

## Vote Buying: Examining the Manifestations, Motivations, and Effects of an Emerging Dimension of Election Rigging in Nigeria (2015-2019)

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### Abstract

Elections provide the platform for the electorate to choose their leaders in modern democracies. In Nigeria, they provide the opportunity for rich corrupt politicians to perpetrate acts of vote buying against both fellow contestants and the electorate. The introduction of Smart Card Readers (SCRs) technology and the permanent voter cards (PVCs) by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) made it difficult for politicians to manipulate election results. In order to game the system, politicians began relying increasingly on vote buying as a means of compromising and influencing the outcome of elections. Hence, vote buying is a fairly new method of election rigging. This paper, therefore, intends to explore the manifestations, motivations, and effects of vote buying on elections conducted between 2015 and 2019, as well as its implications for future elections in the country.

**Key words:** Vote buying; Election rigging; Money politics; INEC

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### INTRODUCTION

Election rigging, the sit-tight attitude of leaders, money politics, and electoral violence are some of the greatest challenges to democracy and democratization in Africa

(Collier, 2010). This explains why the Nigerian 2015 presidential election was unique for several reasons. First, it was one of the most hotly-contested in the history of the country and the outcome of the votes show neck-to-neck contests between the two leading candidates, a phenomenon not witnessed in about four decades of Nigeria's history. Second, it was one of the most heavily monetized election which saw the two leading candidates try to outspend each other. Third, the election saw the first time an opposition candidate defeated an incumbent president in Nigeria's electoral history (Adigun, 2017). However, all these do not necessarily make the election totally free and fair.

Regular and periodic elections are an important feature of modern democracy. It is difficult to imagine democracy in the modern era without free and fair elections. Nigeria is the largest democracy in Africa with a population of about 180 million with a history of years of military dictatorships that ended two decades ago (Nwankwo, Okafor & Asuoha, 2017). Despite this, the expectations of the primary features of liberal democracy would have at least developed appear to have been dashed. Currently, Africa's largest democracy is still not showing signs that it is divesting itself of its old features of authoritarianism and dictatorship. The only evidence of the presence of democracy today is the regular conduct of elections. But elections must be conducted in a manner that is not only "free and fair" but also be seen to be so for it to pass as democratic. The principles of electoral democratic abhor electoral malpractices, irregularities, and rigging. Therefore, compliance with democratic norms in the contest signifies electoral democracy whereas the reverse is the case for election rigging. One of the new dimensions of malpractices is Nigeria's recent electoral experience is *vote buying*.

While some may argue that vote buying is not fundamentally new to Nigeria's electoral politics or only peculiar to Nigeria or Africa (Schaffer, 2007), several

videos and images have emerged, showing unabashed sharing of cash, food and valuable items among the electorate by politicians and parties during the off-cycle gubernatorial elections in Edo, Anambra, Ondo and Ekiti states (Nwankwo, 2018). There were also news reports of heavy voter inducements during the just-concluded 2019 general elections. According to Matenga (2016), however, “nearly 80% of voters from 36 African countries believe voters are bribed – either sometimes, often or always. Furthermore, 16% of voters in African countries reported being offered money or goods in exchange” for their votes during elections. The CLEEN Foundation identified vote-buying as the leading risk factor that could generate tension or electoral violence during the 2019 general elections if not checked (Ejembi, 2019).

This paper, therefore, examines the manifestations, motivations, and consequences of vote buying as an emerging challenge to the Nigerian electoral process between 2015 and 2019. Though Nigerians are no strangers to election rigging and malpractices, the subject matter of vote buying has generated many discussions in the Nigerian public space and the academia since 2015. The prevalence of vote buying and selling made election observer and monitoring group, Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth, and Advancement (YIAGA Africa) to describe the phenomenon as a new way of elections rigging by politicians in Nigeria (*News Agency of Nigeria*, 2018a). Also, Osita Okechukwu, director-general of the Voice of Nigeria says vote-buying in elections signify the end of the era of “writing election results in hotels” (Asadu, 2019a). Nigeria’s elections have usually been affected by incidents of vote-buying and selling by political parties and their candidates.

Though, many people have attributed the phenomenon to the country’s rising poverty profile, desperation among politicians to undermine the electoral process arising from the introduction of stricter measures against ballot snatching and other “traditional” means of rigging elections, decisive role of money in politics, and the country’s weak enforcement of electoral laws; there seem to be no consensus whether or not vote buying constitute an electoral offence. To further complicate the issue, the electoral umpire, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) says it lacks the constitutional power to arrest and investigate politicians involved in vote-buying (Adebulu, 2018a) despite its consistent assurances that it will tackle the menace (Ugbede, 2018).

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## 1. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

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### 1.1 Vote Buying

The numerous attempts by scholars to define the concept of vote buying has produced several perspectives. This is because vote buying carries different notions in different states depending on its historical, cultural,

political systems and its election laws and processes or level of democratization (Schaffer, 2007). According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), vote buying is “the use of state and public sector powers and resources by... politicians or political parties to further their prospects of election” (2017, p.145).

Etzioni-Halevy (1989, p.287) gave an often quoted definition of vote buying as “the exchange of private material benefits for political support.” Etzioni-Halevy’s definition stresses on gaining private material benefits by voters in return for their political support. In other words, it is about giving voters some benefits in the form of gifts or incentives for them to reciprocate with their votes by voting for the giver or the candidate. In effects, voters are given items for their private use and they are expected to return this gesture from candidates or political parties by voting for them. Etzioni-Halevy sees this act as an exchange in the sense that the materials are given to the electorates in anticipation that the electorates would consider the gift received and vote for them.

Invariably, vote buying is a binding contract, or perhaps an auction in which the voter sells his or her vote to the highest bidder (Schaffer, 2002). Vote buying is defined here as any form of financial, material or promissory inducement or reward by a candidate, political party, agent or supporter to influence a voter to cast his or her vote or even abstain from doing so in order to enhance the chances of a particular contestant to win an election. Thus, any practice of immediate or promised reward to a person for voting or refraining from voting in a particular way can be regarded as vote buying.

### 1.2 Election Rigging

Election rigging is an aspect of election malpractices. Only that the former involves some deliberate criminal activities such as writing and falsification of results, snatching of ballot boxes (often with arms), ballot box snatching, voter suppression, and intimidation. Election rigging can occur in the following ways:

- i. Manipulating the design of institutions governing elections to the advantage of one or more electoral contestants in violation of the principles of inclusivity, impartiality, openness or transparency, such as through gerrymandering, malapportionment, over-restrictive franchise or candidacy regulations.
  - ii. Campaign regulations that lead to inequalities among contestants.
  - iii. Lack of observer access to electoral processes.
- (Agbu, 2016, p.92).

However, what most scholars leave out of their conceptualisation of the issue is that election rigging though can involve small and large-scale violence, the non-violent (but more sinister) dimension is vote buying. This is particularly true of elections held between 2015 and 2019. Vote buying was carried out with brazenness

and audacity, in some cases with electoral officials and security agents.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The primary methodology adopted for this study is content analysis. Content analysis refers to the method of “analysing documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner” (Bryman, 2008, p.274). This involves the analyses of “volume of texts collected, identifies and groups categories together and seeks some understanding of it” (Bengtsson, 2016, p.8). This involves the review of news published on five (two online and three traditional) major Nigerian news platforms (*The Cable*, *The Sun*, *Premium Times*, *Tribune* and *News Agency of Nigeria*) for the periods under review in order to draw out relevant information. These five news platforms were selected on the basis of their ease of access, national scope, and relative credibility. The content analysis produced data that enabled the mapping of incidents involving the issue of vote buying by location and date. It also yielded rich data on the activities of politicians engaged in vote buying. The open coding ensures the researcher to present his finding in the forms of “themes, categories/sub-themes, and sub-categories/subheadings, as a table to allow the reader to get a quick review of the results” (Bengtsson, 2016, p.12). Content analysis of the news platforms on the issue of research generated 120 mentions condensed into 3 units of analysis or themes and 20 sub-codes after coding.

Our choice of news platforms as our primary source of data for this study suffers from the obvious limitations of them being inherently biased or partisan. For example, these news platforms may have chosen to cover some particular events and not others, and also portray these events in specific ways, according to various economic or political motives. In addition to this, the news platforms’ reportage of the issue may not be fully accurate or exaggerated for political purposes. To address these limitations, the researcher triangulated these data sources to avoid relying exclusively on one source of information. In doing this, the researcher also collected data from the reports of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which has either worked or currently working as observers/monitors in Nigerian elections, academic journal articles, the Electoral Act (2010) and texts on Nigerian politics and society especially those relating to recent elections in order to minimise the risk of these biases in influencing the outcome of this study.

### 2.1 Interpretation of Data, Analysis of Variables, and Discussions

The large part of this study is based on 120 references or news reports from five national news platforms (*The Cable*, *The Sun*, *Premium Times*, *Tribune* and *News*

*Agency of Nigeria*). The distribution of the issues is as shown in the table below:

**Table 1**  
**Source of Information**

News platform	Frequency	Percent
The Cable	36	30.0
The Sun	35	29.2
Premium Times	14	11.7
Tribune	12	10.0
News Agency of Nigeria	23	19.2
Total	120	100.0

Source: Author’s Compilations from Five Leading Nigerian News Platforms

Table 1 shows that *The Cable* covered more (36 referrals or 30.0%). *The Sun* came behind it covering 35 referrals (or 29.2%). *News Agency of Nigeria* covered 23 referrals (or 19.2%). *Premium Times* on its part covered (14 referrals or 11.7%). *Tribune* covered 12 (or 10.0%). In all, the author ensured that there were no repetitions which meant items were dropped because might have been previously recorded.

Specifically, three units of analysis are generated. The content analysis of the news platforms gave rise to the following themes, variables or categories dealing with the motivations (30 sub-codes), manifestations (32 sub-codes) and effects of vote buying in Nigerian elections (58 sub-codes).

### 2.2 The Electoral Act and Vote Buying

In most democracies, vote buying is considered an electoral offence. In Nigeria, the provisions of Section 130 of the Electoral Act 2010, as amended, states that:

A person who — (a) corruptly by himself or by any other person at any time after the date of an election has been announced, directly or indirectly gives or provides or pays money to or for any person for the purpose of corruptly influencing that person or any other person to vote or refrain from voting at such election, or on account of such person or any other person having voted or refrained from voting at such election; or (b) being a voter, corruptly accepts or takes money or any other inducement during any of the period stated in paragraph (a) of this section, commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of N100,000 or 12 months imprisonment or both (Electoral Act, 2010).

In addition to this, Section 124 of Electoral Act (2010) gives a fine of N500,000 or 12 months’ imprisonment or both on conviction for anyone caught paying money to any other person for bribery at any election. Also, the same section of the Act criminalizes accepting anyone accepting or receiving money or gift, for voting or to refrain from voting at any election with the same penalty as the giver.

Despite the clear provisions of the Electoral Act against vote buying, politicians appear to have been violating it with impunity. The fact that none of those arrested by the Nigerian police suspected to be party agents allegedly with a bag containing N640,000 out on a mission to buy

votes in the course of voting in the Osun governorship election are yet to be prosecuted several months after the election provide impetus for politicians to continue in this nefarious practice (*News Agency of Nigeria, 2018b*).

### **2.3 Party Primaries, Vote Buying, and the 2019 Campaign Context**

In the build-up to the 2019 general elections, it was clear to all that the race will be between the two leading parties – the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the opposition People’s Democratic Party (PDP) – and their candidates. The reason for this is not far-fetched: they were (and are still) the only parties that possess the resources to prosecute an effective campaign. Also, 2019 will be the first time in its 21-year existence the PDP will be going into a general election as opposition. The party was defeated by the current president, Muhammadu Buhari, in 2015. It is not clear yet what role the incumbency factor played in the 2019 presidential election. This is because President Buhari repeatedly reassured people that he had no reason to interfere in the choice of Nigerians but the actions of his lieutenants did not appear to convey that message since the party had previously won five of the seven of the off-cycle governorship elections since 2015 which the opposition said were fraudulent especially in Edo, Ekiti, and Osun states with several domestic and foreign observer groups reporting incidences of vote buying (Nwankwo, 2018).

Both the APC and PDP stood fairly equally on the Nigerian electoral map prior to 2019. Of the country’s 36 states, the APC controlled 22 with geographical spread across the country’s six geo-political zones. The PDP controlled 13 states across four geo-political zones. The All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) is in power in Anambra state. While the APC was in control of the Executive arm of government at the Federal level, the PDP was in the firm grip of the National Assembly (the Nigerian National Legislature). With the APC in control of critical state institutions like security agencies, the PDP controls the strategic oil-rich states of Rivers, Cross Rivers, Akwa Ibom, and Delta which boast of considerable revenue allocations to equally counter APC’s electoral spending, if not outspend it. With both parties having nearly equal capacity to spend, some NGOs refer to it as the leading risk factor in the 2019 general elections.

While there seems to be a large media reportage of the issue of vote buying in recent times, its history predates the return to democracy in May 1999. There have been allegations of vote buying in the electoral history of Nigeria. There were allegations of vote buying taking place during the Social Democratic Party presidential primary in Jos in 1992. Indeed, vote buying was part of the reasons adduced by Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida for annulling the 12 June 1993 presidential poll which was hailed as the freest and fairest election in Nigeria’s history:

Even before the presidential election, and indeed at the party conventions, we had full knowledge of the bad signals pertaining to the enormous breach of the rules and regulations of democratic elections.... There were proofs as well as documented evidence of widespread use of money during the party primaries as well as the presidential election.... Evidence available to government put the total amount of money spent by the presidential candidates at over two billion, one hundred million naira (N2.1 billion). The use of money was again the major source of undermining the electoral process (Ajani, 2013).

Vote buying is not restricted to general elections themselves. There have been reports of huge voter financial inducements during both APC and PDP primaries. Matenga (2016) recalls during the 2014 APC presidential primary at the Teslim Balogun Stadium, Lagos that over 8,000 delegates who participated allegedly made US\$5,000 each from the candidates. Given that more than 8,000 delegates were reported to have attended the primaries, the competing camps could have spent more than US\$16 million and US\$24 million respectively on vote buying at the primary stage. The 2015 general elections followed the pattern of the previous year during the governorship election in Ekiti State, which was won by a candidate (Mr. Ayo Fayose) who was not widely favoured according to opinion polls conducted before the vote. It was a case of the ‘highest bidder’ emerges the winner.

Also, during the 2018 PDP presidential primary in Port Harcourt, it was reported that each party delegate went home with at least US\$9,000 in what is known as “dollar rain” (*The Vanguard, 2018*). This is not restricted to presidential party primaries alone. Aspirants for different positions on the platforms of both the APC and PDP have been said to have engaged in vote buying. For instance, a House of Representatives aspirant for Aniocha/Oshimili constituency of Delta State, Mrs. Amaechi Mrakpor alleged that she was outspent by her rival, Mr. Ndudi Elumelu, during the PDP primaries to pick the party candidate for the constituency in the 2019 general elections. She alleged her opponent Mr. Elumelu bought each party delegate at \$1500 (Osuyi, 2018).

Despite several warning and measures to curb vote buying, politicians still try to beat the system. President Buhari himself was alarmed by the desperations of politicians to financially induce voters during the 2019 general elections with “millions of United States dollars” (*Premium Times 2019*).

### **2.4 The Manifestations of Vote Buying in Elections in Nigeria (2015-2019)**

Vote buying has been an integral element of money politics in Nigeria. As shown in Table 2 below, vote buying manifests in several ways including the offer of cash, purchase of permanent voter cards (PVCs), food items, TraderMoni (a government’s social investment policy), and the deliberate violations of the Electoral Act by politicians. Our content analysis of five leading Nigerian news platforms shows their coverage.

**Table 2**  
**Manifestations of Vote Buying**

SN	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	TraderMoni	5	4.2
2	Food Items	2	1.7
3	Money Politics	9	7.5
4	Purchase of PVCs	3	2.5
5	Offer of Cash	4	3.3
6	Deliberate violations of Electoral Act	1	0.8
7	Use of Smartphones	4	3.3
8	“See and Buy”	4	3.3
	Total	32	26.6

Source: Author’s Compilations from Five Leading Nigerian News Platforms

Recent experiences, however, show that vote buying takes place at multiple stages of the electoral cycle and has been observed eminently during voter registration, the nomination period, campaigning and election day (Matenga, 2016). It is more predominant during election day, shortly before, during or immediately after vote casting.

Vote buying take the electoral system to be like a typical market place where the politicians, political parties, and party agents are the vote buyers while prospective voters are the sellers. The commodity on sale is the vote to be cast while the medium of exchange could be monetary and non-monetary items. The market force that determines the value or price of a vote is the level of desperation of politicians to win in a locality. Although money and other valuables can be used to effectuate vote buying, political actors have adopted two main techniques – monetary rewards and non-monetary reinforcements - to buying votes for election day.

The heart of vote buying is money politics. As monetized as the 2007 general elections were, as reported in the press, voters were paid as high as N2000 (Nwankwo, 2018). However, in the most recent elections, voters were paid as high as N10000 representing a 500% increase in the value of a vote from 2007. Thus, elections are like an auction market where the highest bidder buys the good. The view of Mr Sesugh Akume, the National Publicity Secretary of the Abundant Nigeria Renewal Party (ANRP) as quoted in an article by the *PM News* corroborates this,

Elections for sale where the highest bidder carries the day are akin to a death knell on our democracy. What we have presently is democracy for sale – a democracy that perpetuates ignorance, poverty, violence and underdevelopment. This ugly trend is entrenching the practice of corrupting the system to earn illicit money in order to buy votes from an impoverished and psychologically-damaged populace. This leads to politicians offering bad governance, gaining illicit wealth in the process and repeating the cycle (*PM News* 2018).

During the 2016 Edo state Gubernatorial election, there were reports of large scale vote buying and selling

across polling units especially in Auchi, Etsakor West local government where the practice is rampant, as cash was distributed openly to voters.

The Buhari administration launched the TraderMoni<sup>1</sup> scheme – interest-free loans (of up to N20,000) for petty traders and artisans – in 2017. But the implementation of the programme has sprung up controversies. The opposition has tagged it as one of the means of “vote buying” for the ruling APC. Leading politicians including the Senate President, Bukola Saraki and Speaker of the House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara, expressed worry over the distribution of cash under TraderMoni scheme to petty traders ahead of the 2019 general elections was in contravention of section 124 of the Electoral Act (Shibayan, 2018b). On the other hand, the Vice President’s office (under which the scheme operates) denied allegations that the scheme was meant for vote buying saying: “Nigerians are not for sale and cannot be bought” (Shibayan, 2018c).

Vote buying is not altogether the use of money to buy votes. Things like foodstuffs, clothes, and other valuables are used for vote buying too. INEC raised the alarm of politicians’ attempt to use food vendors as a means of vote buying during the 2019 elections (Asadu, 2019). By this method, a food vendor would save free food to voters – either before or after voting – on the signal of a party agent or the candidate’s representative(s).

The introduction of the card reader technology is said to be the turning point or “joker” in the Nigerian 2015 general elections (Agbu, 2016). This development has led politicians to have found other means of beating the system. The purchase of PVCs and direct offer of cash to voters appears to be their new means of violating the Electoral Act. A group, YIAGA Africa alleged that some voters in the country were selling their PVCs as high as N20,000 in 15 states: Benue, Kogi, Nassarawa, Abia, Akwa Ibom, Ebonyi, Edo, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Imo, Rivers, Oyo and Yobe states (Adebulu, 2018b). Worried by this development, the Senate President Bukola Saraki, urged INEC to find ways to curb the activities of politicians seeking to procure PVCs ahead of the 2019 general elections (Shibayan, 2018a).

It is fair to say that Nigerians aspire for free and fair election (Ojo, 2008). While this could be the case, there is no evidence to the contrary that they are immune to vote-buying—an essential element of electoral shambles in the country. The 14 July 2018 gubernatorial election in Ekiti State, Nigeria is another episode of massive voter buying by the two major political parties-APC and PDP.

<sup>1</sup> This author does not want to be drawn into the argument as to whether or not the Trader Moni scheme is vote buying since the interpretation as to whether the scheme constitutes vote buying depends on what one means by vote buying or one’s moral or political orientation which is clearly not one of the objectives of this paper.

With the deployment of security personnel to forestall electoral violence, one would expect that the election will be devoid of any form of malpractice. While the poll was generally peaceful, the police reportedly dispersed the opposition party, the cry of vote buying seems to portend a new challenge for security agencies.

The peak of vote buying is the security operatives' deliberate allowance of a high level of open vote buying, with the two main parties – PDP and APC - accusing each other of doing “see and buy” implying that the voters have to show the party operative (agent) their ballot paper to confirm they voted for the party before paying. The increased level of vote buying in the recent elections has shown that while the incidents of vote buying have steadily increased since 1999, the money paid per vote skyrocketed in the 2018 Ekiti and Osun governorship elections. In the history of Nigerian elections, the 2007 presidential election which former president Olusegun Obasanjo dubbed a “do or die affair” was the most fraudulent and monetized election.

The popular trend of smartphones among young people seems to have aided the ingenious “see and buy” method of vote buying. Despite INEC's incessant warnings and ban on the use of mobile phones, cameras and recording devices at polling booths to curb the menace of vote buying and selling during election, perpetrators deployed a new strategy of “see and buy” at different polling units in Irewole Local Government Area during the 2018 Osun gubernatorial election (Adeyi, 2018). Both domestic and international observer groups reported the prevalence of the “See and Buy” vote buying method was said to be rampant during the off-cycle gubernatorial elections between 2015 and 2019. The major perpetrators were said to be the two major parties the APC and PDP. They were accused of distributing N3,000 to N4,000 for votes in several polling units (*The Whistler*, 2016; Dada, 2016).

### 2.5 The Motivations for Vote Buying

Our analyses of new platforms reveal that several factors contribute to the rise in vote buying. Some of them are broken down into Table 3 below:

**Table 3**  
**Motivations for Vote Buying**

SN	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	Desperation of politicians	17	14.2
2	Collaborations with security agencies	1	0.8
3	The criminalisation of Vote Buying	8	6.7
4	Weaponisation of Poverty	4	3.3
	Total	30	25.0

Source: Author's Compilations from Five Leading Nigerian News Platforms.

The recent technological innovations such as INEC's introduction of smartphones and similar devices to read

biometric PVCs and electronic tracking of the movement of electoral materials has vastly reduced traditional forms of rigging such as ballot snatching, result writing, and the likes (Agbu, 2016). Hence, politicians have come to realise that falsification of election results in order to emerge winners is becoming counter-productive, especially as the judiciary has also annulled many rigged elections. These factors have contributed to the rise of the desperation of politicians to win elections by trying to game the system. They have, therefore, resorted to wooing voters with money, foodstuffs, clothes and other souvenirs in exchange for their votes.

The desperation of politicians to win elections at all costs tops the list of motivating factors in vote buying. Since politicians operate on the business and investment model, investing their capital in “paying” the voters so that they can recoup their investments seems to be a logical idea. Politicians engage in vote buying because of the promise of enormous power and wealth they hope to gain once they get elected into office. There is also the fear among many politicians that if they do not engage in the act, their opponents will still do so and gain electoral advantage. This dilemma has thus made vote buying a race of sorts, especially among the “big” political parties. Even though President Buhari said he will not approve of the use of state resources to fund in 2019 campaign and engage in “the issue of cash payment to voters” (Shibayan, 2019), there is no evidence to suggest he did anything to prevent his high-ranking lieutenants who appear to do so on his behalf.

Another factor is the high incidence of poverty in the country. According to the World Poverty Clock (2018) “Nigeria now has more people living in extreme poverty than any other country in the world” as at June 2018, which is projected to increase to “3 people per minute” by 2030 (ibid). This means that currently over 86.9 million or nearly 50% of the country's estimated 180 million population living below the poverty line of \$1.90 per day (Kazeem, 2018). With the prevalence of acute poverty in the country, it becomes easy for politicians to weaponise poverty where many people susceptible to selling their vote for immediate gratification. This was why former Governor of Jigawa state and PDP presidential aspirant, Sule Lamido, accused the ruling APC of impoverishing Nigerians and turning it into a weapon which they constantly use to rig election through vote-buying (Osauzo, 2018).

The so-called “security votes” is another factor that has contributed to vote-buying. The “security votes” are monthly allowances that are allocated to the 36 states' Governors in Nigeria for the sole purpose of funding security services within their states (Egbo, Nwakoby, Onwumere, and Uche, 2012). The fact that the funds are hardly subject to legislative or independent scrutiny or oversight makes such funds find their ways into re-election

campaign funding of Nigerian state chief executives. The absence of robust auditing and accountability mechanisms has meant that some incumbents embezzle the funds outright or use it illicitly for election funding through vote buying (Page, 2018).

The fact that it has been difficult to criminalise vote buying means its perpetrators can always engage in and get away. Though security agents arrested some of the perpetrators especially during Osun gubernatorial election, nothing has been heard of the culprits being charged to court.

That security agencies, election officials, and party agents sometimes collaborate to aid vote buying further fuels the problem. In order to seal their protection and loyalty, security agents are usually the first to be compromised by the political parties or candidates. Hence the trade in votes often takes place in the presence of security agents who appear unable or unwilling or too compromised to deter such electoral offences. The fact that INEC has no power of arrest and enforcement of its own rules makes the problem further complicated. Also, the fact that those who engage in the act are almost never prosecuted (even when arrested) encourages many others to adopt the strategy.

## 2.6 The Effects of Vote Buying

The author's analyses of news platforms reveal that the effects of vote buying are still with us. Some of them are broken down into Table 4 below:

**Table 4**  
**Effects of Vote Buying**

SN	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	Arrest of collaborators	9	7.5
2	Condemnation of Vote Buying	15	12.5
3	Denial of Vote Buying Allegations	5	4.2
4	Blame trading among politicians	9	7.5
5	Redesigning of polling units	1	0.8
6	Ban on smartphones at polling units	4	3.3
8	Hindrance of the electoral process	14	11.7
9	Protests of election outcomes	1	0.8
	Total	58	48.3

Source: Author's Compilations from Five Leading Nigerian News Platforms.

Due to the fact that vote buying can hinder the integrity of the electoral process, a lot of eminent personalities and NGOs including the National Association of Seadogs (NAS), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), United Global Resolve for Peace (UGRFP), African Electoral Integrity Initiative (AE2i), Nigeria Civil Society (NCS), Inter-party Advisory Council (IPAC), and the likes have all risen to

condemn the ignoble act in recent times. Some leading Nigerian musicians also lend their voices against vote-buying during the 2019 general elections (*News Agency of Nigeria*, 2019).

Vote buying shuts out candidates with lean campaign budgets. By this, there will be an increase in political corruption. This will mean that electoral victories are purchased rather than won fairly, it obviously leads to state capture. It equally compromises the credibility, legitimacy, and integrity of elections and its institutions. Vote buying undermines the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidders and not necessarily the most popular or credible contestants (Adamu, Ocheni, and Ibrahim, 2016). It often leads to protests and blames trading among parties and candidates after elections thereby discrediting the process (Gbadamosi, 2019). It, therefore, discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics and causes citizens to lose faith in state institutions.

Vote trading equally has a tendency to perpetuate bad governance. It not only compromises the wellbeing of those who sold their vote for instant gratification but also the future of those who did not sell their votes but are inevitably exposed to bad governance that results from such a fraudulent process. For every vote traded, there are many people who will suffer the unintended consequences when the traded votes make the difference between winning and losing in the election.

As a result of the prevalence of the dubious use of smartphones as a means of vote buying, INEC had to threaten to redesign the polling units and ban the use of smartphones as measures to cope with the problem.

The main effect of vote buying in elections especially on the Nigerian general elections is that it will always undermine political legitimacy and make a joke of the Nigerian two-decade of the democratic experiment. In addition to this, it will create a fundamental moral burden on citizens to demand good governance from politicians who have previously bought their ways into offices and the legitimacy of future elections.

## CONCLUSION

While vote buying is not alien to some advanced democracies, Nigeria needs to step up the game by putting heavy penalties on vote buying or selling. The incident of vote buying in some of the recent elections in Nigeria might be a signal that Nigerian democracy is at a critical juncture for future dubious electoral manipulation similar to the 2007 election. Therefore, urgent electoral reforms are most needed to avert an impending political and electoral crisis in the near future.

The ignoble trade in votes that followed the gubernatorial elections in Edo, Ondo, Anambra, Ekiti, Osun states and the just-concluded 2019 general elections

clearly indicates that democracy in Nigeria is on auction sale to the highest bidders. The country has progressed to a reasonable extent regarding curtailing election rigging since 2011, however, vote buying remains a bane to the progress being made. Therefore, there is a need for electoral reforms at this critical juncture to check vote-buying for future general elections. A further amendment to the Electoral Act is imperative to outlaw and criminalise vote buying and selling including any person or group aiding it. Besides, there is a need to improve the enforcement mechanisms of the law to tame the tides of vote buying and selling as an emerging dimension to election rigging in Nigeria.

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