. Consequently, from a structural-functionalist perspective, peace is achieved where existing social structures perform their functions adequately, supported by the requisite culture, norms and values.

In broadening the definition of peace, Alabi (2008) had earlier outlined two dimensions of peace. The first is negative peace, that is the absence of direct violence, war and fear of the individual, nation, region and indeed at the international levels; the second dimension is positive peace that is the absence of unjust structures, unequal relationships, justice and inner peace of the individual. In sum, we can conceive peace to be the absence of fear, conflict, anxiety, exclusion, deprivation or suffering and violence. It is primarily concerned with creating and maintaining a just order in society.

Vanberg (2008) Peace and indeed peace theory is intimately connected not only with conflict theory, but equally with development theory. Therefore, a peace research must be one that looks into the conditions past, present and future for the realization of peace which is intricately connected with conflict research and indeed development research. Violent conflicts, whether social, political or environmental have seriously contributed to the crisis situation in terms of loss of human and material capital. This theory has however found it suit on this paper as the structure of government has fail in it responsible of maintaining peace. (Army, Police and other security).

WHY MONEY POLITICS, VOTE SELLING AND BUYING IN NIGERIAN POLITICS?

So many reasons can be adduced as being responsible for the incidence of money politics and Vote selling and buying in Nigeria. Some of these factors include ignorance, on the part of the electorate, apathy, and poverty as well as, deceit by the politicians. There is also attitudinal problem on the part of the people involved in both buying and selling. Our attitude towards politics is not right, because most politicians view it as a call to investment from which huge profit is expected and not as call to serve humanity. They electorates on

their part see politics especially during election, as an opportunity to sell their votes to represent their own share of the national cake since they do not have access to where the national cake is being shared. Davies, in a recent perspective work had identified seven predisposing factors which captured almost completely the reason for the very high incidence of money politics and vote selling and buying in Nigeria. The factors as identified by Davies (2006) are reproduced below as follows:

- a. The inability of many political parties and the contestants to put in place comprehensive and comprehensible manifestoes for scrutiny by the voters. Instead of clear-cut manifestoes that would enable the electorate to make a rational political choice, meaningless slogans, demagogic and rabbleroxing speeches are made. Such speeches either overestimate or underestimate the political perception of the voters, but are rarely educative and convincing. Many voters seem to be unimpressed by all the tricks the Parties and the candidates employ, hence the need to bribe them for their votes.
- b. Political cynicism on the part of the voters who believe that political office holder is incurably corrupt, self-seeking and incompetent, that politics is a dirty and dishonorable enterprise, that the whole political process is a fraud and a betrayal of the public trust. This cynical view of politics is further accentuated by unfulfilled promises made by winners of past elections. Thus, asking for a pay-off, another way by which the people receive their own share of the national cake. On the other hand, the candidates who gave money to voters probably believe that they are investing against electoral failure.
- c. Focusing on personalities rather than on issues. By the mode of their campaign, most candidates draw the attention of the electorate away from the political parties to themselves. The consequence of this is that the political parties and their message become less important to the electorate. The candidates then take the centre stage and would therefore need to spend more money than their parties could afford in order to mobilize support for themselves.
- d. The peoples' perception greatly reinforced by obscene display of opulence by public office holders and ostentatious living of many politicians that every elected or appointed public officer is amassing wealth from the public treasury. This seems to have strengthened the resolve of many voters to sell their votes to the highest bidder.
- e. The penchant of politicians to strive to win elections, even at the party primary level, at all cost, makes desperate contestants to engage in all sort of malpractices including offering financial and material inducements to voters. Working on the poverty of the people, Nigerian politicians have been known to distribute food stuff and other consumable materials to voters shortly before the elections and sometime on Election Day, contrary to the provision of the extant electoral law that prohibits such practice. Instances abound too, when candidates threw some money into the air during campaign rallies, making people to scramble for it and getting injured in the process.
- f. The noticeable weakness in a party whip, characteristics of party politics in presidential system, when elected members exercise considerable degree of freedom when voting on legislative proposals. Such freedom makes the legislators to be more susceptible to receive gratifications from the private interest groups. The interest groups employ what Shank calls legalized bribery. They make large donations to some spurious private or community programmes in which the target legislators are interested, and give expensive gifts to the legislators or sponsor their overseas travel etc. all in the name of public relations to secure the votes of the legislators in the legislature.
- g. The absence of any legislation that puts any ceiling on financial contributions to political parties and candidates by groups of individuals (Davies, 2006).

VOTE SELLING AND BUYING IN NIGERIA: A THREAT TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Development suffers as a result of this menace of vote selling and buying. The money that would have gone on development is been use to compensate political god father. That vote selling and buying and violence affect relatively few people and rarely work well does not mean that these malpractices are without consequence. As others have noted, the intrusion of money and violence into election campaigns damages the quality of democracy (Schedler 2002, Schaffer 2007). These transgressions undermine democratic norms of political liberty (by depriving voters of free choice) and political equality (by benefiting the rich at the expense of the poor). They diminish the legitimacy of electoral outcomes by giving "losers," usually opposition parties, reason to think that the vote was fraudulent. Even without other methods of manipulation such as ballot stuffing, ballot stealing and tampering with vote tallies Nigeria's disastrous July 2018 Ekiti gubernatorial elections suffered precisely this fate.

Negative consequences may be lasting because defective election campaigns set the stage for governance by corruption. As a defeated gubernatorial candidate said in Nigeria: "anyone who is willing to steal a ballot box will steal public money." Vote buying and violence enable the elevation into elected office of cronies, criminals and strong-arm "godfathers" who are singularly unfit for public service. Low caliber leaders cannot offer political representation to the marginalized majorities whose voices are seldom heard in Nigerian politics. Instead, policy debate remains distorted: the views of the poor are muffled and the preferences of the rich are

amplified on key issues, such as the desired balance between taxation and services (Hicken & Simmons, 2008 and Stokes, 2007:91). All told, irregular elections reduce the institutionalization of political accountability.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined the concepts of vote selling and buying and their negative impacts on National development. It is revealed from the analysis that good governance can thrive only when based on the tenets and practice of democracy, which is the best-known form of government for now. The importance of money to run elections in terms of campaign, printing of party manifestoes, emblems and other services is well recognized, but the excessive use of money with the objective of purchasing votes is counterproductive to national development. This is because once excessive use of money is employed to influence the outcome of elections; the election becomes synonymous with the gentle art of 'getting votes from the poor and campaign funds from the rich by promising to protect one from the other. This paper revealed that vote selling and buying politics has a great setback on National development. It is critically necessary to conclude that all legislative processes be implemented in time to enable stakeholders appreciate the operating laws for the exercise be made for national development.

WAY FORWARD

Based on the findings in the paper, the following way forwards are made:

1. Electoral and other institutional reforms should be effective.
2. Anti-corruption agencies need to collaborate with banks and other financial institutions to monitor the movement of cash during elections
3. Also essential is a culture of democratic citizenship that begins with a citizenry that is ready to insist on credible and transparent elections.
4. Democratically elected leaders should ensure development, and improve the conditions of the ordinary people.
5. Voters should have moral objections to vote buying.
6. Thus, there is less need for voter education than for a system of incentives and capabilities that will allow ordinary people to resist these misguided efforts to appropriate their votes
7. The Government should establish a National Commission on Electoral Offences with the responsibility of investigating and charging electoral offenders to court.
8. Enforcement of the existing electoral regulations on party finances including campaign programmes should be implemented.
9. Electoral should resist any attempt by politician to induce them of money bag at polling station.

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