

# **Vote Buying and Selling in Nigeria: A Socio-Cultural and Economic Perspectives**

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**Abstract:** This paper posits that vote-buyer and selling is an aberration to Afrocentric means of ascending to legitimate position of leadership. The paper argues that the phenomenon of vote buying and selling completely violates the understanding of free and fair elections that is the soul of democracy. While marshalling arguments to substantiate the aforementioned submissions, this paper has demonstrated that the social contract theory indeed had set the stage for the change in leadership and governance processes. The social contract theory moved leadership from the brutal mentality of survival of the fittest to individuals handing over their rights to be governed to an individual who administer justice and provide leadership for the good of all. This process evolved to what we have today as democracy, where elections are its oxygen. It therefore means that whatever affects elections poses a danger to democracy owing to the seamless twin relationship that exist between elections and democracy. Elections in Nigeria have not added the needed value to democracy in manner in which it is required of it due to a number of factors. One of the most challenging of the factors is vote buying and selling that is almost becoming a defining feature of democracy in Nigeria. Using substantial primary sources as well as secondary sources, this paper provides actionable and practicable ways of tackling this hydra-headed monster that has brought much harm than good political space in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Vote selling, vote buying, elections, inducement, national development

## **INTRODUCTION**

Free, fair and credible elections are the soul of democracy. Stressing this point, Nwakwo, et al, (2017) are of the view that elections free from malpractice are the springboard of democracy. According to Ojo (2008), this is because elections serve as the conduit for peaceful change of government that grant political legitimacy to the government. In Nigeria, as in most parts of Africa, elections are worrisomely characterized by vote buying and violence; aimed at winning elections at all cost. This is in contrast to the ideal situation where political candidates seeking to occupy political offices canvass electoral support by reasoned arguments that show practical and actionable ways of improving governance and enhancing human development via pragmatic programmes and policies.

Premium Times (2018) warns on the grave dangers associated with vote buying. According to it, elections for sale where the highest bidder carries the day are akin to a death knell on our democracy. What we have presently is democracy for sale – a democracy that perpetuates ignorance, poverty, violence and underdevelopment. This ugly trend is entrenching the practice of corrupting the system to earn illicit money in order to buy votes from an impoverished and psychologically-damaged populace. This leads to politicians offering bad governance, gaining illicit wealth in the process and repeating the cycle. However, this cannot be allowed to continue if Nigeria is to benefit from the multi-faceted gains that democracy holds.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF VOTE BUYING AND SELLING**

Vote buying and selling means different things to different people. For (Owen, 2013) vote-buying is a process whereby individuals or political parties pay cash to voters to purchase their votes. On the other hand, vote-selling is a process whereby voters receive cash from vote-buyers or intermediaries in exchange

for their votes (Vincent & Wantchekon, 2008). Schaffer (2002) observes that a vote is literally “bought” or “sold” depending on whether one adopts the perspective of the candidate or the voter. The act of vote buying by this view is a contract, or perhaps an auction in which the voter sells his or her vote to the highest bidder.

It is important to mention that vote buying carries different notions in different countries depending on the country’s historical, cultural, political aspects and its election models (Schaffer, 2007). As a matter of fact Rigger (2002) and Wang and Kurzman (2007) are right on point by insisting that it is difficult to precisely measure vote buying due to the illegal nature of this practice. It is important to note that keen observers such as Schaffer and Schedler (2005) have established that vote buying in its literal sense, is a simple economic exchange; where candidates “buy” and citizens “sell” votes, as they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets. 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 (Frank D. et al, 2018). One of the most cited definitions of vote buying is from Etzioni-Halevy (1989, p. 287) who define vote buying as “the exchange of private material benefits for political support.” The definition stresses on gaining private material benefits by voters in return for their political support. The ultimate aim of vote buying is to influence the outcome of elections. To this end, Bosco (1994, P. 41) should be disputed because of his view that “vote buying does not necessarily affect the outcome of election”. A further rejection of his view is predicated on what Finan and Schechtler (2012) said. According to them vote-buying has the noticeable potentiality to undermine the desired effects of democratic constitutional arrangements. Still on why of Bosco’s position should be suspect is that if the argument that vote buying is significantly associated with corruption (Chu and Diamond, 1999; Vicente, 2010) is anything to go by, then, it becomes additional evidence that puts Bosco’s view as an erroneous opinion. The outright condemnation of Bosco comes from Mares and Young (2016) who maintain that “private inducements infringe on the rights of individuals and have substantial negative effects on the ability of electorates to hold elected politicians accountable to citizens.” It is important to note that the fundamental purpose of vote buying is to “offer rewards in exchange for votes, with the ultimate goal of gaining office” (Wu and Huang, 2004, p. 757). Vote buying represents the exchange of money, gifts, goods or services for a vote. The vote brokers propose money, goods, or services to the voters in return for their vote . Dekel et al, (2004) observe that while we generally think of the trade of goods as being welfare improving, this view is not always held with respect to the buying and selling of votes. In some forms, vote buying is considered perfectly legal, while in others it is considered illegal, immoral and undesirable.

It needs to be pointed out that vote buying provokes the feeling of obligation in the context of reciprocity. Finan and Schechtler (2012) have identified two critical features of vote buying. First, it is not an official policy to be judged at the polls, but rather a targeted attempt to weaken electoral discipline. Thus, vote-buying could potentially undermine the desired effects of democratic constitutional arrangements. Second, the individual transfers involved in vote-buying are relatively small, and are delivered personally. While the first feature underscores the importance of understanding the mechanisms that make vote-buying possible, the second feature suggests that factors governing interpersonal relationships may play a critical role. Scholars have acknowledged the importance of reciprocity for supporting vote-buying. To further buttress this point, Schaffer (2007, p. 193), reveals that “embedding vote-buying within ritual gift exchange helps engender feelings of obligation among recipients.” In a related development, Hicken (2007, p. 157) states, “in an attempt to change the cultural norms that support vote-buying in Thailand, specifically the norm of reciprocity, a senior Buddhist monk declared that it was not immoral to take money from one candidate and vote for another”. In their quest for vote buying, politicians rely on an individual's reciprocity to effectively buy votes, then the politician has an incentive to target the most reciprocal voters. Little wonder, the poor and the vulnerable are the most targeted when it comes to vote buying. Another group that are easily targeted are those whose preferences are known. It is on the basis of this that vote-buying is widely characterized as a phenomenon in which party workers or brokers target specific individuals whose preferences are known to them ex ante (Finan and Schechter, 2012; Nichter,

2008; Stokes, 2005). The matrix of vote selling and buying is in two folds. First, Robinson and Verdier (2003) posit that most standard models of elections would suggest that vote-buying should not exist. Explaining further, Finan and Schechtler (2012) substantiate that with secret balloting, votes are unobservable and a politician's promises are unenforceable. With this double commitment problem, there is no formal way to contract for votes in an election. However, a remedy to this challenge, politicians target more reciprocal individuals, and this helps them overcome the commitment issues associated with anonymous voting.

A second dynamics associated with vote buying and selling is that politicians actually know which party voters prefer and are simply paying them to turn out to vote. Politicians will have an incentive to target more reciprocal individuals even in a model of turnout-buying. This is because, without reciprocity, a politician will have to pay a voter the cash-equivalent of his disutility from voting to convince him to turn out. Reciprocal people can be paid less than their disutility from voting, since the receipt of money will engender in them a desire to reciprocate. In principle, one could test the turnout-buying model (Finan and Schechtler (2012)). There are two noticeable types of reciprocity that are common in vote selling and buying. These are intrinsic and instrumental reciprocity. Intrinsic reciprocity is when a kind act by one individual affects the preferences of another to elicit kindness in response while instrumental reciprocity is the strategy by which selfish individuals sacrifice their short term gains in order to increase their future payoffs.

Table of Actors involved directly or indirectly in vote selling and buying in Nigeria

Typology of actor	Type of inducement		Remarks
	Positive	Negative	
<b>Partisan brokers</b>	Money, goods, favour	Violence	Partisan brokers are usually persons who act as intermediaries between the person seeking political office and the voter. Their 'skills' are needed because they have the capability to map up the electoral vulnerabilities of the prospective vote seller and they know the kind of approach they will use in order to have him sell his/her vote. Depending on the situation, their approach ranges from non-violent to violent actions. They are assured that in event of any altercation with the state authority, their principal can get them off the hook.
<b>State employee</b>	Administrative favours	Administrative witch hunt and victimization	It is a sad commentary on Nigeria's history of democracy to say that

			<p>top echelon of the civil service and career used to arm-twist the voting public in favour of political party so-appoints them. This is done in the face brutal violation of the norm that restricts such individuals from being partisan. However, when collude with parties and win elections, they are guaranteed of undue administrative favours. On the other hand, if they fail to arm-twist the voter to favour the party in power, then they can be assured of witch hunt and victimization. Often than not, such individuals are seen in their native towns/villages where it will be easier for them to play on ethnic and/or religious sensitivity of their kith and kin to influence votes for the party that so-appoints them.</p>
<p><b>Traditional and religious leaders</b></p>	<p>Political patronage in terms of juicy contracts, as well as appointments as chairman of ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of government.</p>	<p>Negligence and outright denial of rights and privileges</p>	<p>Traditional and religious leaders ought to be non-partisan considering their strategic positions to the cohesion and unity of their communities. However, it is gathered that some traditional rulers are merchants of vote buying and have turned their revered palaces to be the market place where naira and kobo is usually exchanged for votes. Same was said of some religious leaders, who have championed to course of a political party to point of not only canvassing votes</p>

			for the party,(which is tolerable) but to the point of engaging in vote buying for the party (which is unacceptable).
<b>Civil society</b>	Social benefits in terms of grants and other sundry benefits	Social exclusion, clampdown on legitimate activities	There was a general consensus that the easiest way to money and influence in Nigeria is to win an election. Aware of this, therefore, some politicians have evolved every possible means of ensuring electoral victory. One of such means is establishing civil society groups that can do their bidding, including covert vote buying. It was observed that at the threshold of any election, the number of civil society groups surge and diminish as soon as elections are over. The reason is that <i>ab initio</i> their emergence was connected to electoral victory of their owners/patrons.
<b>Gangs and militias</b>	Money	Violence	There are some politicians who use gangs and militia to buy votes. The best time of operation is on election day. Once their wish is not honoured by the voters, they resort to violence to ensure that if their sponsor cannot have his/her way, then no else will. In some instances, such groups always on collision course with security agencies. It important to add that such groups often have their way in places with low or absent presence of security agencies.

Source: Focal Group Discussions in Fori, Gada Biyu and Tunga-Maje.

There are various means of buying and selling votes in Nigeria. For instance, Focal Group Discussion (2019) in Fori, Jema'a Local Government Area of Kaduna state and Gada-Biyu in Kwalli Area of Council of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) reveals arm twisting of INEC staff to buy unclaimed PVCs by political actors and their brokers in the business of buying Permanent Voter's Card (PVC). Furthermore, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) lamented on the manifold ways of buying and selling votes as captured by Daily Sun, (2019, p. 15). According to INEC chairman "a new method of vote buying is being devised. We received credible information that some partisan actors are now going round buying up PVCs from voters or financially inducing them to collect their PINs on their PVCs. In some instances, telephone numbers and details of bank account are being collected." In addition Sunday and Chibuzo (2019, p. 5) quote the INEC chairman as saying "the attention of the commission has been drawn to a new plan by political actors to use food vendors around polling units with large voter populations as collection points for cash-for -votes as well as other forms of material inducement to voters on election day."

Focal Group Discussion (2019) in Tunga-Maje in the FCT reveals that vote buying is on the increase, judging from the experience of the 1999 elections and other proceeding elections in Nigeria. Field work also in Kasuwan Magani of Kaduna state and Bakin Kogi of Nasarawa state suggest strongly that vote buying and selling is more prevalent and common among people of low income and politically unexposed. As to why politicians will indulge in vote buying, overwhelming consensus opinion during Focal Group Discussions (2019) indicate that the inability of the political class to deliver on their mandate is what makes them to be desperate clinch unto power and thus aggressive in their quest for vote buying. This logically explains why vote buying is more common with incumbents seeking re-election as explained by politician in Sabon-Wuse, the headquarters of Tafa local government area, Niger state. In addition, it is assumed that the incumbent is likely to have more resources to prosecute the agenda of vote buying.

Vote Buying, Selling and the Integrity of the Elections in Nigeria: Vote buying and selling is antithetical to democracy. Vote-buying is intrinsically undemocratic, with adverse effect on the integrity of elections. Vote-buying and other forms of electoral malpractices affect democratic institutions adversely and erode trust in democracies (Chang & Chu, 2006). The reason is that the phenomenon of vote buying and selling corrupts the electoral process. Devadoss and Luckstead (2016) explain further that vote-buyers engage in corrupt practices by obtaining funds at the start of the election cycle to maximize vote-buying during elections. In particular, voters expect that politicians are willing to buy their votes, and acquiesce because of the perception that selling their votes provides them with an opportunity to partake in the sharing of the "national cake" (Onapajo et al., 2015).

Vicente (2014) states that vote-buying hinders policy accountability because of the manner policy makers were elected. Buttressing this point, Leight et al. (2015) observes that vote-buying may hinder electoral accountability by the failure of voters to hold incumbent politicians accountable by trading their votes for money during elections. Vote-buying corrodes accountability that should derive from democratic elections as pointed out by (Jensen and Justesen, 2014).

The prevalence of vote-buying in developing democracies has adverse effects on governance and public service delivery as echoed by (Bustikova & Corduneanu-Huci, 2011). It is in this connection that Collier and Vicente (2012) describe vote-buying and other illegitimate electoral strategies in developing democracies as a "new degenerate form of democracy" (p. 118). Base on the foregoing, it can be argued that vote buying hampers the advancement of democratization. No wonder, Lippert-Rasmussen (2011) warns that vote buying "distort democratic deliberation" (p. 144). It is worrisome that vote-buying as an electoral strategy leads to governmental and economic inefficiencies as argued by (Jensen and Justesen, 2014). This is why Hanusch & Keefer (2013) are insistent that vote-buying decreases public welfare and compromises the electoral gain.

Hanusch & Keefer (2013) note that politicians engage in more vote-buying in areas where their credibility is low or completely compromised. This provides the justification why Hanusch et al. (2016) maintain that vote-buying is more prevalent in democracies where politicians apparently had failed to make credible commitments and where political and democratic accountability is not getting higher. Aside from the link between vote-buying and credibility, vote-buying is equally connected to electoral credibility in that its use as an electoral strategy by political parties in Nigeria impacts negatively on electoral credibility as mentioned by (Alfa & Marangos (2016). It therefore implies that democracies with a high electoral integrity, strengthened democratic institutions and better infrastructural development (Norris, Frank & Coma, 2014) are less likely to be burdened with vote buying and selling.

At this juncture, it is important to re-echo the irony of vote buying as mentioned by Carreras & İrepoğlu (2013). According to them another paradox regarding vote-buying is that the perception of unfairness in elections by voters leads to a decrease in participation whereas the distribution of material gifts as an electoral strategy such as vote-buying correspondingly brings about an increase in electoral participation. Hicken et al. (2014) caution that vote-buying becomes more intense when elections are highly competitive to the extent that vote-sellers go into further rounds of vote-buying if the opposition offered to buy votes for an amount that was lower than they had previously offered the voters. There are reports across many states of the federation that the 2019 general election in Nigeria suffered this ugly development.

Poverty as Reason for Vote Selling and Buying in Rural Areas: From available literature and data collected during field work, poverty is identified as one of the reasons for selling votes. This poses a serious challenge because, just as many other sources attest, Ighakpe (2019) says that “Nigeria is currently ranked the country with the highest number of extremely poor people.” Kazeem (2018) amplifies that “86.9 million Nigerians now living in extreme poverty, the figure represents nearly 50% of its estimated 180 million populations.” Therefore, it is feared that as Nigeria faces a major population boom, there is every likelihood that the country will be world’s third largest nation by 2050. The population boom will certainly worsen the already existing endemic poverty in the country.

Vote selling is more common among low-income voters. The reason why the low-income voters are targeted and lured to sell their votes is because of the desire to meet immediate needs and the hope to be in longstanding relationship with political patrons. Even among the poor, there appears to be targeting of those with relatively greater needs (at least for money and food). It is therefore logical to submit that if the poor are most likely to be hoodwinked into vote selling, then the implication is that the poorer the citizens are, the higher is the likelihood for them to engage or to be engaged in vote selling.

As a matter of fact, vote-selling can be of greater enthusiasm and appeal to the poor voter than the lure of public goods, as the poor are often times forgotten about in the distribution of public goods. Desposato (2007, p. 104) says “poor voters, on average, should have higher utility for immediate private goods than for delayed public goods.” Additionally, unless a voter has an alternative source of income and simply did not need the incentive, it is unlikely that poor voters will therefore be able to resist vote-buying incentives as noted by (Magaloni et al, 2007).

Schaffer (2002) reveals that there three ways in which vote-buyers might hope to get recipients to vote, or not vote, for a particular candidate. First, vote-buyers might hope to produce instrumental compliance. If successful, recipients change, or do not change, their electoral behaviour in exchange for tangible rewards. (We include “do not change” to acknowledge that sometimes offers are made to forestall voters from changing their minds). Second, buyer-buyers may hope to generate normative compliance. If successful, recipients change, or do not change, their electoral behaviour because the offer convinces them of the goodness or worthiness of the candidate, or because they somehow feel normatively obligated. Third, vote-buyers may hope to generate coercive compliance by bullying recipients into changing, or not

changing, their electoral behaviour. If successful, recipients fear retribution if they decline the offer, and if they do not vote as directed after offer has been accepted.

## **CONSEQUENCE OF VOTE SELLING AND BUYING ON WELL-BEING AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Lessons from Traditional Society: The socio-cultural milieu of the people is principally responsible for their civilization and corpus of epistemology. However, the philosophy of vote selling and buying seems not to have place in the practice of selecting leaders in African Indigenous Societies (AIS). The indigenous societies were in themselves democratic in the context of their time and space. Thus, leadership must emerge from a process that conferred legitimacy, unlike what vote selling and buying does.

As a matter of fact, leaders were selected or elected from generally accepted processes that never betrayed legitimacy and such leaders must not lobby but to accept the verdict of the people. For instance, in the Bafut kingdom of Bamenda, Cameroon, Aletum (2001, p.209) says that “when the new ruler has been installed, he is presented to the Bafut population for ‘stoning.” The ceremonial stoning may consist of tiny, harmless pebbles in the case of an approved and respected new leader, or of large, injurious rocks hurled so as to maim, chase off or kill the undesired incumbent. In either case it reminds the new ruler what could happen if his rule become illegitimate. Analysing the foregoing in the context of African cosmological worldview, Tangwa (1998, p. 2) avers that traditional African leadership and authority systems might be understood somewhat paradoxically as the “harmonious marriage between autocratic dictatorship and popular democracy.” He further explains that specific formal practices (which vary between cultures) positioned the citizenry is to authorize, critique and sanction the ascension of their ruler, his/her continued reign and the selection and ascension of his/her successor. Aletum (2001) says that “the exercise of democracy in traditional institutions... [through] checks and balances” was imposed by citizenry participation in the transition and maintenance of leadership; thus there was no room for lobbying in the manner of vote selling and buying as we have today. Robert & Ritzenthaler (1964, P.73) explains that “the stoning indicates that this is the last chance the people have to treat as mortal the man they are elevating to the chieftainship. From this time onward he becomes a king and a god.” The choice of a leader was politically charged and if contestation arose, many traditional African cultures employed ritual checks and balances for resolving conflicts, especially those relating to succession issues. Williams (2002) posits that noble status in pre-colonial African society often depended upon both, the fact of birth and some form of community approval. To use a familiar philosophical turn of phrase, both are necessary and neither is sufficient in isolation. Other ritual acts and elements such as ceremonial objects with an established protocol for usage (for example, stools, palaces, caps, cups, etc.) could not be wielded at the King’s whim. The ritual objects were psychologically invested with ancestral power thus inhibiting their abuse. Aletum (2001, p. 206) observes that “[If the transfer of power in the above societies did not follow the customs and traditions dictated by the ancestors, the usurper after sitting on the ancestral stool suffered a serious mishap such as sterility, madness or even death. This also was true for a rightful chief going against the decision taken by the people while at the same time drinking from the ancestral cup to which he swore allegiance to the people.” From the foregoing one, therefore, wonders why Africans who are coming from this socio-cultural patrimony that was a norm will suddenly resort to vote buying and selling in blind pursuit for position of authority. This betrays the age-long cherished value of accepting the uninfluenced and undiluted verdict of the people when it comes to ascending leadership position. The sad aspect of it is that once leaders emerged from what is largely their scheming rather than the consent of the people, then be assured that the wellbeing and development of their people will never be their priority as witnessed in Nigeria. Their commitment will be the recoup the funds expended on buying votes and to make a substantial gain in order to prepare for the next election cycle. This clearly shows why speedy-socio-economic development of Nigeria is never on the top agenda of political leaders beyond lip service. Therefore, there is need to encourage now more than ever pragmatic competition; where political



candidates will vie for votes on the basis of pragmatic appeal rather on clientelistic competition; which is characterized by offering of goods and money for votes.

## CONCLUSION

The reason why laws are made is to correct behaviours that are detrimental to the good of the society. But beyond making the laws is implementation; in a manner that every offender, no matter highly placed is punished. Nigeria needs to have stringent laws against vote buying and selling. The law must be implanted aggressively in order to curb this endemic impunity that is robbing the nation from benefiting free, fair and credible elections where leaders with the prerequisite knowledge to drive growth and development will emerge. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be repositioned to punish those engage in vote buying and selling, including the option of banning such individuals from participating in politics for a period not less than ten years. This deterrent will dissuade politicians from vote buying and refocus them on issues of development that will be part of their messaging as they canvass for votes.

Institutional empowerment of the poor should be considered as critical means of insulating them from cheap manipulation of the politicians. In addition, voter education that hinges on the dangers associated with vote buying and selling should be considered by all stakeholders as an imperative that will improve the electoral process. This must be done in order to avoid the error of commercializing elections in the manner that the highest bidder takes the day. This is not a tenant of democracy and must not encourage. Furthermore, it violates the Afrocentric heritage of choosing leaders. It is on the basis of this that paper opines that the disgraceful concept of stomach infrastructure, which is used as bait for vote buying, should be expunged from Nigeria's political lexicon. Instead, it should be replaced with physical infrastructure as it obtains in other climes that are witnessing growth and development.

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