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PERMANENT VOTERS CARD (PVC) NOT AUTOMATED TELLER MACHINE (ATM) THE PROBLEM OF CASH AND CARRY POLITICS IN NIGERIA: WHAT ROLE FOR THE MEDIA?

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ABSTRACT

Anecdotal evidence has demonstrated that vote buying and selling remain a humongous challenge towards empowering the right people who can properly steer the affairs of any country. In other words, the above statement underscores the fact that when electorates sell their fundamental rights to bring to power the right leaders who ensure good governance, they consequently suffer from the outcome of such mistake. Put differently, when voters who could use their permanent voters card to choose the right people into the government decide to exchange their votes for cash, they end up suffering the consequences of such wrong decision. Vote buying or what this study refers to as “cash and carry politics” has remained an issue of great concern in recent time. Sadly, from 1999 till date, studies have shown that most candidates, both in primary and general elections have been implicated in vote-buying. According to reports, delegates in the recently concluded 2022 primary elections were paid as much as \$9000 by the two political parties, (APC and PDP) to persuade them to vote for certain candidates. This type of situation no doubt spells immense doom to the survival of democracy and enthronement of the good governance in Nigeria, the reason being that he who pays the highest dollars apparently gets the highest votes. It is against the foregoing that this paper examines the subject of vote-buying in Nigeria and the challenges it has posed to the survival of Nigeria’s democracy. The paper also explores the theoretical trajectories of vote-buying in Nigeria and expansively provides not only insights, but probable ways that the Nigerian media can lend their voice towards addressing this problem.

Keywords: Vote buying, elections, electorates, voters, media, cash-and-carry politics

Introduction

Elections remain the central and basic platform through which all democratic experiments are carried out. To this end therefore, they are expected to be free and fair; without any form of interference. The above somewhat explains the reason why the word “election” is visibly emphasised in 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Aliyu and Tijani (2020) agree with the above when they note that “the word ‘election’ appeared no less than 150 times in the 1999 Constitution of the

Federal Republic of Nigeria; an indication that it is a very important area of every political set-up” Without free and fair elections, constitutional democracy becomes not only illusionary, but a mirage. Universal standards and principles of democracy require that elections be free and fair. For this to happen, voters’ choice must not be compromised or influenced by financial inducements. Sadly, in the recent time, studies have revealed that vote selling and buying occur at almost every polling unit in Nigeria (Aliyu & Tijani, 2020; Ayitogo, 2018; Danjibo & Oladeji, 2007). They occur in the cities, as well as the rural areas (Ayitogo, 2018, p.23). Sometimes, it is absolutely disheartening that the electorates who have a duty to make use of their voter’s card to determine the outcome of the elections end up selling and/or exchanging their votes with cash. This situation which has lingered in Nigerian political setting over the years appears to be a principal challenge to democracy. The truth remains that until this quandary is addressed, the problem of choosing the right leaders in Nigeria will remain an illusion.

Method

The study made use of data collected through secondary sources that include: textbooks; newspapers, magazines, journals articles and corporate websites. The data qualitatively provided details about the subject matters on vote-buying in Nigeria, cases of vote buying and selling; challenges and consequences of vote-buying. It also explored the role of media in curbing the problem of vote-buying in the context of a developing democracy like Nigeria’s. The data collected through these sources was contextually analysed with conclusions drawn inferentially.

Understanding the Cash and Carry Politics in Nigeria: Vote Buying; a Conceptual Clarification

Cash and carry politics or what Ovwasa (2014) calls “money politics” can be defined as a phenomenon in Nigerian electoral process whereby contenders for elective positions make use of money to induce or sway electorates to vote for them” In other words, the act of vote buying by the above view is a contract, or perhaps an auction in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder (Ovwasa, 2014). Vote buying is a form of bribery that completely corrupts the electoral process. It is a criminal influence of the electoral process. According to Usman, Aliyu and Tijani (2020), vote buying is legally defined as “any reward given to a person for voting in a particular way or for not voting”. Vote-buying is also seen as a complex and undemocratic global phenomenon which cuts across the developing and developed nations (Ovwasa, 2014). In other words, vote- buying is not only a developing countries’ problem, the developed world has also been implicated in the problem. It is on record that such countries like: United States, the United Kingdom, China, Italy, Singapore, Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe Malawi have at one time or the other been involved in vote-buying (Kennedy, 2016, p.123, p.127). Vote-buying has a long history in well-established democracies; it is also widespread in emerging democracies (Kennedy, 2016).

Vote-buying is witnessed at different levels of elections; both at the level of the election of party executives, primary elections, internal party politicking and the general election (Aliyu & Tijani, 2020). In fact, in some situations, vote-buying is suspected to take place even after elections. Cases

abound in the recent time where cast ballot are exchanged with fresh ones to tally with what the buyers have presented in election tribunals. These days also, vote buying transcends the general election, just recently, and across Nigeria, reports abound of vote buying for impeachment activities, for example, one House of Representative aspirant was accused of asking voters to swear with the Quran that they will vote for him before he released the sum of N250, 000 to each that agrees to the oath of compliance (Aliyu & Tijani, 2020, p.40). Another type of vote buying occurs when politicians send their agents to purchase and keep Permanent Voters cards from the uninformed electorates who are ready to sell their PVC for quick cash. Research has demonstrated that top sometimes, politicians are caught with several voters' cards, they buy these voters cards ahead of elections and make use of them during elections to add up to their votes (Aliyu & Tijani, 2020, p.41). At other times, some staff members of electoral bodies have been accused of collaborating with political aspirants to purchase unclaimed voters' cards.

It might be important to note that political aspirants who get involved in vote-buying do not only make use of money to persuade electorate to give their votes in exchange for cash, they also make use of food, money, beverages, clothing and at times, employments (Aliyu & Tijani, 2020). Poverty have always been adduced as one of the reasons that voters trade their votes for a fee. However, Nwabueze (2019) attributes this action not only to poverty but “lack of foresight, the level of ignorance exhibited by voters and lack of awareness on the consequences of vote-buying among majority of voters” In other words, as much as studies have indicated that poverty is one of the main reasons for vote-buying, other reasons have been cited for this.

Vote Selling in Nigeria Politics: How did we get here?

The history of vote buying in Nigeria precedes the return to democracy in 1999. There is an evidence of allegations of vote buying in Nigeria's electoral history. According to Oladapo, Oyewale and Abayomi (2020), “Vote buying was widespread during Social Democratic Party election in 1993” This remains one of the reasons given by General Ibrahim Babangida for cancelling the June 12 election.

The issue of money politics and vote-buying became prominent in the in post-independence Nigeria that is immediately after independence. At this period, the influence was very minimal, especially in the first republic; this was between the years 1960 to 1966 (Oladapo, Oyewale & Abayomi, 2020). Because the strength and approval of the major political parties were essentially enhanced by the ties they had with their people in their regions, the appeals to ethnic and religious sentiments became the most important weapons that political leaders employed to ensure electoral victories. Unlike what obtains in the present time, most of the election expenses were borne by parties from the funds they were able to raise, there were no such huge spending by individual candidates, as witnessed today to win elections.

However, in 1979, the Second Republic saw cash and carry politics grow to a larger dimension, as some wealthy Nigerians who became rich during the Nigerian Civil war (1967-1970) had started venturing into politics; it was perhaps the arrival of these wealthy crop of Nigerian

politicians that encouraged or stimulated money politics (Oladapo, Oyewale and Abayomi, 2020). Abayomi et al. further argue that:

As soon as the military signaled the commencement of competitive politics, Nigerians who became rich during the Nigerian Civil War ventured into politics, some of them sponsored candidates for elective position, while some contested for one political office or the other. There arose at this point, brazen display of affluence and the use of money by wealthy mercantile class.

The situation became worse in 1993 as the act of cash-and-carry politics and vote-buying took strong roots in the political activities of the contestants. The rich actually hijacked the two political parties, namely the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) allowed by the military to restore democracy in Nigeria. At the primary elections that year, the use of money to win party nominations was prevalent, whereas complaints of inducement-trailed the results was hugely reported.

Similarly, vote-buying and selling reached their peaks in the election that ushered in the democratically elected government in 1999 and the subsequent civilian to civilian transitions of 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, when President Mohammadu Buhari was voted into power through the All Progressive Congress Party (APC). Vote-buying was also audaciously displayed in 2019 elections (Agbi & Saka-Olokungboye, 2019). Another period that witnessed shameless, outrageous and extreme level of vote-buying and selling was 2003 election, when the former president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, one of the beneficiaries of the highly manipulated Nigerian electoral system admitted that so much resources are deployed to capture the elective offices. Sadly, most of the resources were channeled into vote buying (Agbi & Saka-Olokungboye, 2019, p.148). From the foregoing, it is clear that vote buying and selling has been around in Nigerian politics from independence, but assumed an enormous dimension in 1993. Also with the return of democratic rule in 1999, this practice took another dimension – a dimension that saw the political candidates and parties spending millions to grab power. Interestingly, as 2023 election draws close in Nigeria, vote buying still appears to be a huge challenge as the just concluded primary elections of Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC), still witnessed enormous vote buying and selling (Chiemena, 2022, p.12)

Cases of Vote buying in Nigeria

From the inception of the fourth republic's experimental democracy, 1999-2019, Nigeria has witnessed different levels of electoral violence characterized by instability, insecurity of lives and properties, vote buying and other election irregularities (Sarkariyu, Aliu & Adamu, 2015; Soriwei, 2017; Ukase, 2016).

However, the degree of prevalence and rise of vote buying in Nigeria was conspicuously pronounced in 2015 and 2019 general elections. The situation was so bad that in Port Harcourt, money politics, vote buying and selling was reported to have assumed a frightening dimension, as some presidential aspirants were said to have bribed many of the delegates with dollars. More than 3,000 delegates were reported to have received thousands of dollars as bribes from some presidential

aspirants ranging from \$2500 to \$9000, an equivalent of the sum of 1.8 million and 6.4 million naira in exchange for votes (Agbi & Saka-Olokungboye, 2019, p.124).

Furthermore in 2015, vote buying was excessively reported during the intra-political parties' nomination process in PDP and APC conventions, the candidates were ready to pay as much as \$3000 in exchange for votes. Commenting on the level of this form of barefaced vote-buying in both parties, Nwagwu, Uwaechia, Udegbumam and Nnamani (2020) have this to say:

The attendees at the convention who numbered up to 7, 214 delegates were alleged to have received US\$5000 from the two main contestants. The delegates were scheduled to get US\$3500 each from Atiku Abubakar group and another US\$3000, each from Muhammadu Buhari group. The accredited delegates that participated in the APC primary election were 7,214. Therefore, from calculation, Atiku's group might have spent over \$14,428,000, and \$21,642,000 expended by Buhari's group, respectively, only on vote-buying, this is excluding hotel accommodation, feeding, and transportation bills that were spent on these delegates at the primary stage. It was a game of the highest bidder emerging the winner.

From the above submission, it is obvious that contestants who do not have huge amount of dollars to buy votes were eventually schemed out of the political race. This act has somewhat remained the major challenge facing the ability of Nigerians to choose the right political leaders in, as their votes are exchanged for cash at the point they are supposed to take the most sensitive decision towards electing the right leaders. In the same way, unsolicited campaign visits were paid to northern and western monarchs with alleged undisclosed amount of money doled out to each monarch. The main purpose for this visits was particularly to buy not only hearts of these monarchs, but their votes (Nwagwu, Uwaechia, Udegbumam and Nnamani, 2020).

The problem of vote buying was likewise enormously pronounced in 2019 as a number of factors played out. For example, the National Leader of APC, Senator Ahmed Bola Tinubu was reported to have driven two bullion-vans into his residence on 22 February, 2019 during the presidential election from where money was thoughtlessly dished out in large quantum to party agents for vote trading (Nwagwu, Uwaechia, Udegbumam and Nnamani, 2020). Interestingly, the picture of the bullion-vans and crowd of vote sellers went viral on the social media. Sadly, till this day, neither the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences commission (ICPC), nor the INEC (the regulatory agency) has deemed it worthwhile to investigate this matter. This might explain the reason why Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu insists that it is his turn to be selected as the next president of Nigeria. It might be worthwhile to note that in advanced democracies, such single brazen act of bringing in so much money in a bullion van for vote buying would ordinarily disqualify Senator Ahmed Tinubu from contesting for the primaries of 2023 APC primary election. But today, through the same vote buying and selling process, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu emerged as the flag bearer of the All Progressive Congress. This form of politics Ojoye (2018, p.18) argues "has remained a part of the problem witnessed over the years in Nigerian democracy, more so, it has remained the bane of country's inability to make the right choice of leaders"

What's more, harping on the extent of vote buying during 2019 general election Sanni (2019) discovered that:

the prevalence of vote-buying and perception that votes were actually purchased from voters placed the south-south highest with 24% prevalence and (76%) perception of vote buying in Nigeria's 2019 general election north-west had 23% (53%); north-central 21% (64%); south-east 19% (73%); south-west 19% (71%); and north-east 18% (52%), respectively.

From the above statistics it becomes glaring that all the six geo-political zones in Nigeria were involved in vote buying during the 2019 general elections. This situation consistently portends danger for Nigeria democracy as the electorates who wields the authority to put in the right person in power exchange their votes for cash. More so, these social menaces seem to gradually cripple electoral processes and largely undermine the efforts of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and different stakeholders in conducting unbiased, free, fair and credible elections in harmony with the desires of the voters for transparent, reliable and acceptable elections (Abba & Babalola, 2017; Adekoya, 2019; Olaniyan, 2020).

Vote Buying In Nigeria and the Position of Law

Vote buying is a criminal offence across jurisdictions globally (Usman, Aliyua & Tijani, 2020). In the United States, vote buying is utterly criminalised. The law against this act in the US punishes anyone found to engage in it.

According to the law in United States:

Any person who willfully gives false information or conspires with another individual for purpose of encouraging false registration to vote or illegal voting, or pays, or offers to pay or accepts payment either for registration to vote or for voting shall be fined not more than US\$10, 000 or face imprisonment of five years or both (Usman, Aliyu and Tijani, 2020, p.20).

In Nigeria however, vote buying is also a punishable offence found in Section 124 (1) (a) to (c) of the electoral Act as amended (Usman, Aliyu & Tijani, 2020). In other words, vote buying is criminalised in Nigerian constitution as an open form of bribery” It is an electoral fraud or offence that Nigerian Electoral Act frowns at. For that reason, acceptance of inducements or anything to either vote or refrain from voting is regarded as corruption. Upon conviction, an offender can be liable to a fine or a prison term. The above position is clearly stated in electoral Act according to Section 130 of the Nigerian Electoral Act, 2010 this way:

Any 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 to 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.

Sadly, regardless of the position of law against vote-buying, it continues to flourish in Nigeria. This explains the reason Usman, Aliyu and Tijani, (2020) laments that “irrespective of the clear cut punishment for offenders or people who get involved in vote-buying, the issue of vote buying has continued to pose a very huge challenge of non-compliance to Nigeria’s electoral process” It is against this backdrop that the authors wonder whether the electoral act on vote buying comprehensively covers and addresses the issue. More so, while vote buying has remained a subject to punishment, the attainment of compliance to this legal provision remains a huge challenge.

Furthermore, Nwagwu, Uwaechia, Udegbonam and Nnamani (2020) argue that:

Nigeria has made remarkable advancement in improvement of the legal framework by consistent review of the 2002, 2006, and 2010 Electoral Act to guide against vote-buying. The identified inconsistencies and potential loopholes in course of application of the law have been addressed by amending the subsisting Act. For instance, Section 90(1) of the Act empowers the Commission to place limitation on the amount of money or other assets which a person or group of individuals can contribute to a political party. Also, Section 91(9) of the 2010 Act stipulates that no individual or other entity shall donate more than one million naira to any candidate or political party but in practice, these laws are not strictly observed.

In contraction however, “Section 93(3) (b) gives political parties the leverage to receive limitless sums above the threshold, provided it can identify the source of the money or other contribution to the Commission” (Nwagwu, 2016, p. 79). Similarly, Section 91(2)–(7) provides 1-billion-naira maximum expenses a candidate would incur on a presidential election; maximum of 200 million naira to be incurred by each gubernatorial candidate at election; the maximum expenses each candidate shall incur in respect of National Assembly election shall be 40 million naira for each senatorial aspirant, while House of Representatives aspirants shall each expend 20 million naira. The State Assembly election expenses shall be 10 million naira per candidate; while candidates for chairmanship election in an Area Council shall incur 10 million naira; and in the case of candidates for councillorship election in an Area Council, 1 million naira shall be the maximum expenses to be incurred (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010).

The legal frameworks identified above are all put in place to curb and accordingly place restraints on the challenges posed by vote-buying in Nigeria. However, it is rather disheartening that in the face of these legal restrictions, vote-buying continues to flourish in the country. Against this backdrop therefore, it becomes increasingly imperative to explore the factors that encourage vote-buying in Nigeria.

Reasons for Vote-Buying in Nigerian Politics

Existing literature demonstrates that a number of factors which include: mix of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, old age, early stage democratization and winner-takes-it all electoral system have

immensely contributed to the problem of vote-buying in Nigeria (Khemani 2015 cited in Oladapo, Oyewale, Abayomi, 2020). Likewise, research has also discovered that there is a relationship between vote-buying and poor delivery of electorates (Adojutelegan, 2018).

Lending their voice to the ongoing argument about vote-buying in Nigeria, Nwagwu, Uwaechia, Udegbunam and Nnamani (2020) agrees with Oladapo et.al, that:

The primary contributory factors to vote-buying in Nigeria are poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy and worsened by galloping inflation. The poor are the most vulnerable segment of the population who, on seeing money or other enticing benefits, do not reason or reflect on the future consequences of the unsolicited “gestures”, they do not hesitate to grab the gifts for immediate satisfaction of social needs, no matter how small the benefits may be.

Sadly, this short-sighted decisions of voters due to low level of education, hunger, and idleness engenders forfeiting their future for wretched lives. Worst still, Nwagwu et al. (2020) argues that “the prevalent impact of the economic recession and intrinsic inflation rate in the country have disvalued the possessions of the impoverished with low purchasing powers and rubbished the standard of living of the poor the more, thereby projecting vote-buying to flourish in Nigeria polity endlessly”

Furthermore, the perception of public office holders, whether elected or appointed as self-centered, incompetent, greedy and corrupt “representatives” of the governed is used as a point to justify the acceptance of money and/or materials as a condition to vote for the person paying for the vote (Nwagwu, et.al, 2020).

Moreover, the nature of politics in Nigeria appears to encourage money politics. The zero-sum game (winner-takes-all and loser-loses-all) pattern of politics places extremely high premium on power, and the institutional apparatus for regulating political competitions is entirely lacking. Thus, creating an atmosphere where political competition take on the character of warfare.

Also the emergence of technological innovations such as introduction of hand-held devices to read biometrics voter identity cards and electronic tracking of electoral materials seem to increase the challenge of vote-buying. Because these electronic devices appear to have vastly reduced traditional forms of rigging, politicians have come to realise that falsification of election in order to emerge winners is becoming counter-productive, they have therefore resorted to enticing voters with money, foodstuffs, clothes and other souvenirs in exchange for their votes (Utomi, 2018).

Similarly, the desperation of politicians who want to win elections at all costs is another factor that encourage vote-buying. Politicians engage in vote buying because of the promise of enormous power and wealth they hope to gain as soon as they enter government. 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 consequently made vote-buying a race of that must be won at all cost, especially among the “big” political parties (Utomi, 2018).

In addition, complacency and complicity of security agents and election officials have also been identified as a part of 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, vote-trading often takes place in the presence of the supposed security agents who appear unable, unwilling and/or too compromised to deter such electoral offences. There is also the related problem of the weakness of the rule of law. The fact that those who engage in the act are never arrested and prosecuted encourages many others to adopt the strategy (Utomi, 2018).

What Consequences do Vote Buying Pose to Electoral Processes?

The paper has so far established the challenges that vote-buying pose in democratic settings; it further argues that vote-buying perpetrates corruption in the political system. This is so because when a candidate chooses to pay for support, rather than compete fairly for votes, they show gross disregard for democratic norms and the willingness to use illegal means. In fact, vote buying obstructs the democratic process by interfering with the right of the citizens to freely decide who will represent them and their interest. This therefore results in candidates with the deepest pockets winning elections rather than candidates who would best serve the constituents (Mohammed, 2018, p.12).

Ideally, election should create a “social contract” between the political candidates and the constituents who voted for such candidates with the supposition that candidates will govern along the lines of their stated policy platforms, vote-buying consequently enables poor governance and therefore undercuts the ability of the voters to hold their elected officials accountable. Mohammed (2018) also argues that “If a candidate believes all they need to do to be elected is to pay off voters and government officials, they will have no incentive to be responsive to issues their constituents care about, issues like: water, sanitation, education and unemployment”

Again, vote buying deters aspiring political leaders from running for office because it suggests that money, rather than ideas or experience, is how to win an election. Such certainly would discourage qualified candidates from running for office, while entrenching corrupt officials in their positions. The above paints a clear picture of what Nigeria is going through today.

Furthermore, vote buying unduly raises the cost of elections and in that way, raises the cost of elections, thereby shutting the contestants with little finances and promoting political corruption. One truth cannot be denied, the fact that when victor is purchased rather than won fairly, it apparently leads to comprise of credibility, legitimacy and integrity of elections (Abdulrahman, Danladi & Sani, 2016). Furthermore, extant literature has increasingly shown that vote-buying has the tendency to increase bad governance. Sadly, it does not only compromise the wellbeing of those who sold their votes for immediate gratification, but also trades the future of those who did not sell theirs, but are inescapably exposed to bad governance that results from such fraudulent process (Abdulrahman, Dalandi & Sanni, 2016; Utomi, 2018).

Vote Buying in Nigeria and a Socially Responsible Media, Interrogating the Agenda Setting and Behavior Change roles of the media.

Vote buying has been established in Nigeria as one of the very worrisome challenges that has negatively affected the democratic process and growth of the country. It has rewarded people with cash rather than those with the right ideological capacity to move Nigeria ahead. This therefore raises a number of concerns and questions. One of such concern is, how can the media help in addressing this problem?

The mass media is noted for its ability to set agenda - political, social; economic and other forms of agenda (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012, p.195). The media through this agenda setting role decides what political issues they discuss and as such, raise these issues to prominence. It might be imperative to probe the extent that the Nigerian media has raised the issue of vote-buying in the recent time, in other words, an enquiry into the extent that the media have discussed, as it were, and brought to the fore this very challenging issue? Ejuo and Nandi (2018) explains that “some media practitioners are sometimes used as agents of propaganda to report in the favour of the government and politicians, instead of performing their watch dog function” Ejuo et.al however argue that “the media is duty-bound to partner with the government and electoral regulatory bodies to enlighten the electorates on the need to reduce or discontinue the incidences of vote buying.” This they argue, “Can be consistently reported, and as it were made an agenda and issue for public discourse” The extent that the media has done this has remained imprecise.

Furthermore, research has shown that there is a close relationship between poverty, election violence and vote buying (Osimen & Iloh, 2022). For the politicians, this is a goldmine as poverty becomes a platform for vote selling and a way that voters who sell their votes rationalize their actions. Nigerians and the politicians are aware of this fact, they recognise that the poor standard of living has driven majority of people into extreme poverty to the extent that they are willing to sell their future for a paltry amount – this therefore has become a behavior; an attitude that needs to be corrected. In order to bring about this modification of behaviour, the mass media as a behavior-change tool can be maximised to address this challenge (Nwamara & Etumnu, 2022a). Brewer and Lay (2010) argues that “there is significant relationship between knowledge, behavior change and the media” The educative roles of the mass media (traditional and social media) not only increases political knowledge but creates understanding about certain issues and inform people. To this end therefore, the media can be maximised not only as an agenda - setting tool to bring to prominence the issue of vote-buying, but as a platform to educate the electorates, who during elections exchange their votes for money on the consequences of such actions. Put differently, the media should make it a point of duty to hammer into the ears of the electorates, day and night, the problem that arises from taking money in exchange for their votes. Sesan (2016) agrees with the position above when he notes that “It is impossible to buy somebody’s vote, but people usually sell their conscience because of greed and when they do that, they end up voting for the wrong people and thus selling their future. It therefore behooves the media as change agents to “re-conscientize” voters on the need to understand the grave implications of vote-buying and as much as possible avoid it.

Furthermore, it is incumbent upon a socially responsible media to accept and carry out certain duties or obligation to the society, setting high standard of truth, objectivity, balance and informativeness, this is irrespective of whose ox is gored (Okunna and Omenugha, 2012, p.206)

Agbaje (2006) as cited in Nwosu and Okeke (2020) agrees with the above view when they argue that:

With the concentration of the press ownership in the hands of politicians whose collective interest is to invariably sustain their political status quo and selfish interest, the supposedly watchdog role function of the media which culminates in the probity and proper accountability of the press to the people is frustrated, making it more or less the mouth piece of the political class rather than the avowed defender of the people

What the above submission brings to fore is the fact that sometimes, instead of objective reporting of vote-buying, especially when it involves politicians who are owners of media organisations, the press chases to overlook such situations, knowing that it will not favour their principals. Such predisposition does not encourage objective journalism which frowns on vote-buying (Udeze & Nwosu, 2020). Against the above submission therefore, it becomes increasingly appropriate for the media to carry out enlightenment campaigns against vote buying.

Moreover, the media are known as agents of socialization because they constantly bring about the right social change needed to impact the society (Eribo, & Fashanu, 2017, p.123; Nwamara & Etumnu, 2022b). One of such social changes that the mass media is expected to engender through their socially responsible reports is that which involves tackling the dilemma of cash-and-carry politics in Nigeria. Although Idowu, Anikwe, & Asekhamhe, (2020) discovered that even though the television medium has remained effective in carrying out the role of sensitizing the public against vote-buying, a number of variables have intervened in their quest to effectively carry out this role. They argue that such challenges arising from compromise from ownership influence has consistently remained a cog in the wheel of the media in fighting this anomaly. A very vivid example of the above challenge are evident when media houses owned by politicians fail to report issues that concern their principals (Nwosu & Okeke, 2021). A content analysis of the alleged vote buying in the 2022 APC primary elections showed that the *Nation*, a newspaper that belongs to Senator Ahmed Tinubu, one of the APC presidential candidates, who was allegedly reported to have released large sums of money to buy his way through as the presidential flag bearer of the APC was not clearly reported (Ndudi & Okereke, 2022, p.56). This situation, therefore, calls for collective effort to permanently address it. In what ways would the media help to curb this predicament?

What Role for the Media in curbing the problem of Vote buying in Nigeria?

Vote buying has been clearly established in this study as inimical to democratic development of any society that fails to deal with it (Ndudi & Okeke, 2022; Idowu, Anikwe, & Asekhamhe, 2020; Utomi, 2018; Mohammed, 2018). This explains the reason why there is an urgent need for massive education of the voters on the perils, dangers and risks involved in selling votes. Therefore, in other to address

the large number of problems raised by vote-buying during elections in Nigeria, it becomes absolutely imperative that the mass media considers the following recommendations:

- There should be a holistic collaboration between the mass media (traditional and new media), the National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) towards developing a strategic framework and policies for effective monitoring of political parties before and during elections to contain vote buying. In carrying out this role, the mass media should as much as possible create awareness on such policies and rules as stipulated by INEC, EFCC and other electoral regulatory bodies. They should emphasize on the implications of heeding to such policies and rules.
- Similarly, the mass media should work collaboratively with Civil Society Groups, especially in rural areas to advocate on the importance of shunning vote-buying, while promoting the importance of applying pressure for the police and other law enforcement agencies to investigate, arrest and diligently prosecute those involved in the act of vote-buying and trading before, during and after elections.
- Since 2019, the National Assembly has continued to deliberate on the passage of the Bill establishing the National Electoral Offences Commission (NEOC), this law when passed would carry out such statutory functions of investigating, arresting and prosecuting electoral offenders, but up till today, the bill has not seen the light of the day. It therefore behooves the mass media to raise, through its agenda setting role, the passage of this bill, which when passed, would to a large extent help in correcting the problem of vote-buying in the country.
- Furthermore, media organisations need to intensify voter education and enlightenment campaigns on the negative implications of vote-buying, they should focus mainly on how this act raises cost of election, promotes political corruption and undermines good governance.
- In the same vein, Electoral Act should be amended to empower people, through citizen journalism, to effectively make use of the social media tools in facilitating exposure of electoral frauds like vote-buying. With this form of technology effectively deployed, political candidates who usually indulge in vote-buying as a way of securing massive votes to enable them win election will be cautious as this exposure will work against them in election periods.

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Permanent Voters Card (PVC) not Automated Teller Machine (ATM) the Problem of Cash and Carry Politics in Nigeria: What Role for the Media?

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