# SOCIOLOGICAL IMPACT OF VOTE BUYING IN NORTH-WEST ZONE OF NIGERIA: THE STUDY OF THE 2015 AND 2019 ELECTIONS

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**ABSTRACT**
*Vote buying is a widespread phenomenon in Nigeria. It involves an exchange in which the voters sell their votes to the buyer for money during election. This phenomenon has impacted negatively in the Nigeria's free and fair election processes. The ill competent ones occupied elective political positions because they used money to secured votes, while the qualified ones were left behind hence, they were unable to use money during primary and secondary elections. The objective of the study was to find out the impact of vote buying on electing people to various political positions in North West Zone of Nigeria. The theory of Collective Action was used in explaining the study findings. Two different but complementary methods of data collections (questionnaire and in-depth interview) were used to obtained the needed information. The findings revealed among others that; sometimes credible candidates were denied opportunity to even contest, that many of those that were able to buy their ways were not been able to perform to expectations, etc. The study recommended among others; that more political awareness against vote buying should be put in place, that laws prohibiting votes buying should be implemented accordingly etc.*

## Introduction

The modern democratic nations of the world have developed a system through which smooth and orderly change of leadership can be achieved. Free and fair election is needed for effective democratic transition in leadership (Mu'azu, 2007). Election has been defined as a process of choosing a leader, members of parliament, councilors or other representatives by popular vote (Wikipedia). Some politicians seeking political positions sometimes engages in vote buying to access such positions, this has been affecting the quality of political leaders in terms of service delivery while in office because many of these politicians lack capacity and ability to be in leadership positions. Vote buying is a widespread phenomenon. It is usually viewed as a purely economic exchange in which the voter sells his or her vote to the highest bidder (Schaffer, 2002).

Vote buying as a global issue is in the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK) and other European states. Anecdotes about vote buying and electoral fraud, particularly in the mid to late nineteenth century, are an inescapable, and colorful, part of American political history. Howard W. Allen and Kate Warren Allen (1981) noted, 'stories of fraudulent election practices color the political history of

the US, and anecdotes about vote buying, the dishonesty of election officials, and the like suggesting the widespread prevalence of election fraud in the American past are an integral part of the lore of American politics. Also, in the nineteenth century UK and US, vote buying was common place, parties gave voters cash, food, alcohol, health care, poverty relief packages and myriad other benefits in exchange for their votes during elections. To gain leverage over them, parties gathered information about voters debts, their crimes and even their infidelities (Susan, 2014).

However, in Nigeria and other African states just like in Europe, money and other material items and other gains are been used to influence voters' behavior and choices of contesting candidates during elections. This phenomenon has brought about opportunities to the ill or less competent candidates to buy their ways to the political offices to the detriments of the qualified and competent contestants because they lacked money or material benefits to give to the voters during elections. Poverty and illiteracy are among the factors that pushed many voters to surrendered their votes for money during elections (Liman, 2016).

The problem of vote buying is high in Nigeria, particularly in the North Western part of the country due to high rate of poverty and illiteracy in the area. To this end therefore, the study was designed to unveiled the impacts of vote buying during election on service delivery and how same contributed in depriving opportunities to some of the credible candidates from contesting and winning elections in the country as a whole.

## Statement of the Problem

Vote buying in Nigeria and particularly in the North- Western part of the country has always played a role in depriving opportunities to credible candidates in contesting election (Philip, 2020). Only few credible contesting candidates has money while many of such candidates lacked money to offer for them to be voted into various political positions. Those that used money in buying their ways into various positions usually are the less competent ones whom cannot perform as expected (Dini, 2021). Thus, the problem of vote buying has impacted negatively in the performances of the elected political office holders in North-Western part of the country.

However, none of the existing literature that were reviewed covered the subject matter of the time frame of 2015 and 2019 election periods, and they were not based on studies that were conducted in the North-Western part of Nigeria. Therefore, the need to find out the Sociological impact of Vote buying in North- Western part of the country with the focus on 2015 and 2019 elections prompted the need to conduct this study.

## Conceptual Clarification

- Vote Buying in this context means using money by contesting candidates to influence voters' behavior or choice to vote in their favour during election.

- Sociological Assessment is primarily concerned with the examining of how money is used to influenced the behavior of popular voters' choice of candidates during election.

- Impact of Vote buying is about the consequences of chosen unqualified political office holders due to collection of money from the contesting candidate(s) during 2015 and 2019 elections, i.e poor service delivery while in office in the communities.

## Methodology

Four (4) states (Kaduna, Kano, Katsina and Jigawa) were chosen from the North West Zone of Nigeria as the study locations. A total of four (400) hundred unit of respondents were used for the exercise, with one hundred (100) from each of the four states. The sample size of four (400) was determined using Taro Yamane Model, i.e n/(1+N(e)2 )

Where e= margin error =0.05, N=Total population, n= Sample size

The population used for the study comprised of voters that voted in 2015 and 2019 elections were randomly selected during 2013 election in the selected areas in the chosen states. With the used of quantitative method of data collection, questionnaire was designed and distributed to respondents and same were collected back with the used of research assistants in each of the four states. Using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS- Version 23), the responses

obtained were analyzed and interpreted according to the study objectives. Also, the study purposefully selected four (4) Key Informants, one (1) from each of the four (4) states. They comprised of one (1) ex- Councilor, one (1) ex-Council Chairman, one (1) ex- Assembly member and one (1) serving Community leader. In-depth interview guide was used to interviewed them, responses were recorded, transcribed and interpreted according to the study objective to complements the one obtained from questionnaire administration.

## Results

The table below highlighted on the experiences of the respondents on impacts of vote buying in the study locations.

**Table**: Impacts of vote buying

| | Item | SA | A | UD | D | SD | TTL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Leaders that occupied positions through vote buying are performing below expectations | 201<br>50.8% | 153<br>38.7% | 4<br>1% | 31<br>7.8% | 6<br>1.5% | 395<br>100% |
| 2 | Credible contestants are left out of winning elections due to vote buying | 172<br>43.5% | 193<br>48.8% | 6<br>1.5% | 17<br>4.3% | 7<br>1.7% | 395<br>100% |

**Source:** Field work, 2023

**KEY: SA** – Strongly Agree, A**-** Agree, **UD**- Undecided, **D** – Disagree, **SD** – Strongly Disagree, **TTL** - Total

**Item one** (1) on the table above revealed that majority of the respondents (89.5%) either strongly agreed or agreed that people in power that occupied positions through vote buying are not performing to expectations while in office. Similarly, from the in-depth interview conducted in one of the study locations, a respondent who was a former councilor in one of the areas visited narrated his experience by saying that;

> *'as at the time of the election, you must use all that you have to win the election and this may include selling out your properties to buy form, sponsored campaign and even gives money out to people so that they can considered you during election. When you are in office your concerned is on how to returned back the money you spent during election' (IDI, 2023).*

To confirmed the statement made by the councilor, one of the ex-council Chairman in one of the states visited for the study stated that;

> *'You know our people particularly party supporters; they are always looking upon you to give them money for transport during campaign and also to buy some voters during elections. As such when you occupied the seat, your concerned is to recovered your money through contracts giving and sometimes people are collaborating with the contractors to render substandard projects all in an effort to recovered what they spent during election and to possibly makes profit out of it' (IDI,2023).*

In the same vein, one of the community leaders in one of the areas visited for the study maintained that;

> *'The politicians are using money and other material items to buy votes or to convinced people to vote in their favour during elections. Some of these people only have the money but lacked ability of leadership, after elections and while in office they cannot contribute in the assembly to fight for the rights of their people. they don't contribute in poverty alleviation programs in their areas, they only accumulate to themselves, family and*

*associates in most of the time (IDI, 2023).*

These implied that majority of the political office holders that happened to be in power are not performing as it is expected of them.

**Item two** (2) on the table above showed that majority (93.3%) of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that credible candidate or contestants are left out of winning elections due to vote buying by political contestants.

To corroborate on this finding, one of the interviews that was conducted, the respondent who was an ex-Assembly member shared his experienced by saying that;

> *'the people with the knowledge, exposures and capacity to lead may not have the money to buy their ways and as such they had to allowed those with the money to buy their ways and occupied seats of power (IDI, 2023).*

In a related development, one of the ex-Council Chairman argued that;

> *'the use of money are involved at all levels, that you must used money to buy form, you must used money to lured the delegates to be on your side and also you need to save some amounts to win the support of voters on the election day. With all these happening, definitely some of the contestants including the credible ones are been left out of the process (IDI, 2023).*

Similarly, one of the ex-councilor in one of the areas visited for the study also shared his experienced on the subject matter by saying that;

> *'the first time when I wanted to contest for councillorship in our area I was left out of the game because I don't have the money to play around with during election. Sometimes you need to buy some of the voters, party agents, and even the security do collect some amounts from some the powerful contestants during election, where should I get that kind of money?, I was lucky in 2015 to won the election even though I didn't spent much (IDI, 2023).*

These implied that vote buying played a role in pushing away some credible candidates from contesting during elections.

## Discussion of Findings

Findings on the first objective revealed that most of the leaders elected through vote buying are not usually performing to expectations when they assumed positions of leadership in the North West Zone of the country in particular and the country at large. This corresponds with the finding of a study conducted by Kwarisima (2016), titled 'Vote buying and its effects on democracy and development in Uganda: a case of Rwamucucu Sub-County, Kabale District, South Western Uganda'. One of the findings revealed that vote buying exist in the area and that money was the major means. The study further revealed that betrayal by leaders, poverty and rampant corruption at the top levels of leadership were among the main causes of people selling their votes. In a related study conducted by Liman (2016), titled 'Factors Influencing Vote Buying in Election Period in Zaria Local Government Area', one of the findings showed that majority of those in power that occupied positions through vote buying were not in for the development of their communities because they lacked the capacity to be in such positions.

On the Second Objective, the findings revealed that credible candidates are usually left out of winning election because they don't have money to buy their ways. This is in tandem with one of the findings of a study conducted by Yunusa (2016), titled 'Credible Candidates are mostly not involved in politics because it Involves the use of money in contesting and winning election in Nigeria'. One of its findings shows that without having enough money contesting candidate can hardly win election no matter how good the candidate is in the community.

However, these findings are best explained with the used of Collective action theory that assumed that people tend to respond to subjective states of disadvantage, which may or may not flow from objective physical and social reality. According to Olson (1965), Collective Action theory posits rational social actors who regularly assess the actions of others to inform their own decisions to cooperate. In this

situation therefore, some voters decided to surrendered their votes to buyers because of their thinking that political leaders in power were not usually performing to expectations in the North western part of the country.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Although it is evident that vote buying is a global phenomenon, but in the Nigerian context, particularly in the North-Western part of the country the phenomenon has being attributed to high level of poverty and illiteracy among the popular voters in the region which pushes them into collection of money from un popular candidates for their votes during 2015 and 2019 elections. It is equally evident that credible candidates are been sidelined in contesting and winning elections in the area. The study therefore recommended the following measures toward enhancing free and fair election in the country, these include;

a. There is also the need for orientation and re-orientations on the part of elected members to learn and internalizes the fundamentals of what it takes to be in elective positions in the country. This can be achieved through Radio, Televisions and other media of enlightenment programmes in our media channels. Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), Parliamentary bodies and Political parties should also be charged with the responsibilities of sensitizing elected members on the does and don't of the offices of the elected members.

b. Measures should also be put in place to discourage the use of money in buying votes to influence the choices of popular voters during elections as this will go a long way in promoting or giving opportunities to credible candidates to contest elections in the North-Western part of the country.

c. Government, Political parties and some other non-governmental organizations (NGO$^{S}$) should double their efforts in their campaign against vote buying in the country. This can be achieved through Seminars, Conferences, Workshops, Posters and other means of communications.

d. That laws prohibiting vote buying should be fully implemented to the latter. People caught in vote buying should be made to face the consequences of their actions not minding their social standing in the society. Also, new laws should be promulgated toward addressing the emerging challenges.

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