

Innovations

From Election Rigging to Vote Buying: Evolving Decay of a Dysfunctional Electoral Process in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper addresses election rigging and its evolving decay in the Nigerian politics. In order to address the issue, clientelism was adopted as its theoretical framework while secondary sources of data were culled from textbooks, newspapers, journals, internet sources, etc. Besides, Afro barometer survey and resources from the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Carter Centre (CC) were used. Findings revealed that the nature of election rigging before the advent of the fourth republic was traditional and it included the snatching of ballot boxes, collation of fake results and introduction of violence to disrupt the electoral process. The evolving nature of election rigging is 'vote buying,' a tool for winning elections in Nigeria. It is a trend which evolved from erstwhile rigging techniques to a more methodical rigging technique. Furthermore, factors that accounted for the change from election rigging to vote buying are poverty, lack of party ideology, digitalization of electoral process and desperation of politicians to win election. It is recommended that government should strengthen the legal framework to curb vote buying in Nigeria.

Keyword: Election, Election Rigging, Republic, Vote Buying, Electoral Process

Introduction

Across the world, the transition into a democratic system of government in any clime is usually typified by conducting elections at regular intervals. Ensuring the freeness and fairness of elections plays significant role in consolidating democratic system. In other words, the quality of voting and the sanctity of votes are strong measures of democracy.

Of all the means of selecting or appointing rulers, election remains the most popular means of attaining power in a modern political system. The reason is that most countries of the world now practice democratic system of governance, thus making election an opportunity for citizens to choose their leaders at the legislative and executive arms of government.

As significant as election is, if it is incredible, the legitimacy of government is in question. Egwu (2013) affirms that most of the democratic processes since political independence have been without credibility and so have brought about grief in the past. He further states that after the return of civil rule in May 1999 electoral crisis still persist. His submission is that if this situation continues, the credibility of election would have serious implication on the legitimacy of the government. This is corroborated by Onapajo et. al (2015: 2) who stated that "Nigeria's electoral process has always been known for its chaotic nature, and at the heart of this quagmire is the preponderance of vote buying, a phenomenon which arguably reflects the nature of politics and election."

In the process of making formal decision about political office holders, election has been a significant stage which also serves as the cardinal foundation of a country's democratic process (Awopeju, 2021; Mattig, 2011). Extant studies have confirmed that credible election helps to institutionalize the process of democratic succession, serves as instrumental purposes of legitimization and mobilization of popular support for the government, and promotes political participation, competition and legitimacy, all of which are central to democracy and development (Joseph, 1999; Lindberg, 2004). Omotola's stance (2022) is that though not all electoral processes bring about democracy, it is also not possible to have democracy without election, meaning that election is germane to democracy. In view of this, it is pertinent to ensure that the electoral process fulfill certain required conditions so that sound participation, competition and legitimacy can be achieved. Any form of misconduct during elections will create chaos in the society. Therefore, when the outcome of election is not acceptable to the people, the trust the people have in government and its institutions will decline.

While studies conducted by Olaoye (2007), Awopeju (2011, 2012), Mojaji and Musa (2022), Hassan (2022), and Olugbile (2023) have assessed political participation vis-à-vis vote buying in elections, little attention has been given to the evolving decay of vote buying and the reasons for the evolvement. This is the gap this study intends to fill.

It is against this backdrop that this study examines the phenomenon of election, from election rigging to vote buying with a view to examining the evolving decay of a dysfunctional electoral process in Nigeria. In view of this, the study raises these

questions: What has been the nature of election rigging in the erstwhile republics? What is the evolving nature of rigging in the Nigerian state in the fourth republic? What factors are responsible for instigating the evolving nature of rigging in the fourth republic of Nigeria?

In order to address the raised questions, the study makes use of secondary sources of data. These include textbooks, journals, newspapers, internet sources, government publications, etc. The paper is divided into five main parts. Part one introduces the study, part two examines conceptual clarification, part three presents the Nigerian politics and election rigging, part four deals with the election rigging and vote buying while part five concludes and makes policy recommendations for the study.

Conceptual Clarification

Election

It refers to an art and science of casting votes in order to select preferred party or candidate in a competitive party politics or democratic contest (Oni, 2016). Similarly, Ujo(2000: 249) defines election as 'a process of choosing between alternatives through forms of generally acceptable procedures.'

Election Rigging

It is an act of adopting dishonest and illegal methods to obtain desired results during an electoral process.

Electoral Process

Electoral process encompasses the entirety of voter registration, candidate registration, electoral campaign, mass media accessibility, voting, vote counting, tabulation of provisional result, election dispute resolution and official announcement of result. However, it includes the rules guiding the conduct of elections and any conduct that threatens the electoral process (Elekwa 2008; Nnamani, 2014).

Vote Buying

It is the "exchange of private material benefits for public support or the use of money and other direct benefits to influence voters" (Bryant, 2005: 32). The direct material benefits may be cash (money), food items, contract, etc., to influence the electorates to vote in a particular way or for a specific candidate.

Theoretical Frame Work

The study is anchored in clientelism. Clientelism is a concept “at the crossroads of politics and administration, economy and society” (Roniger, 2004: 354). Clientelistic relations did not appear with the advent of modern states or their democratization since the end of the 19th century. However, during the process, the relationships have been transformed in two ways. One, they have acquired a specifically political dimension through their insertion within the institutions of each regime. Two, clientelistic relations have been increasingly denounced as obstacles to the efficiency of these institutions and the respect for democratic values.

As regards clientelism, professional politicians had no patrimony that could be converted into clientelistic resources. Instead, they sought electoral support through spreading the idea that voting and political affiliation should stem from the sharing of convictions, ideology, and the defense of collective interests. To these politicians, the self-driven exchanges that characterised notable clientelism contravened democratic principles and were thus eradicated in order to moralize public life (Briquet, n.d. www.britannica.com). The thrust of this theory is that clientelist practices focus on gaining public loyalty and political support with any form of inducements. According to Stokes, Dunning & Nazareno (2013), clientelism is the exchange of goods and services for political supports which often involves implicit or explicit quid-pro-quo.

The theory is germane to the present Nigerian politics because it explains the relationship between the Nigeria electoral process and vote buying. Election is now a required exchange of votes for money, exchange of materials and exchange of goods and services for support in an election. Therefore, selling and buying of votes involve clientelistic politics because politicians buy votes and electorates sell votes, thus making the highest bidder among the money bag to win in Nigeria.

Nigerian Politics and Election Rigging

Election rigging is as old as polity itself in Nigeria’s political context. The history of election rigging can be traced to the era of the first republic when the 1965 election in the country’s Western Region was alleged to be massively rigged, thus leading to “operation wettie” riot. It was this riot that pitted political groups against each other leading to the Nigeria’s first military coup in 1966 (Animasahun, 2022). The military regime was in operation for 13 years when another election was conducted in 1979 to usher in the second republic.

The second republic which started on 1st October, 1979 was also characterised by election rigging (Awopeju, 2011; Olaoye, 2007). At the expiration of the mandates for political office holders, elections were held in various wards and constituencies

in Nigeria in August 11, 1983. The 1983 election increased the tempo of election rigging. The rigging technique took another dimension because the electoral umpire connived with the ruling party, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to perpetrate the rigging (Kurfi, 1983). However, elections were massively rigged in some states where the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) had its strongholds (Olaoye, 2007). These states included Oyo, Ondo, Anambra, Cross River and Imo. Election rigging also accompanied the cases of election violence in some states to unimaginable level (Abe, 2008). This led to the disruption of election process and the integrity of the election was questioned, thus leading to legitimacy problem for Shagari-led civilian administration. This situation led to another coup in 1983 which brought the second republic to an end on December 31.

The third republic also witnessed the military junta, Ibrahim Babangida, postponing the democratic transition programme because of the desire to hold on to power. Because military cannot legitimize the polity due to its nature, he finally announced the transition programme in 1991. Due to this development, two political parties, Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) were established to contest for elections in the third republic by military administration. Elections into the states and federal houses of legislature in 1992 were held and presidential election took place in June 12, 1993. The conducts of elections in this era were far better than the previous regimes. It was during this republic that the public voting system or open ballot system (A4) was used to conduct election under the chairmanship of National Electoral Commission (NEC), Prof. Humphrey Nwosu. The option A4 brought sanity into the system and elections were credible and accepted to people because electorates were lined up, indicated the candidate of their choice, and electoral umpire counted. It was affirmed that the June 12, 1993 election was adjudged to be the freest, fairest and most credible election in the history of Nigeria (Awopeju, 2011; Hassan, 2022). On 14 of June, 1993, election results that were announced so far indicated that Chief M.K.O Abiola, the presidential candidate for SDP had won 14 states out of the states released and that from the thirty states (30) released by NEC, it had already indicated victory for the SDP (Oshun, 1999). However, the election was later annulled by the then military head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida.

The aftermath of annulling the election led to mass protest among Nigerians who thought that their mandate had been compromised by the Babangida-led military junta. The crises and political upheavals negatively affected Nigeria to the extent that the country has not recovered from the June 12 saga till date. "Thousands of lives were lost because of poor management of elections" (Jim-Nwoko, 2019: 12). Also, Babangida stepped aside for an Interim National Government (ING) headed by Ernest Shonekan. The ING was eventually overthrown by General Sani Abacha on

November 30, 1993 thus making him the military head of state. The development made Nigerians to suffer brutalization in the hands of the military until May 29, 1999 when civil rule returned.

The 1999 elections made it possible for the existing three political parties, Alliance for Democracy (AD), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), to win elections at the various state and federal levels while the PDP candidate, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, won the presidential election. One significant issue regarding the conduct of presidential election in 1999 was that it was arranged to assuage the ill-feelings generated by the June 12 annulment and crises. Although the 1999 elections did not experience electoral violence, they exhibited notable signs characterised by landslide victory, disputed results with the accompanying rejection of officials' results by losing parties, and poor election management (Bratton, 1999). Besides, the America based observer reported that there was no credible evidence that these electoral abuses affected the outcome of the elections (The Carter Centre, 1999).

In 2003, elections conducted by INEC and supervised by the PDP federal government were massively rigged by the PDP-led government with the intention of destroying the growth and emergence of opposition parties in Nigeria's democracy (Jim-Nwoko, 2019). Similarly, the 2007 elections were massively rigged and tagged "do or die" by President Olusegun Obasanjo. It was adjudged to be the worst election conducted in the political history of Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Hassan, 2022) because it was below basic regulations and international standards. President Musa Yar'Adua, in his inauguration speech, acknowledged that the election that brought him to office was fraudulent in nature. The 1500 cases of election petition before the election tribunal were indicators (Egwu, 2013).

The 2011 election was a watershed on the 2007 elections. Although the election was also flawed, there was a massive reduction in the number of election-related disputes for adjudication (Egwu, 2013). Egwu (2013: 2) captured 2011 elections thus:

After a shaky start on April 2, 2011, elections were concluded with an outcome that appears to have restored the battered image of the Nigerian state with the reputation of mediating in the subversion of the will of the Nigerian people and not inclined to obey international conventions on electoral democracy and good governance that it has committed to respect. The endorsement of the elections by domestic and international observers as credible largely reflecting the will of the people, despite some challenges, has therefore

earned the Nigerian state a “clean bill” of political health to be able to play its expected role as a regional leader with considerable moral and political authority.

The above assertion implies that the results of 2011 elections as observed gave some credence to Nigeria as regards her leadership in West Africa. Therefore, she was able to make many redeeming elements of the 2011 elections, part of which is the commitment of the INEC leadership to conduct transparent elections by avoiding the partisan path of Prof. Maurice Iwu-led INEC. On the substantive side, Egwu (2013: 2-3) highlighted theremarkable improvements as follows:

- (i) increased citizens’ engagement with all facets of electoral democracy such as opportunity for participation based on a new voter register;
- (ii) improved confidence building and trust between critical stakeholders in the electoral process;
- (iii) revival of political parties Code of Conduct;
- (iv) more coordinated approach to election security on the platform of Inter-Agency Committee on Election Security under the operational command of the police;
- (v) severe challenge to the dominance of the PDP that had extended its dominance with every election since 1999, considering the unchallenged dominance of ruling parties which remains a disturbing trend in most struggling democracies;
- (vi) the defeat of four sitting governors in Nasarawa, Imo, Oyo, and Zamfara states despite desperate deployment of incumbency power, providing confidence that votes can count;
- (vii) more diverse party representation especially in the House of Representatives at the national level and in the states with greater promise for checks on the excesses of the executives;
- (viii) improved strength of opposition politics such as the visibility enjoyed by smaller and new parties; and
- (ix) massive reduction in the number of election-related disputes for adjudication from over 1,500 in 2007 to a little over 500 cases following the 2011 elections.

Despite these substantive remarkable improvements, the 2011 elections triggered electoral violence in some states in the north thusleading to loss of lives. The Human Rights Watch (2011) reported that post-election violence occurred in some northern states such as Bauchi, Gombe, Kaduna, Adamawa, Niger and Kano claiming over 800 lives.

The 2015 elections were significant in the history of Nigeria's electoral politics because it was the first time the opposition won the presidential election. The chairman of INEC, Prof. Attahiru Jega and his team were able to conduct credible elections by displaying high level of integrity and innovative spirit in the organisation and management of the election through the introduction of technology, Smart Card Reader (SCR) and Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) (Agbu, 2016). The introduction of technology to curb electoral corruption by this team signified a progress in the electoral politics of Nigeria. Although some local and international observers declared the 2015 general elections to be largely free, fair and credible, it was considered to be otherwise because of the instances of electoral fraud (Agbu, 2016). A team of European observers led by Dirk Verheyen and Joelle Maganck decried that there was spate of underage voting in the north as minors presented valid PVCs (Agbu, 2016). Besides, the electoral process and results from Rivers and Akwa-Ibom states were fundamentally conflicting and hotly contested because it seems the PVCs of SCRs were either side-lined or seriously compromised. The level of violence in Akwa-Ibom State House of Assembly and gubernatorial elections led to the disruption of the election process.

In 2019, elections were disputed in Nigeria because Nigerians witnessed network failures as regards free and fair elections. There were conspicuous shortcomings in the process of conducting general elections because the elections were marred with violence. Jim-Nwoko (2019: 2) affirmed that "many lives were lost in the process and the elections had several unfinished and rigged elections. At the last office count, 736 election petition cases were filed in courts."

The 2023 elections were characterised by violence in some parts of the country such as Lagos, Delta, Kogi, Enugu and Ebonyi states. In order to substantiate this, the European Union (EU) election observation mission also noted how violence marred voting in some areas. Apart from the recorded violence in some states, the elections were also marred with voter's suppression (Nwangwu, 2023). This is a deliberate act to disenfranchise the eligible voters in casting their votes so as to influence the outcome of the election.

Electoral suppression was experienced during the gubernatorial elections in states such as Abia, Borno, Delta, Edo, Enugu, Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Kogi, Nassarawa, Ogun, Sokoto, and River states (Nwangwu, 2023). Besides, out of 93.47 million registered voters, only 24.9 million voted in the presidential election. This represents 26.72% of the voters turn out (Amata, 2023). A comparison with previous elections in the era of the fourth republic revealed that the 2023 general elections had the least voters turn out of all the general election in Nigeria (see the table 1 below).

Table 1: Analysis of General Elections in Nigeria, 1999-2019

Year	No. of registered voters	Voters' turnout	Percentage
1999	57,938,945	30,280,052	52.3%
2003	60,823,022	42,018,735	69.1%
2007	61,567,036	35,401,045	57.5%
2011	73,528,040	39,469,484	53.7%
2015	67,422,005	29,432,083	43.7%
2019	82,344,107	28,614,190	34.8%
2023	93,470,000	24,900,000	26.7%

Source: Author's Compilation (2023)

The above table indicates that in 2003 general election Nigeria experienced high level of voter turnout while 2023 recorded the least voters turn out. From 2007, the trends of voter turnout kept on declining. In other words, from 2007 to 2023 the political participation of the citizens dwindled.

Peradventure, election rigging could have led to the decline of citizens' participation. However, the deployment of technology in 2023 which was meant to curb election rigging was not having much impact because it was only used to accredit voters for elections. While voter's accreditation was largely carried out with the bimodal device, the electoral commission's failure to carry out real time transmission of the presidential election results created room for alleged result rigging.

Based on the foregoing, the following issues can be deduced:

- (i) The antecedent of elections in Nigeria has been marked by both challenges and progress.
- (ii) In the area of challenges, rigging has been a way associated with Nigerian politics. It seems that the rigging tactics have made participation of the electorates to decline.
- (iii) In the area of progress, electoral reforms were carried out in a bid to improving the electoral process.
- (iv) Technological devices were used to address the election rigging in Nigeria.

Therefore, the nature of rigging in the erstwhile republic before the fourth republic was traditional in nature. This included ballot snatching and stuffing, multiple voting, over voting, alteration of results, and other related electoral malfeasance. The emergent problem in Nigeria's democracy and electoral process is simply that of

vote buying (Aiyede, 2008). The prevalence of vote buying was more pronounced in 2011, 2015 and 2019(Mogaji& Musa, 2022). Despite the scarcity of cash circulation in 2023general elections, the electionswere stillcharacterised by vote selling and vote buyingby the electorates and the party agents(Olokor, 2023). The effect of vote-buying has become so worrisome in Nigeria's politics. This paper will at this stage examine election rigging and vote buyingwith a view to ascertaining the factors which accounted for it in the fourth republic.

From Election Rigging to Vote Buying in Nigeria

The republics (first, second and third)did not witness the prevalence of vote buying nor did it play a vital role in determining the electoral outcomes. However, it laid down the ground for the emergence of money politics. In the fourth republic, vote buying has become incessant and it has even reached its peak. "Since 1999 elections, delegates have been paid between \$2000 and\$10000 to buy votes during the party primaries" (Hassan, 2022: 114). According to Afro barometer survey conducted in 2003, it was reported that 259 respondents were offered cash, 93 respondents were offered goods such as food and drinks while 37 respondents were offered employment (Nichter, 2014). The 2007 Afrobarometer according to Bratton (2008: 5) revealed that:

Voters were offered money (68 percent of all reported attempts in 2007), commodities (such as food or clothing, 26 percent) or jobs (6 percent). In the latest and previous Nigerian elections, the modal (i.e., most common) inducement was N500, or about US\$4. Between 2003and 2007, the value of vote buying payment rose from ₦1750 to₦2250.

Similarly, in all the All Progressive Congress (APC) 2015 presidential primaries in Lagos, over 8,000 delegates who participated allegedly made US\$5,000 from the candidates. Delegates were supposed to have received US\$2,000 each from the Atiku Abubakar group and US\$3,000 each from Buhari group (Onuoha &Ojo, 2018).Hassan (2022: 115) stated that the total amount spent by Atiku and Buhari for the buying of votes at the primary stage alone was more than \$16 million and \$24 million, respectively.In 2023 presidential primaries, the report of the International Coalition for Democracy and Good Governance (2022) indicated that the PDP and APC primaries lack the appropriate democraticprocesses because the highest bidders emerged as the flag bearers of the parties.

Currently, votebuying seems to have becomea progressive formof election rigging.It has become moreprevalent during off-cycle governorship elections than

general elections in Nigeria. In some states such as Ekiti, Edo, Ondo and Anambra where gubernatorial elections were conducted, vote buying has been tagged with various names such as “stomach infrastructure”, “vote and cook soup,” and “see and buy” (Hassan, 2022). One of the strategies used by the incumbent party is to subject the electorates to hardship so as to make them sell their votes to the parties. In order to boycott the stringent electoral laws to achieve desired goals, desperate politicians have taken to vote buying (Busari, 2018: 12).

Vote buying is commonly found among illiterates in the rural areas although it is found in both rural and urban centres. Hassan (2022: 115) is of the opinion that:

Vote buying is more expensive in the cities where buyers pay more than in the rural areas where small amount of money is shared. He posited that “in the urban centres, the poor women, elderly and unemployed educated youths are the target. By contrast, as the poverty improves, the vote buying increases in both rural and urban areas.

However, the expansion of vote buying began with the introduction of stomach infrastructure in Ekiti 2014 gubernatorial elections. The stomach infrastructure was used by former governor of Ekiti State, Ayo Fayose, to give out commodities like chicken, rice, and money before Election Day in order to lure the voters to vote for him. He later went on to give out 100,000 bags of rice and 80,000 birds (Hassan, 2022). Therefore, through stomach infrastructure, he was able to defeat the incumbent governor, John Kayode Fayemi of the APC in 2014 gubernatorial elections. Also, the Ekiti 2022 governorship elections were also characterised by vote buying (Adebayo, 2022).

The 2016 gubernatorial elections in Edo State marked the beginning of prevalent vote buying after the 2015 general elections. Elections were keenly contested by the major political parties in the state (PDP and APC). At the beginning of the election, there was low turnout but money was introduced to lure the electorates. This made them to rush to the polling units to cast their votes (Hassan, 2022). In the sight of INEC and the police officers, votes were openly bought by party agents. However, the prevalence of vote buying in the state is to ensure that voters were monitored to cast their votes for the agreed candidate.

The gubernatorial elections of Ondo State in 2016 and 2020 experienced rampant vote buying. In 2016, money was given to Odigbo, Okiti-pupa and Ilaje local governments to induce voters. The slogan was “dibokosebe” (vote and cook soup) was a strategy used to cement behaviour towards vote buying in the election. During

the 2020 gubernatorial elections, voters were selling their votes for ₦5, 000 (Premium Times, 2020). The APC gave between ₦5, 000 and ₦10, 000 depending on the wards, while the PDP was said to be giving ₦5, 000 (Babajide, 2020). There were some instances where the party agents distributed money openly while security officials looked away. In other situations, money was distributed in hidden places with the support of and coordination of security operatives in different polling units (Kabir, 2020).

In Anambra State, the governorship elections of 2017 were also characterised by vote buying. The estimated amount of vote buying was put at ₦1.5 billion (Hassan, 2022). Similarly, with the Edo and Ondo gubernatorial elections of 2016, it was an open negotiation between the party agents and the voters as regards vote buying. The Edo voters were offered ₦5, 000, ₦3, 000 and ₦2, 000 by the party agents who adopted an “eye-mark and pay” technique (Hassan, 2017). Apart from cash (money) given to the voters, they were induced to vote with material items such as cooked food, malt and gala sausage (Hassan, 2017).

Following the 2023 general elections, there was off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi states. The power of incumbency was evident in the off-cycle elections shown through the widespread of vote buying. In Kogi State, there was vote buying in Okene and Lokoja local government areas, having the second and third highly registered voters, respectively, in the state. In Imo, the Chinye (2023) reported that “there were repeated reports of vote buying by the party agents of the APC and PDP. Of the reported incidents of vote buying in Imo, 76% were from the APC party agents facilitating vote trading.” In Bayelsa, the incentives ranged from ₦1,000 to ₦3,000, while there were reports of even higher sums of ₦22,000 (Hassan, 2022).

The off-cycle election conducted in the fourth era and the prevalence of vote buying are a reflection of the act in the states of the federation. For instance, the trend of vote buying was seen in Gama ward of Nasarawa Local Government in Kano State. The question one needs to ask is this: what factors account for this prevalent act in Nigeria’s democracy? Studies such as Olanrewaju (2018), Hassan (2022), Mogaji & Musa (2022) and Olugbile (2023) have affirmed that poverty, desperation and lack of party ideology is a major factor responsible for vote buying in Nigeria. According to the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) survey, 63% of people living in Nigeria (133 million people) are multidimensionally poor. The National MPI is 0.257, indicating that poor people in Nigeria experience just over one-quarter of all possible deprivation (National Bureau Statistics [NBS], 2022). With this trend of poverty in Nigeria, electorates can easily be susceptible to vote selling and the parties buy their vote. In order to substantiate this, Hassan (2022: 118) is of the opinion that:

The level of poverty certainly increases the chances of people agreeing to sell their votes. This is largely because poor voters generally lack basic resources such as good health care, water and food, paving the way for clientelistic relationships between the voters and politicians.

The above quotation implies that when poverty has exacerbated in society, electorates are easily bought because they will feel that the only dividend of democracy from the government is to sell their votes to the highest bidder. Mogaji & Musa (2022: 98) stated that:

Lack of party ideology affects the character of the politicians and their level of desperation for power. For votes to be bought and sold, there must be a willing buyer (desperate politician) and a willing seller (a greedy electorate), leading to the act of vote buying and creating an uneven playing field for electoral candidates to political office and giving victory to the highest bidder.

The close examination of the above quotation indicates that party ideology plays significant role in the manner in which political parties adhere to the electoral laws in the country. In situation where parties lack system of belief and ideals about government and politics, there is tendency for them not to conform to rules during the electoral process. For instance, the financing of a party by an individual beyond the stipulated amount has high possibility of encouraging vote buying, which in turn can truncate the electoral process. Also, another factor that has led to widespread of the phenomenon of vote buying is desperation of the politicians. Normally, because man always wants to remain in the corridor of power the desperation to seek means to retain him/her can lead to buying votes so as to win election. Furthermore, because the digitalization of electoral process (use of card reader machines and permanent voter cards) has restricted election rigging to an extent (Olugbile, 2023) political elites have devised another medium, which is vote buying.

These findings agree with clientelism theory which states that gaining public loyalty and political support with any form of inducements is central to clientelist practices, such as the exchange of goods and services for political supports through implicit or explicit quid-pro-quo.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper concludes that vote buying is a continuation of election rigging by other means. The election rigging has evolved from traditional to a more appealing type, which is now vote buying. The implication of vote buying is that it weakens the democratic legitimacy which in turn leads to a retard development of a state. In order to curb the aforementioned situation, the following recommendations are made:

First, political enlightenment should be given to the Nigerian citizens vis-à-vis vote buying and selling. The citizenry should be enlightened as regards the negative implication on democratic sustainability and consolidation. The relevant agencies of government such as INEC and National Orientation Agency (NAO) should be more active in sensitizing and educating the teeming population about the evil effect of vote buying in Nigeria.

Two, the legal framework vis-à-vis vote buying should be strengthened. In other words, electoral law should be amended to address the menace of vote buying in Nigeria. The loophole in the electoral law as regards vote buying by the political parties and the selling of votes by the citizens should be addressed by the government, most especially the aspect that relates to clientelism.

Three, poverty should be addressed by Nigerian government. They say poverty induces behaviour. Democracy is supposed to bring happiness to the citizenry. Therefore, when citizens are happy and enjoy the dividend of democracy, they will not sell their votes and they will be able to make independent political decision. The government should provide job opportunities for unemployed graduates and make life comfortable for the citizens.

Four, desperate politicians (money bags) should be prevented from contesting elections in Nigeria. Through their act of desperation, they always frustrate the electoral process and bring the game of "do-or-die"/zero-sum approach. The citizens should realize that free, fair and credible elections are significant expression of freedom. However, when the money bags buy vote through the highest bidder process, citizens can be enslaved during the electoral process.

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