

VOTE BUYING AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: *This study investigated the opinions of Nigerians on vote buying and return on investment in Nigeria. The study was conducted using virtual snow ball sampling / chain referral (non-probability sampling). A total of 416 respondents participated in the study in which, an online link was shared through various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and email. The cross-sectional and descriptive study was explained with the social exchange theory. The study concluded that vote buying is a common phenomenon in the elections conducted in Nigeria. It also concluded that vote buying can influence the decision of voters on whom to vote for (84.4%) and can work in favour of those who employ the act (85.1%). In order to curb the problem of vote buying in Nigeria, it was opined that those who are found culpable should be disqualified from the electoral process (68.3%), outrightly banned from taking part in any election again in Nigeria (49.8%) and made to pay monetary fine (22.8%). It was also opined that those who sell of their votes to politicians should be imprisoned (75.2%), made to pay monetary fine (33.4%) and not be dealt with (17.8%) in that order.*

Keywords: *Vote Buying; Electoral Process; Outright ban; Disqualification; Imprisoned.*

1. Introduction

Vote buying is the payment of cash or gifts in exchange for voting (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007). It is an economic transaction that is executed between those who sell their freedom and those who buy them in the hope of regaining their investments when they get into power. Vote buying is entirely an act of election malpractice connected with vested interest since an election can be said to be free and fair when it is devoid of ballot snatching, vote buying, violence, rigging, figure alteration, bribing of electoral officers, intimidation of opponents through the use of security agents and multiple voting.

Vote buying is seldom an isolated act, and it spreads corruption throughout the whole political system. When a political candidate decides to buy the support of the people rather than contest fairly for their votes, there are possibilities that such candidate will show a disregard for democratic rules and a disposition to adopt illegal means becomes inevitable. Vote buying encourages poor governance and weakens citizens' capacity to hold their elected officials accountable for their actions. In addition, vote buying discourages aspiring politicians from running for office since it suggests that money instead of ideas or experience is what wins an election hence

preventing qualified candidates from running for political positions while entrenching corrupt politicians in their position.

Vote buying has been observed in several elections in Nigeria where voters were openly induced with money and other household materials to sell their votes (Onuoha and Ojo, 2018). There are therefore indications that politicians who buy votes or engage in any corrupt practice during election are most likely to have a perspective of embezzling or stealing public funds when eventually elected. This is because, more often than not, vote buying is considered as a political investment with expectations for return on investment when politicians eventually assume office. When voters sell their votes, it implies that they are voting for the wrong candidates. This may likely affect governance by leading to poor governance and undermining of the electoral process (Business Day, 2018).

An attempt to induce voters, manipulate electoral process and the electorate especially during election preparation periods can therefore be described as an act of corrupt practice. This to an extent has a great influence on the decision-making capacity of the electorate who are crossed with the decision whether or not to vote based on the costs and benefits associated with being decisive in an election. Although Brattom (2008) has once argued that most ordinary people resist efforts of political elites to illegally influence voter behaviour but, some individuals especially society's poorest and most vulnerable members have little choice except to comply. Faced with irregular carrots or sticks during the course of an election campaign, their only other viable option is to feign compliance while refusing in practice. It is also obvious that the major reasons for election bribery is largely due to the gains expected after winning the election.

There are also indications that in places where vote buying is prevalent, political candidates are usually confronted with the predicament of wanting to mobilize most of their resources to buy the votes while assuming office with significant debts from election. Even though vote buying is prohibited in Nigeria as stated in article 130 of the Electoral Act 2010, it continues to be prevalent in several elections that has taken place in the country (Onuoha, 2018). This of course comes with the hope of a return on investment. It is against this background that this study investigates the influence of vote buying by political parties on voting decisions in Nigeria.

2. Theoretical Orientation. *Social Exchange Theory*

Social exchange theory is a psychological and sociological theory that explains social behaviours between two parties based on a cost-benefit analysis. Much of the works of social exchange theory is credited to George Homans in 1958 (Tiwari, 2020). The theory holds that people's behaviours are anchored on rational calculations that are designed to maximize their profit. It holds that rewards and costs drive relationship decisions hence, both parties take responsibility for one another and depend on each other. As individuals tries to maximise their wins, rewards received must be proportional to their costs and investments.

Although social exchange theory has been commonly likened to human interactions with the marketplace but, the theory can also be applicable to other social relationships (Cook and Rice, 2006).

The basic assumptions of social exchange theory include the following:

1. There are three or more persons who have the chance to make exchanges with one another. These people have the capacity to make decisions about whether to exchange, who to make exchange with, and under what conditions to make an exchange.

2. Social exchange triggers emotions that are positive to negative.

3. Emotions can be taken as reward or punishment for instance, feeling good has a positive value and feeling bad has a negative value.

4. People endeavor to circumvent negative emotions and to reproduce positive emotions in social exchange.

5. Individuals will attempt to understand the cause of feelings produced by social exchange. In that way, emotions become ascribed to the entity that caused them.

6. Individual's construe and exchange their feelings with regards to social relationships. Positive emotions formed by exchange will increase cohesion in these relationships, while negative emotions will lessen solidarity.

The social exchange theory can be applied to the current study in the sense that the relationship between political parties in Nigeria and the electorate can be likened to that of reward and cost. The relationship between these two parties can be said to be a rational calculation that are designed to maximize their profit hence the relationship between the two parties is driven by rewards and costs drive. As the political parties depend on the electorate to win the election by offering money and other tangible materials to induce them to vote for them, the electorate in return gets a value for their vote by accepting to sell their votes by accepting the offers. In another sense, it is also expected that the political holders would expect a return on their investments when they eventually assume the office by recouping what they have invested from the government coffers.

Social exchange theory has been criticised for reducing human interaction to a purely rational process that arises from economic theory (Miller, 2005).

3. Methodology

The study evaluates the opinion of Nigerians across several demographics about the influence of vote buying on voting decision. The study was conducted using virtual snow ball sampling / chain referral (non-probability sampling). A total of 416 respondents participated in the study. An online link was shared through various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and email by appealing to Nigerians to share their opinion and proffer solutions to the problem of vote buying in Nigeria. Each respondent was also encouraged to share the survey link to other Nigerians in their social media contacts. Primary data received from the field was presented in frequencies and simple percentages.

4. Results

Table 1 below represents the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in the study. From the table it was noted that, (35.5%) of the respondents in the study fall under the age category of 18-24. This was followed by the age bracket of 25-34 years accounting for (19.2%) of the total respondents in the study. The least number of respondents were found in the age bracket of 65 years and above with (6.0%)

Table1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (in years)		
18-24	143	34.5
25-34	80	19.2
35-44	69	16.5
45-54	60	14.4
55-64	39	9.4
65 and above	25	6.0
Total	416	100.0
Gender		
Male	253	60.8
Female	163	39.2
Total	416	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	194	46.6
Single	222	53.4
Total	416	100.0
Educational Background		
Primary Education	21	5.0
Secondary Education	76	18.5
Tertiary Education	319	76.5
Total	416	100.0
Religion		
Christianity	224	53.8
Islam	192	46.2
Total	416	100.0

Source: Researcher's Survey 2019

On the gender characteristics of the respondents in the study, male was (60.8%) while female was (39.2%). With regards to the marital status of respondents, (46.6%) are married while (53.4%) are single. Furthermore, (5.0%) of the respondents in the study have primary education, (18.5%) had secondary school education while, (76.5%) had tertiary educational background. In addition to this, (53.8%) are Christians while (46.2%) of the respondents in the study belong to the Islam religion.

Table 2 below represents the perception of respondents on vote buying in Nigeria. The table shows that (89.7%) of the respondents in the study know that Nigerian politicians do buy votes. A total of (84.4%) of the respondents think that vote buying can influence the decision of voters on who to vote for. Also, (85.1%) of the respondents in the study admits that vote buying can work in favour of political parties. On the what punitive measures' respondents think should be given to politicians that buy votes from the electorate, (49.8%) were of the opinion that the political party should be outrightly banned while (22.8%) opined that they should be made to pay monetary fines while (68.3%) opined total disqualification from the electoral process. Incidentally, total of (5.8%) of the respondents in the study were of the opinion that nothing should be done to any politician for vote buying. Regards what should be done to people who sell their votes in Nigeria, total of (75.2%) of the

respondents in the study opined that those who sell their votes should be imprisoned while, (33.4%) of the respondents opined that they should pay monetary fine while, (17.8%) of the respondents opined that nothing should be done to them.

Table 2: Questions Relating to Vote Buying among Respondents

Questions	Frequency	Percentages
Is Vote buying common in Elections that hold in Nigeria?		
Yes	373	89.7
No	43	10.3
Total	416	100.0
Do you think that vote buying can influence voters' decisions on their choice of candidate?		
Yes	351	84.4
No	65	15.6
Total	416	100.0
Does vote buying work in favour of political parties in Nigeria?		
Yes	354	85.1
No	62	14.9
Total	416	100.0
What can be done to curb vote buying by political parties?		
Outright Banning of Political party found involved in vote buying	207	49.8
Payment of huge Monetary fine	95	22.8
Disqualification from the electoral Process	284	68.3
Nothing should be done	24	5.8
How can Nigerians be prevented from selling their votes?		
Anyone caught should be Imprisonment	313	75.2
Payment of Monetary Fine	139	33.4
Nothing should be done to them	74	17.8

Source: Researchers' Survey (2019)

4. Discussion

The study investigates the opinion of Nigerians on vote buying in Nigeria. Result from the study suggests that almost all the respondents are aware that vote buying is common in Nigeria elections. This finding corroborates the finding of a previous research conducted by Onuoha and Ojo (2018) on the practice and peril of vote buying in recent elections in Nigeria which suggests that vote buying is prevalent in Nigeria despite being the fact that it has been prohibited. Further result from the study also suggest that a whooping number of the respondents opined that vote buying can influence the decision of voters on whom to vote for. This is similar to the views of Olaito (2018) and Balogun (2019) that opined that several voters in Nigeria allow vote

buying to influence their decision on whom to vote for by seeing their voters' cards as a means to an end. On whether vote buying work in favour of political parties in Nigeria, about four fifth of the respondents in the study are of the opinion that vote buying works in favour of political parties in Nigeria. This agrees with the view of Olatunji (2018) which opined that the more money politicians offer to voters, the more votes they get.

As regards what could be done to curb politicians from engaging that engage in vote buying, almost half of the respondents suggested outright banning of any such political party found guilty while about one quarter suggested that anyone found guilty should pay fine and over three fifth of the respondents suggest disqualification from the electoral process. This result is similar to the view of Matenga (2016) who suggested criminalization of vote buying should be effectively implemented in Nigeria in order to curb vote buying in Nigeria. On what could be done to prevent Nigerians from selling their votes, more than three fifth of the respondents suggested that anyone caught should be imprisoned while almost two fifth of the respondents suggested payment of fine and less than one fifth suggested that nothing should be done to them. This however contradicts the views of Shittu (2016) and Ozekhome (2016), who opined political education and eradication of poverty respectively as measures that can be put in place to check Nigerians from selling their votes.

5. Conclusion

The study investigated the perception of Nigerians on vote buying in Nigeria. The study concluded that vote buying is a common phenomenon in the elections conducted in Nigeria. It also concluded that vote buying can influence the decision of voters on whom to vote for and that vote buying can also work in favour of those who employ the act. In order to curb vote buying in Nigeria, it was suggested that those who are found culpable should be disqualified from the electoral process, outrightly banned from the electoral process and made to pay fine in that order. It was also concluded that those who sell of their votes to politicians should be imprisoned, made to pay fine and also not be dealt with in that order.

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