

## Menace of Vote Trading in Election: Youth as Vanguard of Impactful Change in Nigeria

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### Abstract

This work presents an in-depth analysis of the menace of vote trading in election and youths as vanguards of impactful change. Vote trading is like a cankerworm that has eaten into the fibre of the nation's electoral process. It has become a reoccurring decimal in contemporary discourse on the sustainability of democratic development in Nigeria. This menace of vote trading is gradually crippling electoral processes and undermining the efforts of the electoral umpire in conducting competitive, free, fair, and credible elections for the sustenance of democratic development in Nigeria. To this effect, this paper therefore, investigates the effects of vote-buying on the sustainability of democratic development and good governance in Nigeria. It argues that vote-buying compromises the well-being of the populace by entrenching bad governance and poor service delivery. The study adopts reciprocal determinism theory to illustrate how the political environment and bad governance are stimuli to consolidating the commercialisation of Nigerian electoral processes. The study adopts the documentary method for gathering data from secondary sources and recommends institutionalisation of a strong electoral management body to enforce a stiff penalty for commercialisation of the electoral system in Nigeria. This paper is historical; hence, it adopts a qualitative method of analysis. Useful piece of information was obtained from important relevant documents, reports and array of both primary and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Menace, Vote Trading, Election, Youth, Vanguard,

### Introduction

Electoral system cannot be built solely from the top – down but requires the active participation of ordinary citizens in the shaping of a common political will. It is the citizens who must provide the necessary legitimacy to the state.<sup>1</sup> According to Nwagwu et al, Vote-buying is the transactional process through which voters offer their votes for sale and political parties or public office aspirants or their agents' bargain to buy the votes from the sellers. It is synonymous with selling and buying goods and services in an open market on agreed prices.<sup>2</sup> Where competition is very high, the process seems to be auction sales whereby the voters sell to the highest bidder. Modern scholars of social sciences and humanities trace the historical origin of election and electoral processes in Nigeria with emphasis on its fraught with vote-buying (cash-and-carry democracy), and other electoral malfeasances, ethnic chauvinism, religious extremism, and politically motivated violence and killings. Onapajo et al. stress that "Nigeria's electoral process has always been known for its chaotic nature and at the heart of this quagmire, is the predominance of vote buying, a phenomenon which arguably reflects the nature of

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Chukwu, "The Role of Children and Youths in Nation Building", *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 4(3) 2021, 46 – 54. DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.36594.22726

<sup>2</sup> Ejikeme Jombo Nwagwu, Onyinyeomachukwu Gift Uwaechia, Kingsley Chigozie Udegbunam & Rebecca Nnamani, "Vote Buying During 2015 And 2019 General Elections: Manifestation and Implications on Democratic Development in Nigeria", *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1) 2022, 1-28, 1995237, DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2021.1995237

politics and election”.<sup>3</sup> Amao corroborates this assertion as he stresses that the electoral process in Nigeria has frequently been identified for its corrupt, violent, and chaotic tendencies characterised by the utilisation of thugs, maiming of political opponents by those seeking electoral positions through electoral fraud.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore not astonishing that virtually all the elections organised in Nigeria were marred by controversies, with their processes and outcomes facing crisis of integrity, credibility, and legitimacy. According to Onuoha and Okafor, vote-buying, in recent time, has risen in proportion, in scope, and sophistication as videos and images uncover the illegal practice of distributing money, materials, and other incentives among the electorates by political aspirants, party agents in order to lure voters to vote for their candidates.<sup>5</sup> Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart opine that,

While Africa’s largest democracy prepares for the polls, serious questions remain about Nigeria’s capacity and political will to conduct free, fair and peaceful elections. Since independence in 1960, violence and myriad irregularities have persistently marred the process of electing the country’s leaders, Nigerian politicians have become habituated to fraud, corruption, intimidation and violence, as if they consider these the necessary weapons of political winners.<sup>6</sup>

Olorunmola argues that money is considered a crucial factor for political parties to run their affairs during and between elections.<sup>7</sup> Unregulated utilisation of resources, private or public, for political activities is capable of reversing the ethics, practices, and spit of democracy; it confers undue advantages and improperly changes choice to electorates. “The 2015 general election was one of the most heavily monetised election which saw the two leading candidates tried to outspend each other. Vote buying was carried out in 2015 and 2019 elections with brazenness and audacity, in some cases with electoral officials and security agents”<sup>8</sup>.

The cases of Olisa Metuh diverting N400 million and US\$2 million originally meant for national security to vote-buying;<sup>9</sup> Sambo Dasuki misusing US\$2.1 billion and N19.4 billion initially meant for the purchase of arms for the army to sponsor President Jonathan’s re-election bid through vote-buying;<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> H. Onapajo, S. Francis, & U. Okeke-Uzodike, (2015). Oil corrupts elections: The political economy of vote-buying in Nigeria. *African Studies Quarterly*, 15(2), 1-21, 2. <https://sites.clas.ufl.edu/africanquarterly/files/Volume-15-Issue-2-Onapajo-Francis-and-Okeke-zodike.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> O. B. Amao, Nigeria’s 3029 general election: what does it mean for the rest of the world? *The Round Table*, 109(4) 2020, 429–440. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2020.1788767>

<sup>5</sup> F.C. Onuoha, & J.C. Okafor, “Democracy or Moneyocracy? Perspective on vote buying and electoral integrity in Nigeria’s recent elections”, *Africa Insight* 49 (4) 2020, 1–14

<sup>6</sup> E. Onwudiwe, C. Berwind-Dart, “Breaking the Cycle of Electoral Violence in Nigeria”, *United States Institute of Peace, Special Report* 263, 2010, 1

<sup>7</sup> A. Olorunmola, Cost of politics in Nigeria. Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2016, Retrieved on December 30, 2022. <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Cost-of-Politics-Nigeria.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> O. W. Adigun, “Vote buying: examining the manifestations, motivations, and effects of an dimension of election rigging (2015-2019)”, *Canadian Social Science*, 15(11) 2019, 20–28. <https://doi.org/10.3968/11392>

<sup>9</sup> H. Yahaya, Why judge convicted Olisa Metuh for money laundry, other crimes. Premium Times 2020, Retrieved from May 11, 2020, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/378974-why-judge-convicted-olisametuh-for-money-laundering-other-crimes.html>

<sup>10</sup> I. NnochNDI, Former national security adviser, Col. Sambo Dasuki (rtd.) \$2.1billion arms deal: FG re-arraigns Dasuki, 3 others on amended 32-count charge. Vanguard Newspaper 2016, Retrieved from May 8, 2020.

and Diezani Alison-Madueke surreptitiously disbursed US\$20 billion to the following persons to influence 2015 elections outcomes: INEC officials \$115 million, Fidelity Bank officials (Martin Izuogbe & Mrs Gesil Khan)—N185,842,000, Fidelia Omoile—Electoral Officer N112,480,000, Uluochi Obi-Brown, INEC Administrative Secretary —N111,500,000, Edem Okon Effang, former INEC Deputy Director—N241,127,000, and Immaculata Asuquo, INEC Head of Voter Education—N241,127,000;<sup>11</sup> Christian Nwosu, INEC official—N30 million, Musiliu Obanikoro, former Minister of State for defense—N4.7 billion, Yisa Adedoyin and Tijani Bashir—N264,880,000, Dele Belgore—N450 million. In Kwara State, Resident Asst. Inspector-General of Police—N1 million, Kwara State Commissioner of Police—N10 million, Deputy Commissioner of Police in-charge of operations—N2 million, Asst. Commissioner of Police in-charge of operations and administration—N1 million, Resident

Electoral Commissioner—N10 million, Administrative Secretary—N5 million. INEC Head of Department (Operations) and subordinates—N5 million, rank and file officers N2 million. Officer in charge of Mobile Police and subordinates—N7 million, the 2i/c mobile police and subordinates—N10 million, Director of State Security Services and subordinates—N2.5 million, the military personnel in Kwara State—N50 million; and paramilitary agencies got N20 million, all meant to pervert elections outcomes.<sup>12</sup> This was affirmed by Kayode-Adedeji;<sup>13</sup> Onyekwere, also affirmed it.<sup>14</sup>

The paper is divided into seven parts. The first part is introduction. This is followed by the theoretical framework on which the work derives its analysis. The third discusses the role of election in democracy; under this part issues in electoral process in Nigeria was identified. While the fourth part examines Vote Trading, forms of vote trading and factors influencing vote trading came under this part. Part five highlights vote participation in formal political processes. It also looks at barriers to youth political participation. The penultimate section is an analysis of youth as vanguard for impactful change. The last part is the conclusion and recommendations. The argument tends to suggest that, the youths are increasingly demanding more meaningful participation in decision-making processes, so they can have more control over how their lives and futures are shaped. The work however argues that, the political representation of young women and men remains limited. This paper exposes the underlying factor that although young people are involved in activism in the digital space, protesting, volunteering to improve their communities and innovating for social good, their participation in and influence on formal politics is LIMITED.

### Theoretical Framework

Reciprocal determinism theory is adopted as the theoretical framework of analysis for the study. Reciprocal determinism postulates that the individual's behaviour influences and is being influenced by both the personal characteristics and the social world. The theory is a model built around three major characteristics that influence behaviour—the environment, the individual, and the behaviour. The model explains the interwoven nature of the three factors which made them be interdependently working together to produce reflective responses. As the environment influences individual behaviour, the individual's reactions as well as influence the environment. Thus, the theory investigates the part our behaviour plays in the environment. This theory was firstly propounded by a psychologist, Albert

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<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2018/05/2-1bn-arms-deal-fg-re-arraigns-dasuki-3-others-amended-32-count-charge/amp/>

<sup>11</sup> Y. Alli, EFCC traces Diezani's \$115m election bribery cash to stolen oil 2016. Retrieved from May 6, 2020. <http://saharareporters.com/2016/05/03/efcc-tracesdiezani's-115m-election-bribery-cash-stolen-oil>

<sup>12</sup> Alli, EFCC traces Diezani's \$115m... 2016

<sup>13</sup> D. Kayode-Adedeji, We rejected Jonathan's \$3million – Islamic groups. Premium Times, 2015, Retrieved from April 25, 2020 <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/195797-dasukigate-werejected-jonathans-3-million-islamic-groups.htm>

<sup>14</sup> J. Onyekwere, EFCC names beneficiaries of Alison Madueke's Alleged Bribe. The Guardian Newspaper 2017, Retrieved from May 11, 2020. <https://m.guardian.ng/news/efcc-names-beneficiaries-of-alison-maduekesalleged-bribe/>

Bandura.<sup>15</sup> Other proponents that expounded on the theory were Judith Rich Harris, M. Akoul Gregory, and Larry J. Siegal.

Akoul gave details on the earlier propositions of a child who implies that children were inactive receivers of environmental influences, which conveyed that the children were easily moulded or shaped in whatsoever method the parents or school teachers and other caregivers select to work. The theory of reciprocal determinism holds the view that infants display more practical and interactive roles in the environment as the environment influences them. With difficulty would they react as an effect of learned associations or reinforcements; considering that their characteristics, feelings, thoughts, and behaviours impact how they interact with and respond to the environment.<sup>16</sup>

The focus of this theory is the assumption that a relationship exists between the environment and behaviour of persons, in which the environment influences the behaviour of the people. In other words, the environmental factors which produce very poor conduct of elected public office holders, abysmal performance of the government in power to provide good governance, weak public service delivery capacity, absence of infrastructural facilities and welfare of the public which is paramount in governance, poor legislation and a disservice to the people, the ineptitude of government functionaries, and individual experiences of voters fanned their sense of judgement to react the way they considered beneficial. For instance, the lack of genuine electoral processes, transparency, and accountability in governance formed the mind-set of voters to respond to the environment by selling their votes in exchange for money and/or materials. Reciprocal determinism translates to how the environment produces effects on individual characteristics. Cherry stresses:

The environment component is made up of the physical surroundings around the individual that contain potentially reinforcing stimuli, including people who are present (or absent). The environment influences the intensity and frequency of the behaviour, just as the behaviour itself can have an impact on the environment. On the other hand, the individual component includes all the characteristics that have been rewarded in the past. Personality and cognitive factors play an important part in how a person behaves, including all of the individual's expectations, beliefs, and unique personality characteristics.<sup>17</sup>

Vote-buying as a cause of electoral irregularities in Nigeria before and during election periods serves to arouse stimulus or environmental influence on the voters; and vote-selling is a response to the stimulus on the environment. Reciprocal determinism theory argues that vote-buying is a symbol of a huge gap in leadership and bad governance; while vote-selling is a reciprocal behaviour of voters to the environment.

Bandura's theory has demonstrated a vital paradigm shift from the behavioural perspective to a social-cognitive approach to understanding behaviour. Behaviourists believed that the environment wholly influences individual behaviour, but Bandura appreciated the relevance of the bidirectional relationship between individuals, their behaviours, and the environment. To a large extent, it reveals that while individuals are affected by their personal experiences in their environment, they as well have the collective power to effect a change on their situation and circumstances through personal sacrifices and problem-solving behaviours. This theory takes us to the next section on the manifestation of vote-buying in election periods.

The Reciprocal Determinism Theory helped so much in dispelling the mist that beclouded vote trading. The suitability of the theoretical framework has been justified because, as seen in this work how the

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<sup>15</sup> A. Singh, An overview on the reciprocal determinism concept with examples. PsycholoGenie 2018, Retrieved from June 23, 2019. <https://psychologenie.com/reciprocal-determinism>

<sup>16</sup> K. Cherry, *What is reciprocal determinism?* Verywell Mind 2018, Retrieved from August 16, 2019. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-reciprocal-determinism-2795907>

<sup>17</sup> Cherry, *What is reciprocal determinism?... 2*

environment (present state of Nigeria election) influence the behaviour of the voters towards electoral process.

### **Roles of Election in Democracy**

Elections make a fundamental contribution to democratic governance. Elections enable voters to appoint leaders, thus granting voters the constitutional and moral rights to seek accountability from the elected officers. Elections provide legitimacy to political office holders, thus providing them constitutional authority to discharge their duties. Elections also provide political education for citizens and ensure the responsiveness of democratic governments to the will of the people. Elections provide opportunity and platform for voters (citizens) to engage in discussions about their collective wills, thus strengthening social and political structure of the society. Finally, elections serve a self-actualizing purpose by confirming the worth and dignity of individual citizens as human beings. Participation in an election serves to reinforce voters' self-esteem and self-respect.

**Identified Issues in electoral processes in Nigeria:** Electoral violence, electoral malpractices, ballot box snatching, voters' apathy, vote buying and trading and weak youth political participation

### **Vote Trading**

With the improvement on the integrity of the electoral system comes a fresh challenge posed by those who are determined to undermine the credibility of elections, the use of inducements by politicians and political parties. Interestingly, what started as vote buying has metamorphosed into vote selling and ultimately vote trading. Is it vote buying or vote trading? Vote buying refers to politician offering inducements to voters in exchange for votes, whereas, vote trading refers to both parties willingly engaging in "transaction for votes". Trade is a basic economic concept involving the buying and selling of goods and services, with compensation paid by a buyer to a seller or the exchange of goods or services between parties. Vote trading is like any economic transaction, in which anything is used "as price" to induce the willing and demanding voter to change his or her voting preferences. It is a reflection of our present day transactional values based on exchange. According to Okunnu, Vote trading has become a widespread negative phenomenon in Nigeria's democratic process and part of our electoral culture. It is usually viewed as a purely economic exchange in which a voter willingly sells his/her vote to the highest political bidder.<sup>18</sup> Also, the intending buyer (who most times are politicians or their associates), will want the voter to show evidence of voting for his/her party before payment is made. It is not peculiar to African or Nigerian society, it exists in all societies. In America, it is called logrolling.

**Forms of Vote Trading:** Sharing of cash before and during primaries and general elections; Procurement of Voters Cards; Distribution of stomach infrastructure; Provision of social amenities and projects in exchange for votes; Promises of contracts and or allocation of appointments in exchange for votes.

**Factors Influencing Vote Trading:** Economic hardship and poverty; Weakened societal moral fabric and orientation; Money-driven Nigerian political system; Inordinate quest for political participation and resultant "Do or die" orientation of political office holders; Obscene display of opulence and ostentatious lifestyles by public office holders and politicians; Lost of trust in political office holders to perform and Lost of hope in Nigerian project by Nigerian youth.

### **Youth Participation in Formal Political Processes**

Research findings from formal and informal studies on elections in Nigeria have revealed low youth turnout during elections compared to the older generations. Further enquiries reveal that the low turnout otherwise called voting apathy among the youth is influenced by a lot of factors such as individual, structural and organisational barriers. These barriers may account for the distrust many young people have towards traditional institutions of governance and our formal political process.

**Barriers to Youth Political Participation:** Distrust in political institutions and political office holders; Lack of confidence and trust in electoral system (your votes count); Limited knowledge about political

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<sup>18</sup> Ganiu O. Okunnu, Menace of Vote Trading: Youth as Vanguard for Impactful Change, Presentation at INEC Zonal Engagement with Youth in Ogun State, on Thursday, December 8, 2022.

processes (more engagements like this to boost the knowledge of youth); Social and economic exclusion/marginalization; Age requirements to vote or run for office. (taken care of by NOT TOO YOUNG TO RUN law); Increased costs of political participation; Social and cultural traditions. In most societies, politics has been for centuries a domain of older, often male and wealthy citizens, a situation that has resulted in the systematic exclusion of young people from political debates and decision-making and thus contributed to the under representation of youth and Young women are in many countries subject to “double discrimination” based on their age and gender.

### **Youth as Vanguard for Impactful Change**

Increase in youth participation in social activism (ENDSARS); They are increasingly demanding more meaningful participation in decision-making processes, so they can have more control over how their lives and futures are shaped. However, the political representation of young women and men remains limited. Although young people are involved in activism in the digital space, protesting, volunteering to improve their communities and innovating for social good, their participation in and influence on formal politics is LIMITED. According to the European Youth Forum Report, young people have been largely absent from national elections in the 28 member states of the European Union (EU). Almost 60 per cent of eligible voters between 16 or 18 and 24 years old opted not to vote in their country’s most recent national election.<sup>19</sup> According to Afro Barometer, nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of the overall African population is younger than 35. Yet only 55 per cent of African youth said they voted in their last national election.<sup>20</sup>

Vote trading is a criminal act which should be curbed in Nigeria. If the politicians and their parties do not make offer of money or gifts to the masses, there would not be acceptance for such offer. Given out money prior to election is endemic in Nigeria which need to be properly corrected for the dividend of democracy to be attained in the country. In order to achieve this and make way for a credible candidate to emerge in an election, vote trading should be discouraged in its totality in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Vote trading is one of the factors militating against political development and sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. The country is practicing a “patronage democracy”, a carrot and stick relationship between vote-buyers and vote-sellers in consolidation of commercialisation of the polity. The quantum of money in circulation during election barraged political development. Vote trading is prevalent in Nigeria because an average voter in the country is poor and cannot resist the charming effects of uncontrollable electoral bribes in cash or kind, and tantalisation of voters with job opportunities purported to exist; and the political elites’ disposition to capitalise on the weak voters’ unity in vulnerability to exploit the situation to render them politically feeble to control their rights to vote for candidates of their individual choice.

Poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy have been identified by scholars as the major causes of vote trading. The study argues that electoral fraud is fundamentally a derivative of vote trading. Vote trading is the origin of bad governance, facilitator of imposition of wrong and inept group of unsalable persons to find spaces in governance. Insecurity of lives and properties, disunity amongst ethnic groups, secessionists’ agitations from various ethnic associations, the massive blood-letting in all parts of the country, and enormous deficit of infrastructures are the products of vote trading. The plague generates inept leadership and ineptitude yields poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy. Therefore, emphasis should be located on fierce wrestling against vote trading and the capacity to institute legal suits against the culprits. CSOs, spirited citizens, and other stakeholders should operate beyond rhetoric and take proactive actions against political parties, politicians, or their agents and any delinquent anti-graft agency identified to have been involved in vote-buying or aiding and abetting vote-trading to face the wrath of the law. The “Independent” National Electoral Commission would exhibit proficiency only when it is constitutionally independent; when unbiased appointment of the chairman would be competitive through electoral process.

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<sup>19</sup> EU Youth Report, European Commission, 206 final of 8.5, 2015

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Isbell, Elmogiera Elawad and Ghefari Elseyed, “Afrobarometer Round 6: The Quality of Democracy and Governance in Sudan”, *YCPSR*, 2015, Retrieved on 3rd January, 2023. <http://doi.org/10.3996/ICPSR36838.v1>

The utilisation of functional BIVAS in place of card readers in accrediting eligible voters must be sustained to curb electoral irregularities. The precept of ballot secrecy needs functional election legislation to ensure secret voting is not only a right on voters' part but an absolute obligation that must be observed during election periods. Secret ballot is important to sustain the electoral integrity, and one of the primary devices being applied to restrain vote trading.

**Recommendations:**

Need for a change in mind and mindset of the youth. (According to Mr. Raji Fashola, the MIND of the youth refers to his/her present mental frame, ie. What he sees while his/her MINDSET refers to established set of attitude that determines how he/she processes things and his/her responses)

Regular engagements with older generations in issuesbased discussions free of insults, blackmail and blame game tactics.

Engage in consultative and collaborative participations, and emphasize learning-by doing and practice-what-youpreach approaches.

Active utilisation of ICTs and social media tools for social activism.

Online participation should be inclusive, transparent, respectful, accountable, relevant, voluntary and safe.

The secret ballot system should be more enhanced to enable voters exercise their voting right confidential and at the same time prevent party agent from seeing voters' thumbprint on the ballot paper.

Finally, the federal government of Nigeria should ensure that the country's economy is in good shape in order to reduce the poverty rate and improve the citizens' standard of living in the country.