



## Vote Buying as Voter Logistics? A Critical Discourse of 2024 off-cycle Elections in Nigeria

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### Abstract

This paper examined the trend of vote buying in Nigeria, focusing on the 2024 off-cycle elections in Edo and Ondo States. The paper is situated within the theoretical framework of clientelism and rational choice theory. While the rational choice theory explains the voters' decision-making processes which hinged on immediate material gains, clientelism on the other hand x-ray the incidences of vote-buying within the prism of transactional relationships and political patronage. It is a qualitative study. The study draws upon secondary sources, including, online news articles and publications from reputable media outlets that provided coverage of the 2024 governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework serves as the method of data analysis. The findings showed that extreme poverty, institutional weakness, inadequate voter education and awareness, and political patronage increased the incidence of vote buying by political parties. The study also discovered that the pedestrian contingent prioritises immediate benefits over long-term electoral benefits, which accentuates vote selling. The paper recommends stiffer penalties for election-day offenders, including those caught in vote buying. The paper also recommends strategic enlightenment campaigns to stem the incidences of vote buying in Nigeria. It suggests increased budgetary allocation for the National Orientation Agency to enable the agency to meaningfully engage in voters' education and public enlightenment.

**Keywords:** Electoral Act, political elites, political parties, voters logistics, vote buying

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## Introduction

Vote buying has, over the decades, remained one of the banes of Nigeria's electoral trajectory, thereby undermining the sanctity of Nigeria's electoral processes and resulting in the promotion of governance challenges. Vote buying refers to the practice of offering incentives either in cash or in kind to influence voters in an election (Schaffer, 2007). Vote buying is closely connected with clientelism, a system where politicians provide benefits to voters in exchange for loyalty and support (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007), and patronage, the practice of politicians providing jobs, contracts, or other benefits to supporters (Bearfield, 2009). Vote buying has been observed to emerge not only as a political issue, but intricately associated with economic, social, cultural, environmental, and psychological factors.

However, "voter logistics" is evolving in relation to vote buying. In the context of this study, voter logistics is a construct in electoral politics involving the provision of support or services to voters by political leaders, or agents of political parties, veiled under the guise of providing support for essentials such as transportation to voters, feeding of voters, and entertainments either before, during or after the day of elections. Voter logistics potentially serve as a form of incentive in cash or in kind to motivate and, perhaps, influence some of the targeted voters. In some instances, it is presumed that some affected individuals, and concerned political groups, being the direct or remote beneficiaries might view the practice of vote buying as a legitimate or necessary aspect of an electoral process, thus, the construct: "voter logistics".

Ever since the experience of the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria, political observers, analysts, and scholars have called attention to a pervasive incidence of vote buying perpetuated by the political elites, across the major political parties. Despite the rhetorics of good governance under different administrations, Ojo (2021) revealed that political elites had capitalised on the poor economic status of most voters, exploiting their state of poverty to influence voting patterns. The pressure on political parties' supporters at the local government and ward levels as well as at the political units to deliver votes to certain political figures or political parties mostly prompted the agitation for vote buying. As an emerging political culture, the political elites often turn election seasons into a period of financial warfare, deploying both tangible and intangible



materials, including raw foodstuffs, to seek political favour or voter' sympathy. Ojo (2021) considered this scenario part of the consequences of poor voter education, poverty, and challenges of non-enforcement of electoral laws (Ojo, 2021).

The prevalence, trends, and patterns of vote buying in the 2024 off-circle elections in Edo and Ondo States are examined in this paper, along with how the attempt to characterise vote buying as "voter logistics" exacerbates the challenging issues facing Nigerian democracy. The debate surrounding vote buying is critically analysed in this study, along with its implications for the election process's credibility in the country. This study is structured in the following sections: introduction, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, critical analysis, discussion, and conclusion.

### **Concept of democracy**

Depending on the context and perspective, people perceive and define democracy in various ways. At its core, democracy is primordially rooted in a struggle for power among other known forms of government, contesting to rule the minds of people in a given society. Prior to the emergence of democracy as an established form of government, the monarchy was a system held by a single ruler, often inherited power or appointed through succession. This form of government had central decision-making rested on one powerful individual designated as the "king". The ruler required no consent from the people to form a government unlike democracy which often requires general consent of the people through elections to form the government and claim power. Logically, as an authoritarian ruler, a powerful monarch would not result into buying the citizens' minds (a vote buying) to attain the position of power. The aristocracy challenged the absolute or constitutional rights of the monarchy. Aristocracy overthrows monarchy by having power held by a small, privileged class, often based on wealth, family, or social status. In this form of government, decision-making was concentrated among the elites (Heywood, 2021). This form of government was also less dependent on popular consent that might warrant influencing the citizens' minds through any kind of incentives like a vote buying.



Parallel to other forms of government, are the dictatorship and theocracy. Just like the monarchy, in a dictatorship, power is held by a single individual. The nature of power is often characterised by authoritarian rule and suppression of opposition. There are limited individual freedoms and rights while decision making is noted to be arbitrary. Haywood (2021) posited that in a theocracy, government is held by religious leaders or religious institutions with restrictive and limited individual freedoms. The decision-making is guided by religious interpretation.

In contrast to all other forms of government, democracy is considered a more inclusive and accountable system. Democracy is generally conceived as a system of government where power resides in the people (Dahl, 2000). The term “democracy” is well known and widely acknowledged to come from the Greek words “*demos*” (people) and “*kratia*” (to rule) (Olugbenga, 2012). Democracy is strongly linked with the expression of popular sovereignty, a practice whereby citizens elect representatives through regular, free, and fair elections. According to Mosca (1939), democracy possesses the promise of protecting individual freedoms, such as speech, assembly, and the press; upholding the rule of law where both the government and citizens are subject to a fair and impartial legal system; and adhering to accountability with elected officials made to be accountable to the people. However, democracy is challenged, more significantly in less developed countries through the relationship between the elites and the masses, which takes the characteristics of exploitation.

### **Political Intermediaries and Vote-buying**

The relationship between the political intermediaries (*political in-between*) and the vote-buying syndrome is firmly situated in the context of citizen participation in democratic governance. Citizens are expected to engage in the democratic process through voting as a civic responsibility. Ability and the right to vote can be seen as the presumed power that democracy conferred on the electorate or people based on the Constitutional provisions. Voting enables the people to choose their representatives in decision-making. With this important responsibility and the power invested in voting rights, concern for vote buying has emerged as not only perilous for the democratic essence but appalling to its fundamental principles, norms, and essence.



This paper conceptualises political intermediaries in democratic practice as the groups and individuals who serve as the "in-between" of the government, political office holders, or top political hierarchy, and the masses or electorate. Political intermediaries often operate behind the scenes, influencing political decisions, shaping public opinion, and mobilising support for politicians, parties, or policies. Vote buying in Nigeria's democratic system has been described as profound and gargantuan. The prevalence of vote buying not only reduces the credibility of elected representatives across the legislatures and executive branches, but it also results in poor policy implementation because these leaders often prioritise the interests of their financiers over those of the public. Additionally, the culture of vote buying is ascribed to poor governance as elected leaders may feel no obligation to be accountable to the people and encourage corruption in government.

Tracing the trajectory of vote buying in Nigeria, Ekanem (2023) observed that the 2023 general election in the Biase local government area of Cross Rivers State was marred by significant vote buying, providing validity to the rational choice premise. Ekanem affirmed that a significant population in the local government area was exposed to harsh economic challenges, with little option when confronted with vote buying than to engage in a cost-benefit analysis of immediate rewards. Some, according to the researcher, chose to fall for vote buying due to their prevailing economic circumstances. Thus, the image of the election system hinges on a transactional approach, thereby prolonging a cycle of poverty and poor governance as political parties and candidates exploit structural inequities to advance their interests (Ekanem, 2023).

Transactional voting has a detrimental effect on Nigeria's image and electoral system, according to a 2022 Chatham House report on the phenomena of vote transactions and the country's overall perceptions of democracy. According to the Chatham House (2022) analysis, vote buying and selling may provide voters with temporary financial satisfaction, but they also seriously jeopardize the general welfare of the populace by eroding the foundations of legitimate elections. Another point of reference is the Ekiti State governorship election. Ajayi (2022) observed that the election was fraught with widespread vote buying, and the experience was a pointer to the experiences in many other states in Nigeria. According to Ajayi (2022), there were



reported cases of party agents openly offering huge amounts of money to voters in return for their votes. This disturbing tendency not only weakens the integrity of the balloting process but also erodes public confidence in democratic institutions. The culture of vote buying was described as one of the consequences of innate apathy towards public institutions and a general lack of trust in politicians fulfilling their promises. The process of vote buying in Nigeria often passes through many stages, including the period of political rallies, campaigns, party primaries, and political meetings before cumulating events witnessed on election day. Ojo (2023) noted that politicians depend on patronage to maintain their relevance and authority and elections are avenues for politicians to contest for financial supremacy rather than ideology. Politicians with the resources, in some instances, earmarked huge funds to their constituents for vote buying as part of the budget for logistics in election. Umar and Abdulahi (2023) opined that a soft spot for vote buying in the socio-political setting may encourage the act to become part of a political norm in the electoral processes.

Although Nigeria's Electoral Act of 2022 criminalises vote buying, the non-implementation of electoral regulations remains a challenge as a result of a lack of enforcement occasioned by institutional weakness. The judicial system and law enforcement agencies often show a lack of capacity or political will to address the challenge. Aliyu, Adamu and Eze (2023) argue that those who engage in vote buying often evade responsibility and arrest, which incentivises the political class to persist in electoral misconduct. The failure to hold perpetrators of electoral misconduct accountable has created a climate of impunity, resulting in an absence of public confidence in the electoral system. The interaction between politicians and their constituents is defined by clientelism, where voters expect monetary inducements in return for their votes. Eze, Ibrahim and Olumide (2022) argued a lack of political enlightenment and literacy is responsible for the manipulation of voters by the political class, exploiting their ignorance. Uchenna (2023) posited that stemming the culture of vote buying would involve a unified and comprehensive approach from relevant stakeholders like electoral institutions, civil societies, and the judiciary.



### **Factors promoting vote buying in Nigeria**

Political, socio-economic, and weak institutional factors collectively drive the incidences of vote buying in Nigeria. The combination of these factors compromises the sanctity and integrity of Nigeria's political progression. Widespread poverty and economic challenges exacerbate these challenges, making poor voters vulnerable to financial incentives for their votes. Awofeso and Iraborr (2021) noted that poverty has created a perception among many voters that elections serve only as a short-term avenue for immediate gains and temporary alleviation of poverty, rather than providing long-term dividends of democracy.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the uneven implementation of Nigeria's electoral laws may contribute to the proliferation of vote buying. The 2022 Electoral Act explicitly criminalises vote buying, but institutional weakness hinders its enforcement. Law enforcement agencies and the courts seem to lack the capacity and political will to bring the perpetrators of electoral offences to justice. This apparent lack of capacity and willingness to decisively address the actions of vote sellers and buyers encourages further impunity among political elites. Aliyu, Adamu and Eze (2023) noted that in most cases, political offenders evade responsibility, which encourages the political class to continue engaging in electoral misconduct. An environment that promotes impunity and irresponsibility greatly undermines public trust.

It is a truism that the relationship between political patronage and clientelism serves to incentivise the occurrence of vote buying in Nigeria. It is also true that the political environment of Nigeria is greatly driven by the dynamics of transactional politics, where the political class regards funds allocated for vote buying and voter inducement as election logistics. As noted by Ojo (2023), the average Nigerian politician depends on patronage to advance their political fortunes, thereby turning political contests into avenues for financial supremacy. The idea of political contestation driven by ideas and debates takes the back burner. Inadequate voter education also contributes to the prevalence of vote buying, particularly in rural areas. Eze, Ibrahim and Olumide (2022) stated that the paucity of satisfactory voter education renders voters amenable to manipulation by politicians. According to Omojuwa (2025), the country's ruling



class is uninterested and nonchalant about public enlightenment, thereby deliberately underfunding the National Orientation Agency (NOA). 0

### **Theoretical underpinnings**

This paper adopted the clientelism and rational choice theory to explain vote buying in Nigeria, considering the political and socioeconomic environment. The theories of Clientelism and Rational Choice best explain the continued prevalence of vote buying in Nigeria, especially when the logistics of voters are considered. Clientelism explains the reasons that motivate political elites to buy votes. According to Stokes (2023), clientelism theory explains how political actors and gladiators use vote buying as a strategy to secure votes in an environment plagued by weak institutions and poverty. On the other hand, Rational Choice theory provides a clear explanation of the behaviour of the average Nigerian voter by highlighting the free choice of voters who intentionally decide to accept incentives to address logistical challenges (Ibrahim& Yusuf, 2023).

Both theories are pertinent for understanding the prevalence of vote buying in Nigeria. Edward Banfield laid the foundation for the development of Clientelism in 1958 in his work, "*The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*," Banfield (1958) developed the concept of "Amoral Familism," arguing that poverty prevails when individuals prioritise their family interests over those of the broader society. The theory further posits that transactional considerations are drivers for political relationships. In this sense, according to Stokes (2023), political figures or elites provide material and financial benefits with the intent of winning the loyalty of citizens. This theory aptly explains the vote selling and buying within the Nigerian political environment. The Nigerian state's inability to provide basic essential services to the people remains a concern. Consequently, the political elites take advantage of the stark poverty of the pedestrian contingents to offer vote bribes to assuage the immediate hunger of the poor masses in return for their votes.

Ojo (2024) also noted that clientelism is exacerbated in fragile political environments, where a significant number of poor individuals view elections as opportunities for immediate financial gains. Adeleke (2023) opined that providing transport allowances and food packages motivates



voters to participate in elections. Thus, the theory of clientelism provides a graphical framework that aptly plots the persistent occurrence of vote buying. The mutual benefits for both sellers and buyers of votes can also be explained within the framework of the theory. On the other hand, Rational Choice Theory, according to Downs (1957), explains that decisions made by individuals are reached after careful consideration of costs and benefits. Milton Friedman first proposed the theory in 1953, drawing inspiration from economics. Friedman (1953) explained how rational choice influences decision-making in situations of uncertainty.

The Rational Choice Theory explains the voter's decision-making process by clarifying why voters prioritise immediate gains over long-term advantages, especially in light of economic challenges and institutional weaknesses. We cannot confine the persistent occurrence of vote buying solely to the realm of corruption. The tenacious occurrence of vote buying is a consequence of the systemic challenges and barriers that hinder the participation of voters in the electoral process. In other words, the average Nigerian voters assess the costs connected with participating in elections, such as transport costs, time, and other economic considerations, against the immediate gains offered by politicians. Some individuals are likely to abstain from voting when the costs of doing so exceed the expected gains. According to Ibrahim and Yusuff (2023), voters regard vote buying as a solution to their logistical challenges within the context of their economic impediments. From the average voter's viewpoint, the immediate material benefit is more tangible than the abstract promises of the Nigerian politician (Uche, 2023).

## **Methodology**

This is qualitative research. The study draws upon secondary sources, including, online news articles and publications from reputable media outlets that provided coverage of the 2024 governorship elections in Edo and Ondo State. Also, peer-reviewed journal articles and research papers that investigate vote buying and electoral politics in Nigeria were analysed. In addition, reports from the civil society organisations that monitored the 2024 elections and documented instances of vote buying formed part of the secondary sources of data. The study employs a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to examine the narrative structures used to describe vote buying in the secondary data sources.



### Contextualising vote buying in the 2024 off-cycle elections in Edo and Ondo States, Nigeria

**Table 1: 2024 off-circle election in Edo State**

Vote Buying Instances	Owan-East LGA		
	Etsako-West LGA		
	Egor, Oredo and Owan-West LGAs		
Amount Offered	N10,000	N5,000	
Arrests	EFCC arrests		
Observation	CSOs observations:		
Reactions	LP candidate		
	APC candidate		
Themes 1	Prevalence of Vote Buying:	Widespread vote buying was reported across several polling units	
Themes 2	Amount Offered:	Different amounts are offered to voters, including cash and goods (bread)	
Themes 3	Stakeholder Reactions/Civil Society Observation:	Mixed reactions from stakeholders, with some	Vote buying undermines the integrity of the electoral



condemning vote buying and others denying involvements	process
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Source: Media Reports, 2024

**Table 2: 2024 off-circle election in Ondo State**

Vote Buying Instances	Okitipupa LGA		
	Odigbo LGA		
	Ese-Odo LGA		
Amounts offered	N10,000	N5,000	N3,000
Arrests			
Observation	CSOs observations:	Yiaga Africa	Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD)
Reactions	PDP		
	APC		
Themes 1	Prevalence of Vote Buying:	Widespread vote buying was reported across several polling units	
Themes 2	Amount Offered:	Different amounts are offered to voters, including cash and	



**Themes 3**

	goods (bread)	
Party Involvement/Observation:	Major political parties allegedly involved in vote-buying	The Civil Society reported vote buying, highlighting its impact on the electoral process

*Source: Media Reports, 2024*

**Analysis**

The 2024 Edo gubernatorial election took place on September 21, 2024, and that of Ondo on November 16, 2024. However, the gubernatorial election in Edo State, South-South of Nigeria, was reportedly characterised by vote buying as can be deduced from the data above. To gain an electoral advantage in the election, some stakeholders noticed that the representatives' political parties were offering voters monetary incentives (Onozure, 2024). According to Bamidele (2024), the Centre for Journalism and Development believed that there were numerous instances of vote buying, intimidation of poll workers, vote manipulation, and "substantial irregularities that compromised the integrity of the electoral process" during the Edo gubernatorial election. For instance, the Labour Party's candidate, voiced discontent with the election process, calling it an articulate attempt at a transactional electoral process (Ugweuzu, 2024).

Delibi (2024) noted that vote buying and the dissemination of false information were hallmarks of the Edo State gubernatorial elections with party agents offering between N5,000 and N10,000 to voters. Similarly, Yiaga Africa documented instances of vote buying in Edo state:

YIAGA Africa, a non-profit organisation promoting participatory democracy, on Saturday, in its report, disclosed instances of vote buying in the Edo State governorship election at different polling units. It highlighted Ikpoba/Okha, Igueben, Esan West, Akoko Edo, Owan West, and Uhunmodi Local Government Areas as part of the areas where vote buying took place (Olufemi, September 21, 2024).



The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and Yiaga Africa condemned the many instances of vote buying in the 2024 Ondo State gubernatorial election in South-West of Nigeria (Bamigbola, 2024). According to Yiaga Africa's findings, the primary players in the widespread practice of vote buying in the Ondo election were politicians and political party operatives. The results showed that Nigeria's vote-buying culture compromised the fairness of the country's election system. It was insinuated that vote trading was partly responsible for the high turnout in the 2024 Ondo gubernatorial election. Scholars claim that financial incentives played a role in some voters' decision to attend the polling places and participate in the distribution (Olamide, (2024).

According to Akinselure, Dada, and Habib (2024), political party agents had started hoarding money in private homes some days prior to the Ondo State gubernatorial elections in order to purchase votes on election day. According to some reports, at least N20,000 was set aside for the purchase of a vote, while other sources said that there were substantial financial transactions during the governorship race. The offer was significantly lower in several cases. Vote buying occurred during the Ondo State gubernatorial election, according to Gbadamosi (2024). For instance, it was stated that voters in the Akoko area publicly showed their thumb-printed ballot papers to political party representatives positioned at key points across the polling stations to express their preferences. According to Gbadamosi (2024), votes were purchased for between N2,000 and N30,000 each, supporting the findings of Akinselure, Dada, and Habib (2024).

## **Discussion**

Vote buying is not merely a singular issue but rather a reflection of socio-economic and political undercurrents (Umar &Abdulahi, 2023). Financial support under the guise of any name, including logistics, plays a crucial role in the success of electoral processes. Generally, effective management of funds and resources is considered essential for conducting free, fair, and transparent elections (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2018). Significantly, election administration requires adequate funding to ensure the smooth operation of electoral processes, including voter registration, polling, and vote counting (Electoral Commission of Nigeria, 2020). Campaign financing also enables political parties to reach voters and sell their



candidates (Schaffer, 2007). Additionally, voter education initiatives rely on funding to inform citizens about the electoral process, voting procedures, and the importance of participation (IDEA, 2019).

Funding elections and funding the voters has become a critical issue in Nigeria's democracy. In an ideal democratic setting, elections are expected to be free, fair, and reflective of the will of the people. Citizens are supposed to exercise their franchise based on informed choices, with candidates presenting their policies and visions to the electorate. However, as findings indicated, one of the major challenges undermining the integrity of elections in Nigeria is vote buying, a practice where voters are induced to cast their ballots in favour of a particular candidate in exchange for money, goods, or other forms of compensation. The 2024 governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States were no exception to this trend.

According to Kesselman, Krieger and Joseph (2019), the government and the ruling class play a central role in economic decision-making, which affects the generality of Nigerians. Most of the nation's incomes and revenues are centrally controlled by the government, thereby making the people substantially dependent on the goodwill of government officials and representatives to promote and fulfill their own economic needs. On one hand, the political class forms layers of strata, often seen as politically opaque, to act as a political intermediary between them and the people. As a result, the electorate is disconnected from a direct opportunity to assess, gauge, and monitor the activities of government without manipulation by the "political in-between". On the other hand, those who had climbed the ladder to the cocktail of governance would prefer to maintain their positions of authority without necessarily passing through the stress of making further direct consultation with the masses or wasting their time engaging directly with voters to secure their votes and consent to continue in governance.

According to Plato, democracy is a repudiation of the principle of criterion. Plato held the view that citizens have rights to partake in governance but contended that the rights must match capacity. He believed that the ordinary person has neither the knowledge nor the natural acumen requisite for governance (Anowai, 2019). It appears that the prevalence of vote selling and vote buying justifies Plato's philosophy and validates his argument that they were not intelligent



enough to understand the value, and significance of their votes, thus necessitating their selling it. The electorate, as the vote seller, is as guilty as the elites, as the vote buyer, in the sense, that both parties disregard the fundamental purpose of democracy due to economic and political interests. The masses who engage in vote selling are guilty of a lack of understanding of the value of the power bestowed upon them by the principles of democracy. The masses engaging in vote selling failed to realise that it was an elitist strategy to sever them from being the source of power. The struggle for power between the *big threepower centres* (monarchy), (aristocracy) and (democracy) is lost by the masses when their votes no longer count through the act of vote buying. By way of explanation, it stands to reason that if the political elites wrestle the power mantle among themselves and acquire power through vote buying, the consent of the masses as a majority is no longer considered a fundamental requirement for winning elections. The masses must accept the consequences of their ignorance of democracy. Worrisome is the notion and argument by some political observers that vote buying could be justified if constructed as a form of incentive and financial motivation, thus, as a *voter logistics*.

The Nigerian political class views vote buying as a practical method to enhance voter participation; however, this practice is completely inconsistent with democratic best practices. While some in the political class see vote buying as voters' logistics, like covering the cost of transportation and easing the economic challenges of voters during elections, the practice flies in the face of democratic tenets. The purpose of elections is to reflect the aspirations and will of the majority. Reducing this issue to mere transactions cannot be sustained or represented on the scale of free choice. Characterising vote buying as "voter logistics" presents an anomalous and critical inadequacy in the contextualisation of a good electoral system. The Nigerian political system, bedevilled by inadequate voter support mechanisms, including robust voter education and poor transportation networks, accentuates the incidence of vote-buying. The political class exploits these systemic failures to present vote buying as a means for vulnerable individuals to gain access to political offices. The consequences of these behaviours by the Nigerian political class engender continuous dependence of the majority vulnerable on the former, therefore making elected officials less accountable to the people, but to those that financed their elections.



Vote buying accentuates the disparity in the socio-economic conditions of Nigerians. Vote buyers target the poor and vulnerable, exploiting their financial challenges to lure them into compromising the integrity of the voting process. This enthrone, to a large extent an environment lacking in positive values. The downside is the enthronement of a culture that prioritises immediate gains over long-term political benefits. Vote buying establishes a governance structure that prioritises massive corruption and patronage instead of tangible development.

Stemming vote buying as voters' logistics will require a multi-pronged approach. The need to introduce funding for voter subsistence has become imperative, including the setting up of an independent body charged with the responsibility of monitoring the campaigns by the political parties in addition to strict implementation of the anti-corruption laws about the electoral processes. There is also the need to empower the voters through proper civic education and also a deliberate and conscious effort to avoid the weaponising of poverty by the governing elite. Closer collaboration between civil societies and the media is imperative, as it will illuminate and expose the evils of vote buying. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a critical examination of Nigeria's electoral strategies to address unwholesome electoral practices and protect the sanctity and tenets of democracy.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Nigerian political class, having perfected the habit of vote-buying, has become emboldened as a result of the inadequate punishment for the offences of bribery enshrined in the 2022 Electoral Act as amended. For example, Section 126(1) which speaks to offences on the day of the election did not out rightly list vote selling and buying as one of the offences among the twelve so listed. Even the penalty for offences committed on election day is a hundred thousand naira (N100,000) or twenty-four months' imprisonment. This is akin to a slap on the wrist. The absence of specific mention of vote buying as an Election Day offence, combined with the light penalty for electoral offences, has largely emboldened the political class to persist in the nefarious activities of vote buying. It is recommended, therefore, that Section 126(1) of the 2022 Electoral Act be amended to include the act of vote-selling and buying as an election-day



offence. The Electoral Act should be amended to impose life imprisonment without the option of a fine for election-day offences, including vote selling and buying.

Enlightenment of voters is a necessary element in the quest to stem the incidences of vote buying in Nigeria. It is imperative that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) collaborates with civil society groups and the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to educate voters, particularly those in rural and urban areas, about the hazards of vote buying. These initiatives should incorporate traditional and religious leaders to enlighten the people about the dangers of votebuying.

This paper also suggests increasing the budgetary allocation to adequately fund the National Orientation Agency (NOA). It is suggested that the eight billion naira set aside for the Ministry of Power for awareness programs in the 2025 approved budget be transferred to the NOA so enable the Agency to effectively educate voters, as there is an urgent need for the Agency to have enough trained staff and proper resources in every electoral ward of the country.

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