

## **MEDIA ADVOCACY AND VOTE SELLING IN GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** The practice of democratic in Nigeria, like some other African countries, is synonymous with political bottlenecks and anomalies especially with the issue of how to conduct free, fair and credible elections. There is hardly any election that there are no records electoral malpractices one of which is the vote selling. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has been making efforts to improve its conduct of general elections through the means of modern electronic devices but it has not been able to address the problem of vote selling. And as long as the electorates sell their votes, the process may not produce competent and credible public office holders. Granted that vote selling is a violation of Sections 131 to 136 and 177 to 181 of the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria as well Sections 114 to 129 of the 2022 Electoral Act, it behooves critical stakeholders to act in good faith against vote selling from scuttling our nascent democracy. Media advocacy against vote selling is very important towards this end, given the fact that a good number of vote sellers need voter education. The media anti-vote-selling advocacy can be carried out through several media platforms like the cartoon, editorials and features in newspapers. More radio jingles like the votes “Not For Sale” can also be produced to educate the public.

**Keywords:** Election, Media, Media Advocacy, Voter Education, Vote Selling

### **INTRODUCTION**

The democratic process in Nigeria, like some other African countries, is synonymous with political bottlenecks and anomalies especially with the issue of how to conduct free, fair and credible elections (Jumbo, Macaulay, Megwa, Okpongpong, Ukpong & Etumnu, 2022). Scarcely would there be any election without records of electoral violence, thuggery, and wanton irregularities. In a bid to ensure that some of the ugly experiences are avoided, efforts are made by several African countries to adopt modern voting system. Electronic voting machines, biometric identifications, smart card readers, etc. are all geared towards ensuring that elections meet acceptable standards (Gelb & Clark, 2013; Golden, Kramson & Ofosu, 2014; Iwuoha, 2018).

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), stands as the electoral umpire of Nigeria. The Commission has made some efforts that it thinks could help to improve the electoral processes in the country. It is believed that the Commission has been improving its conduct of elections to be considered as the most innovative public service delivery institution in the country (Mike Igini in Majeed, 2022). Among other commendable

initiatives is the Smart Card Reader (SCR) system that was introduced in 2015, though not discountenancing its inherent challenges.

In the 2019 general elections, many felt the polls were below the standard of the previous season. And several recommendations were made by local and international observers from which the Commission has expanded voter access to polling units, the first of its kind for nearly three decades. This was achieved through the conversion of the 56, 872 erstwhile Voting Points and Voting Points (settlements) into polling units, thus led to 176, 846 polling units, beside other laudable efforts, the Commission introduced (Ukpong, 2019; NAN in *Vanguard*, 2022). This also informs the use of Bi-modal Verification Accreditation System (BVAS) machines, in recent off-set elections, which is to be chiefly employed for the 2023 general elections.

Sections 65, 76, 131 – 136 and 177 – 181 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria underscores the essence of being “elected” into public office and emphasises that anyone who must occupy such positions must be “duly elected” as a just mandate. This process can only be obtained through a credible, free and fair election. Often, it is where the candidates and their parties are incompetent or lack the goodwill to win in a free and fair contest that they seek for means to “buy” the votes from the electorates who are willing to “sell” their rights.

There is no doubt that votes could “bought” or “sold” based on the angle from which one decides to look at the issue. But it is more pertinent to consider it from the perspective of the electorate who actually has the right to exercise the franchise or disenfranchise oneself. Therefore, vote selling should be more emphasised. The point to note, however, is that vote selling bears different meanings to different schools of thought based on sociocultural context (Schaffer, 2002b). However, vote selling in Nigeria became phenomenal when the country returned to democratic system in 1999, even if it cannot be denied that there were forms of unscrupulous voting inducement in the country’s electoral history (Okoli, 2022).

There are arguments that if the electorate are well informed of the power of their individual votes and the corollary effects of direction of ballots to governance and national development, they would be more conscious of whom they casts their votes for. It is also observed that voters who are not adequately oriented about an election would not encourage the process (Brennan, 2020). Therefore, it becomes imperative that there be voter education for every general election.

The place of media advocacy in educating the electorates on vote selling cannot be overemphasised, given that it enables citizens to know their rights and privileges, making a case for public good, and build capacity among people. It emphasises an all planned activity that would educate people about issues through the media, even if the knowledge about change is cannot be sapped on a go (CJJ, 2013; Holness & Rule, 2014; Nwamara & Etumnu, 2022; Short, 2016; Bammer, 2016; Dzisah, 2019). The imperative therefore, is to elucidate the place of media advocacy in curbing the menace of vote selling in Nigeria’s general elections.

## **Election**

Democratic leadership is government by the natural consent of those governed, in which election is the building block. It is the process for winning the expected consent when people are allowed to freely decide who would govern them among contesting candidates for public offices (Nwamara & Etumnu, 2022). And for some, “In a democracy, votes are the ultimate currency of power” (*Punch*, 2022), which is obtained during election.

Election is an issue that attracts the attention of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, given that it is the legitimate means of forming a government in a democratic society. And while developing countries are struggling to advance their electoral processes, advanced societies are not devoid of challenges. It is noted that even in the United States, politics is a blood sport because it thrives on competition and conflict (Richard DeLeon as cited in Lavin, 2019).

In Nigeria, though efforts have been made to conduct credible polls with modern technologies, it is observed that the malfunctioning of the devices used, such as the smart card readers (SCRs), its factory faults, unenlightened electorate, and inefficiencies in the electoral umpire all have their place in marring the process (Election Monitor, 2015; Fujiwara, 2015; Dahiru, Abdulkadir & Baba, 2017). It is believed that voter turnout in the last general elections (2015 and 2019), declined to about 47 percent, which was less than that of 1999. However, it is calculated that the aggregate voter turnout to election since the nascent democracy of 1999 stands at 55.13 percent (Iwuoha, 2018).

## **Voter Education**

There are indications that several elections conducted in Nigeria have witnessed twin problems of rejected ballots and declining turnout, such that the rejected votes in the 2011 presidential election for Yobe, Sokoto and Niger States amounted to six percent. The low voter turnout of 30 to 35 percent of registered voters in the last two electoral seasons is also an issue. Where the people are enlightened enough on what and how to do it during the elections, the electoral casualties would have been drastically reduced. Voter education is a form of civic education in which the electorate is made to understand their roles as voters. When, where and how to register as well as cast their votes (Ibeanu, 2014; ECI, 2016; Agency Report, 2021).

Voter education is the process and practice of informing and equipping electorate with adequate knowledge on why, how, where and when to exercise their rights in a political process to elect leaders into public office. It is critical in a volatile political state. Voter education is a critical determining factor for successful elections. In climes where the electorate are not so enlightened, the need for voter education is higher. In advanced societies, the process is improved. For instance, ranked choice voting is perceived to be beneficial for voters because it allows voters to rank multiple candidates without any apprehension of vote wastage or ruffling the process, fostered ballot choice diversity and changed public officials status (Lavin, 2019). But it is more challenging in developing climes.

## **Vote Selling in Nigeria**

Vote selling is a phenomenon that has two broad perspectives. It could be seen from the angle of the politician offering money, goods or services, that is, vote buying or from the

perspective of the electorate receiving the inducement for a franchise, that is, vote selling. From the buyer worldview, three ways could be adopted to woo the electorate through instrumental compliance, where recipient's voting behaviour could change or remain the same because of tangible rewards. Normative compliance could be elicited when the recipient accepts a candidate as worthy or good and obligated to vote for the giver after accepting an offer. Coercive compliance could also be obtained by means of bullying the recipient with fear of retribution if the offer is rejected (Schaffer, 2002b).

Vote selling is a criminal offence under Nigeria's 2022 Electoral Act. Sections 22, 114 to 129 provide strong warning and condemnations for anyone culpable of buying or selling votes during elections. According Section 121 (2) of the Act: voter commits an offence of bribery where, before, or during an election, directly or indirectly, by his or herself, or by any other persons, on his or her behalf, receives, agrees or contracts for any money, gift, loan, or valuable consideration, office, place of employment, for his or herself, or any other person, for voting or agreeing to vote, or for refraining or agreeing to refrain from voting at any such election.

The fundamental point to note is that a vote is a public good that should not be bought or sold and to sell one's vote is a democratic betrayal punishable by law. It has been observed that there are certain factors that inform the vote selling. It becomes more pertinent to identify the kind of people who also engage in vote selling business. People who do not vote easily sell their votes for different reasons like fear of election violence and apathy. Again, not having the permanent voters card (PVC) is an indirect action of selling one's vote because the individual cannot exercise his/her franchise. Furthermore, those who feel marginalised and refuse to take part in election, also sell their votes by their inactions (Babalola, 2022).

Another class of vote sellers relates to those who directly receive material benefits in cash or kind in exchange for their votes. Some of these people trade their rights for the sake of poverty or personal aggrandisement. There are others who are biased to ethnic, religious or any other group interest, who also sell their votes. They do not look at competence, honesty and credibility but base their judgment on parochial reasons.

In other to have the intention of the buyer come to pass, the giver could monitor individuals' vote for post-voting payment or retribution based on recipient compliance or incompliance. While there are different tactics employed to monitor voters, a voter could be given a stolen or fake filled-in ballot in advance, as the voter casts it in and while exiting the polling booth, gives another blank official ballot that was received at the polling station to another voter. The second voter fills the official ballot according to the buyer's preference. This practice is identified as "telegraphing", "lanzadera" (shuttle) and "Tasmanian dodge" in Cambodia, Spain and US/Australia, respectively (Schaffer, 2002a).

Givers could also monitor the aggregate turnout of voters in circumstances where the recipients involve are members of an entire community of electorate within a geographical location. The givers could also adopt the "negative vote buying" mechanism in which the people are given money or incentives to prevent them from casting their votes for an opponent. Or rewards could be given on conditional dispensing in favour of a particular candidate. Any of these processes that are adopted falls within the perimeter of instrumental compliance.

In vote selling, the perception of the recipient could be different from the giver because the receiver might see it as payment, wage, gift or favour. The payment worldview is emphasised when the process is seen as vote business transaction; the wage angle is taken as far as the recipient believes that it is an earning for services rendered, which may or may not generate a sense of obligation or gratitude; while, the gift perspective is seen as coming with no feelings attached. But, irrespective of the coloration attached to vote selling process, there can be specific meanings in the minds of the electorate. The thoughts of the people could bear the impression of threat, especially, if an offer is refused; reparation, to make up for wrongs; influence, to perceive a candidate as being powerful enough to win; and affront, to see the giver as mean and devoid of self-worth.

### **The Media**

The media is seen as the channel of communication that have the capacity to reach heterogeneous and far-flung audience simultaneously with the same message (Oyesomi, Oyero & Okorie, 2014). In whatever means it might be viewed from, either as traditional or mainstream media and new or digital media, the media occupies a place in the society that cannot be undermined in moulding a society into what it ought to be. The first of the two broad classification – traditional media, can also be taxonomised into three forms of print (newspaper, magazine and books); broadcast (television and radio); and cinema (movies and documentaries). The second in the taxonomy, new media, includes internet and mobile mass media (social media, email, websites and internet radio/television).

The conceptualisation of the media as the fourth estate of the realm, besides the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary, places it as the watchdog of public interest and guardian of the people's trust. It also situates it as the mediating agency for information and communication of the needs of the people to those in power. Informed citizens depend on the content in the various media to be equipped on how to go about their daily activities and at the same hold to accountability those whom they have committed their common good (Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010; Snyder & Stromberg, 2010; Aladi, Ohieku, Etumnu, & Geve, 2022).

Much of communication processes in contemporary society is more of a convergence with the media as the fulcrum. For instance, one of the most critical aspects of the society is the control of governance, and the quest to gain political office has remained a public discourse. Political communication is believed to be ingrained with content selection and framing by media organisations; the agendas of individuals and corporate organisations; communication platforms technologies; active and information driven audience; and laws of the society (Fortunato & Martin, 2016). It is the role of the media to work through the communication matrix and educate the people appropriately and call for actions where necessary. It is believed that “media content is the basis of media impact” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), which is one of the reasons for media engagement.

In order to address some information gaps on issues and how the public remains ignorant on important development matters, media engagement is an imperative. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have employed six methods in media mobilisation through capacity building of media professionals, sponsored field project visits, development and distribution of targeted information packages, establishment of media network for population and development, engagement with media gatekeepers, and incentive and award approach

(Fayoyin, 2014). These initiatives have been able to mobilise and engage the media in covering development issues and set the agenda on public issues by means of advocacy.

### **The Media and Advocacy**

Media power in influencing public discourse and shaping policy decisions has gained an overwhelming attention among scholars, not just in the Western world but also within the developing nations (Hurlimann & Dolnicar, 2012; Gibbs, 2010). This implies that the role the media plays or is expected to, cannot be overemphasised when examining the development of a society. This is why it is believed that much skills and persuasions are needed in the work of advocacy (Dzisah, 2019). Media advocacy is seen as “the strategic use of mass media to advance public policy initiatives” (Wallack & Dorfman, 1996, p. 293). This view of media advocacy is thriving on the grounds of public policy that is community oriented and shifts its focus from individualistic to social; personal to political, behavioural to practical and towards policy or the environment. The direction of media advocacy is power gap concerned, which is why it adopts strategic means of changing public policy towards the consideration of the members of society. By this fact, media has an incontrovertible role in the society.

For Berkeley Media Studies, cited in Abdikeeva and Covaci (2017), media advocacy refers to the strategic engagement of mass media for the promotion of public debate to galvanise community support while advancing desirable social change and public policy reforms. Rightly locale in the broad perspective is the specialty that goes with media advocacy and other change oriented issues in the realm of development communication. It is the use of journalism for social development. And this is understood to have existed in the evolution of the press when “advocacy journalism” and the use of the press as a tool for propaganda by those in the polity, was a norm (Waibord, 2009).

Media advocacy is a concept that has always been relevant in several aspects of the society such as social and health related studies, public health, public policy, propaganda, campaign against harmful substances like tobacco smoking and consumption of alcohol; child rights issues, active and mechanised agricultural practices; climate change, political process like election, family planning, water development, and environmental management (Wallack, 1994; Dorfman & Krasnow, 2014; Fayoyin, 2014; Eze, 2014; Oyesomi, Oyero & Okorie, 2014; Abga, Abang & Ugor, 2017; Okaka & Nagasha, 2017). This implies that there is hardly any aspect of human living in need of reorientation and adjustment of attitude, that media advocacy has not played an important role.

Media advocacy do concern itself with rural development. Concerning the level of advocacies carried out by newspapers for rural development and environmental education, Ifenkwe (2008) found out that rural development news reportage was fluctuated between 31.48% and 17.79% in two quarters of the year; sixty nine percent of the coverage was feature story; while the editorials, advertorials and pictorials were 13.04%; 9.27% and 8.38%, respectively. And the call was that newspapers need to improve their advocacy roles for them to be seen as credible information media.

Advocacy communication is one of the key roles the media plays in the society through the various platforms that it employs in reaching out to the audience or concerned stakeholders. As a means of social mobilisation, media advocacy communication would need to be a highly participatory strategy for it to be able to cause change. It should be such that would focus on

mobilising through engaging approaches, local and national dialogue on important issues (Melkote & Steeves, 2015).

The level of activeness of a people, participating in political affairs and offering answers to salient questions is akin to their acquaintance with issues in the society, demonstrates political knowledge. This can be so because there is a level of accessibility to information on government's activities and programmes, which enables the public to play their roles. The people become politically informed because of the political knowledge they have acquired through the media and other sources. Consequently, contribution to social development is a finale (Boudreau & Lupia, 2011; Bathelt, 2015; Molaei, 2017).

Media advocacy is consequential to policy campaign process and the strategic use of the media can bring about sound policy change. This can be feasible when the stakeholders are engaged through media channels, awareness being created and the people being mobilised in positive ways. The media is potent to attract major stakeholders and building public awareness about issues of importance. It is equally important to highlight that there can be robust interaction with critical stakeholders through media advocacy, which would ensure that there is rightful engagement. It is in this wise that media advocacy deals with communication and media processes that spurs policy advocacy campaign. Such media advocacy campaign is critical for the success of any initiative. In order to be successful in any media advocacy effort, there is the need to set in place appropriate frameworks.

### **Framework for Media Anti-Vote-Selling Advocacy**

#### *Media Dependency Theory*

Media Dependency Theory is one of the major frameworks for understanding media advocacy role in the society. The theory is credited to Ball-Rokeach and DeFluer (1989); Wallack and Dorfman (1996) and DeFleur (2010). According to DeFluer (2010), Media Dependency Theory explicates a core principle in the media.

...The relationship among the mass media, their audiences, and the society as a whole and as one characterized by mutual dependency. That is, the media could not exist without the other two components. Audiences are also in a situation of dependency insofar as the media supply their members with amusements and gratifications as well as with useful information that would be difficult to obtain from other sources (pp. 343).

One of the emphasis worthy to highlight in the above is that a relationship ought to exist between the media and the audience because in a civilised clime, the former stands as the means for people to know what is happening around them and how to go about their businesses without avoidable obstacles. For instance, one can think of people who desire to install new government through elections to check bad governance. People look forward to media content to take decisions affecting them per seconds. From the media, the various needs of the audience can be satisfied to an extent. It is in view of this fact that various stakeholders in every society make concerted effort to protect the media in order for it to function effectively, efficiently and meet the needs of the society. Media can persuade behavioural change, not just as a social endeavour (Paola & Cabiddu, 2016).

It is also imperative to note that the media interact with social institutions that also relate with the audience for the purposes of interests, needs and motivations. And the media and its various means of communication are invaluable levers that are crucial in mobilising people for actions, educating over a course and informing of developments in the society. This is why efforts geared towards drumming support for one course or the other have often depended on the media for such accomplishments. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that the level of dependence on the media is proportionately predicated on the number and centrality of the role the media plays in the society (Trenholm & Jensen, 2013; Dzisah, 2019).

Media dependency theory highlights the premium place the media occupies in calling for participatory approaches that address the needs of the community, giving the people the power they deserve and own, which when applied, should transform the society. The media does this by initiating discussions in various platforms on how the issues affecting the people can be addressed, putting decision makers on their toes (Shulman & Sweitzer, 2018).

### **Media Anti-Vote-Selling Advocacy Platforms**

One of the means of the media to reach the people is through radio messages, which has been identified as a very strong means in reaching both urban and rural areas in every society (Nkwam-Uwaoma, Ojiakor & Etumnu, 2021). Radio has been potent in bringing about development in the society because of its strong advocacy potentials. It is seen as a pool of ideas in strengthening togetherness through the exchange of ideas in programmes that educate in areas of politics, current affairs and calls for action. Even farmers have been found to have been well impacted by the potentials of radio in acquiring skills and knowledge (Chapota, Fatch & Mthinda, 2014).

One of anti-vote-selling media advocacy for the 2023 general elections is the jingle is “Not For Sale” performed by famous Nigerian musicians: 2Face Idibia (a.k.a. 2baba), MI Abaga, Teni, Waje, Chidinma, Umar M. Shareef and Cobhams Asuquo. It is an effort by the artistes stand up for a theme song that votes are not to be sold irrespective of circumstance. The essence is to build into the consciousness of the public that they need to take decided efforts in safeguarding the interest of the country at the next general elections (Oduwole, 2022). In its lyrics:

*No sell your vote oh, no matter the thing demdey tell you, no matter how the  
thing dey do you oh, no matter how much money demdey give you oh, no sell  
your vote oh.*

The call is clear, “do not sell your vote”, not minding what the agent would tell you or what would be done or the amount of money that would be given, do not sell your vote. As short and simple as this may look, it sends a very strong signal to the audience, especially those who admire these public figures doing the anti-vote-selling media advocacy. One of the notable influences in the media space, which has also influenced newspaper, is the fusion of concepts that some expressions like media, communication, digital, and information are not used interchangeably. It is even noted that the most glaring problem for media studies is the lack of common understanding of what the subject matter of the field is. Everyone seems to know what the media are and is expected to confront other areas that are believed to be of necessity, leaving the primary undone (Meyrowitz in Williams, 2003).



Bearing in mind that media landscape cuts across print (newspaper and magazine), broadcasting (radio and television) and new media (social media and other online means), the platforms for media anti-vote-selling advocacy then include but not limited to editorial, cartoon, features, advertorial, public service announcement (PSAs), and social media like Facebook. Because of the information driven nature of the contemporary society and the need for proper understanding of developments, newspaper role has evolved to meet the new demands (Khalid & Ahmed, 2014).

Advancement in the communication world has also reflected in the form and style adopted by various media organisations in packaging the dailies. For instance, the days of *Iwe Irohin* (the earliest newspaper in Nigeria that began in Egbaland in 1859) and the *West African Pilot* (the then most circulated paper in the early 1930s and 1940s) cannot be compared with the innovations in *The Punch*, *Guardian*, *Tribune*, *Vanguard* or any of the current dailies. The pictorial illustrations and informed content in *Guardian Nigeria* are apt enough to draw the attention of the twenty-first century Nigerian who is saturated with information glut. Visual media has impacted the newspaper graphics, pictures, colour photographs and display ads.

In newspapering, the editorial is one of the most influential parts of the publication because it serves as the voice of the media organisation on a given issue. It has been noted that the editorial is a platform that explains a subject, event or situation for proper understanding. It is made to persuade the reader to think or act in a different or particular way. Editorials answer critical questions about a phenomenon by means of defence; warns about a problem or danger that has been observed or perceived; criticise the actions of government, a group or persons, while offering relevant solutions to the issue raised. The editorial could be used to congratulate worthy ventures or even serve to entertain readers when there are no burning issues, that is, to relieve tension.

In recent publications, one can see the impact the various national dailies had in their editorial and what they are advocating at the moment. The following were excerpts published on in the national dailies. The leads read:

**Editorial: Stop the menace of vote buying in Nigerian elections**

*Premium Times*, Monday, June 27, 2022.

The recent off-season Ekiti State governorship election was blighted by vote buying, among other malpractices. Vote buying has become an obscene phenomenon that increases in every election in Nigeria without any decisive official response to counteract it. This bodes ill for the 2023 general elections which might end up being decided by the size of the 'bribe budget' rather than the choice of the citizen. Vote buying must be checkmated to guarantee the right of the people to freely exercise their democratic franchise.

PREMIUM TIMES calls on Nigerians to properly see the rather unfortunate phenomenon of vote buying as a very critical impediment to genuine democratic consolidation, which it truly is. The rogue route of political office that vote buying has opened must be closed immediately. Voters who allow unscrupulous politicians to allow them to get into office by means of electoral shenanigan should know that they are throwing away their fundamental rights to democratic accountability through

this selfish act. They, and their benefactors are only fit to be treated as felons and thrown behind bars. The EFCC and ICPC must act accordingly (para.1 &11).

One notable fact to pick from this submission is the point that vote selling is increasing at every successive election season and favours those with impressive “bribe budget”. The call was for Nigerians to see vote selling as a “rogue route” to public office that should be discontinued.

#### **Vote buying and integrity of elections**

*Guardian*, Sunday, July 10, 2022.

The governorship election in Ekiti State in which the All Progressive Congress (APC) party’s Biodun Abayomi Oyebanji emerged as governor-elect was not the best elections a democratic Nigeria could hold. Though considered largely to be an improvement of previous elections conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), it was nevertheless not above the board, having been afflicted with allegations of selling and buying of votes by unscrupulous politicians.

#### **Ekiti vote-buying saga a national disgrace**

*Punch*, Friday, July 1, 2022.

The Ekiti governorship election has come and gone, but the putrid odour of blatant vote-buying that characterised it lingers. Among other malpractices that permeate Nigeria’s discredited elections and its democratic experiment, vote-buying has long featured, but the polling on June 18 broke all previous records in bribes-for-votes. The emerging trend is another fatal blow to the building blocks of democracy in the country. All efforts should be deployed to stop it.

One peculiar phenomenon about these editorials is the fact that they point to the Ekiti gubernatorial election as replica of what transpires in general elections. And if governorship election recorded such alleged vote selling, whether that also pictures the next general election is a matter of concern.

#### **Still on vote-buying**

*Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday, June 28, 2022.

The just concluded party presidential primaries and the Ekiti State gubernatorial election offer conclusive proof of the threat that vote buying poses to the health and continued stability of Nigerian democracy. The proverbial visitor from Mars could well have mistaken the party primaries which held in Abuja and concluded with the emergence of Atiku Abubakar and Bola Tinubu as the standard-bearers of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) respectively for bazaar. Such was the way in which money was discussed, flaunted and exchanged. At a point officials of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) had to swoop on to the MKO Abiola Stadium and the Eagle Square, Abuja, venues of the

primaries of the two leading parties in order to prevent the candidates from distributing money to the party delegates.

That the two leading political parties in the country could subject themselves to open vote selling at the parties' primaries raises much question about the credibility of the process and the candidates that emerged therefrom. It was also good that the editorial highlighted the anomaly by the two opposing parties to give a fair reportage. As a vehicle for advocacy, newspapers are to balance the objective for business along with the demand for objective, accurate and timely information as well as the challenges in meeting government policies in its editorial policy (Khindaria, 2004; Khalid & Ahmed, 2014).

Cartoons have been identified as the most popular entertainment for children in virtually all societies in the world (Sultana, 2014). The interest it captures in the younger generation also have similar take on some adults. But beyond this, cartoons and illustrations have become one way of conveying messages to the society in a near pseudo form. One would easily recall the George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Studies have also shown that teaching practices carried out through the use of cartoons increase students' academic performance significantly (Eker & Karadeniz, 2014). There is no doubt that cartoons have an important role to play in anti-vote selling media advocacy.

Editorial cartoons are also referred to as political cartoons for the sake of the objective they carry out in the society. As satire of political and social developments, they create a sense of humour that could even lighten mood and tension. But most importantly, they serve as historical documents, glimpse of a climate and instructive mechanisms to reach the world. Owing to these, cartoons have maintained their place in dailies despite the advances in technology with the development of animation and photography. In brief terms, a reader can understand a message by simply interpreting the message the cartoonist has conveyed. It is believed that "an artist subtly informs, educates and entertains his viewers" (Adejuwon & Alimi, 2011) through cartoons. One of Nigeria's cartoonist, Mike Asukwo, informs:

Most of the cartoons I do have political themes and so they are strong commentaries on the affairs of the nation...some may say they are a bit caustic and some say it's acerbic, you know. But of course (the cartoons are) humorous whichever way you look at it (Oyekanmi, 2017).

One recent popular cartoon that went viral in the media was the wedding ceremony of President Muhammadu Buhari's daughter, Aisha Hanan Buhari and Mohammed Turad Sani Sha'aban. The cartoon was created by Mustapha Bulama. The wedding took place on Friday, August 6, 2021, with a very restricted audience and was believed to have being of affluence. It was reported that shortly after the wedding, wife of the President, Aisha Buhari, posted photographs of the couple on her Instagram page.

In the cartoon, Bulama portrayed a sketch of the faces of people, representing Nigerians, with mournful and expectant countenances; there were two inscriptions, "poverty" (in front of them) at the position the First Lady is standing and "Nigerians" (above and behind them). The First Lady, standing on an elevated ground surface, behind ASO Rock (the Presidential Villa) and displaying two photographs: "Turad weds Hanan" with a love symbol (right hand) and a sketch of a couple in a traditional attire (left hand). Beside her is a supposed expression from her, "At least you can enjoy pictures". The message is crystal clear that Nigerians are

suffering, while the First family seems not to care about, spending national resources for a lavished wedding.

Media advocates constantly explore promising avenues to convey their message to the target audience. In the print industry, advertorials have also served as a viable platform to champion a course. A special section is identified as “Advertising Supplements”, “Special Advertising Section” or “Special Advertising Features”, which are name flags for advertorials in newspapers and magazines. The concept is drawn from two genres – advertising and editorial – from which the word is coined, using the initial letters of the words, “advert” and “torials”. Seen as “print advertisements executed in the editorial style of the host publication” (Robinson, Ozanne & Cohen, 2002), Zhou (2012) believes that advertorials is more of advertising than editorial or news.

Media advocacy adopts advertorials because of its perceived credibility such as is often witnessed in news stories. Public service announcement (PSA) is also one of the platforms for anti-vote selling media advocacy. PSA is a non business oriented advertisement for the purpose of modifying the attitudes and behaviours of the public through information and awareness creation over certain issues affecting them. This enlightenment process could be through traditional or new media (Dougan & Lee, 2010). For instance, virtually all radio stations in Delta State, such as Quest 92.3 FM, Ughelli; Radio Delta 88.6 FM, Warri; Crown 89.9 FM, Warri, etc. run PSAs and intermittently beckon on the electorate to go and get their PVCs.

One of the means for anti-vote-selling media advocacy is the use of multimedia platforms such as video messages. This seems to be visible in the democratic process of Nigeria. One of the most impactful events in the history of Nigeria’s general elections is the change of power, government and party in the 2015 Presidential election; power moved from President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to President Muhammadu Buhari; from PDP (Peoples Democratic Party) to APC (All Progressive Congress). And according to the former President, one of the significant factors that influenced the election against his candidature was the video message released by America’s former president, Barack Obama. According to Jonathan, “On March 23, 2015, President Obama himself took the unusual step of releasing a video message directly to Nigerians all but telling them how to vote” (Ogundipe, 2018).

The social media and online platforms have been so powerful in recent years as means of media advocacy. The Arab Spring in Egypt in 2011 is an eventful experience that would always be called to mind when the subject of advocacy is concerned. The social media became a juicy platform for change advocates who wanted the 30 years old tight dictatorial rule of President Husni Mubarak to come to an end. The 18-day mass protest in the streets of Egypt was a reflection of the power of social media in bringing about revolutions in a given society (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). And one can only imagine how the social media of recent have been flooded with political messages against vote selling and the mobilisation for the 2023 election, especially by the supporters of the Peter Obi (Labour Party) presidential race, popularly identified as #OBIdient and #ObiDatti. The increasing mobilisation for the elections is likened to the experience of miniature revolution in 2020.

There have been several calls for police reform and the end to brutalities against innocent civilians. The rights of citizens have been trampled upon by men in uniform. The advocacy by different non-governmental organisations to stem the tide harassment and intimidation by

the uniformed men had proved abortive. It was under this kind of frustration that media advocacies were carried out, which led to the national protest in 2020, known as #EndSARS. The means for reaching across to the teeming Nigerians youths in just a short time and drawing the Government's attention was the social media (Ekoh & George, 2021).

Given that advocacy deals with actions that speak in favour of, recommend, argue for a course, support or defend or even plead on behalf of persons who need the aid (Alliance for Justice, n.d.), social advocates employ every available means to communicate their message and draw support from relevant quarters, even the public. In highlighting the place of advocacy in modern times, Sharma (n.d.) notes that "Wherever change needs to occur, advocacy has a role to play". He explains: "Whether you want more funding for a family planning clinic, new programmes to address child malnutrition, laws to make primary schooling accessible or increased attention to a health programme with your organisation, advocacy can help accomplish your goals" (p. 1). Therefore, when media advocacy is the concern of a group of people, it is believed that the means of actualising the goal is on course, given that action is being taken.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The growth rate of vote selling during elections needs to be checked. One of the possible measures, perhaps, would be to get hold of scapegoat politicians who are bent on buying votes. Then, the arm of the law should be allowed to catch electorate who trade with the fundamental rights to good governance by selling the votes. This would help to sanitise the electoral process. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) and other concerned parastatal should live up to their expectations. To be able to do this, there is also the need to increase the level of voter education through every possible means.

Security operatives and INEC officials must be up and doing if elections are to be free from vote selling. There is the need for the electoral umpire to install surveillance cameras at strategic points to record events and if all stakeholders become conscious of such electronic device, they would be more responsible and accountable at the poll. INEC also has the responsibility to ensure that polling booths are freed of the presence of party agents to ensure credible secret thumb printing. There should be more punitive measures, especially, through the establishment of Electoral Offences Commission, which would help in the prosecution of electoral offenders and deter other intended unscrupulous elements.

One of the expected roles of the media is to cause social change in the right direction and the process of actualising this would require that there be information, education, and enlightenment through interaction with those who are concerned. Media advocacy therefore is a means for voter education against vote selling. With the use of editorials, cartoons, feature articles, advertorials, public service announcement, and social media progressive change is inevitable in increasing the knowledge and awareness of vote selling. These means are to be given attention and explored more than ever before, if an impact is to be made in Nigeria's elections.

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