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# Effect of Vote Buying on Election Credibility During the 2023 Gubernatorial Elections in Taraba State

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**Abstract**

This study investigates the prevalence, methods, and impacts of vote buying during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey research design, the study aimed to examine respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions regarding vote buying. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire from a sample of 390 respondents, selected through a multi-stage sampling technique across three senatorial zones in Taraba State. The sample included voters who had participated in the election, with purposive sampling used to ensure representation. The findings reveal that vote buying was a widespread issue, with financial and material incentives, such as cash and gifts, being the primary methods employed by politicians. The study identified several factors contributing to the prevalence of vote buying, including economic hardship, lack of political education, weak enforcement of electoral laws, and low trust in political institutions. Furthermore, the practice of vote buying significantly influenced voters' decisions, with many indicating that financial inducements swayed their voting choices. The study concludes that vote buying undermines the integrity of the electoral process and has serious implications for democratic governance in Nigeria. The researcher


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recommends strengthening electoral laws, enhancing voter education, addressing economic inequality, and promoting transparency in campaign financing to reduce the prevalence of vote buying in future elections.

**Keywords**: Vote Buying, Election, Election credibility, 2023 Gubernatorial election, Taraba State

## INTRODUCTION

When Nigeria attained political independence from Britain in 1960 under a democratic parliamentary system, there was great optimism about its potential to lead other African nations in democratic governance, given its size, resources, and population. However, despite over six decades of independence, the country has struggled to institutionalise democratic principles, particularly in conducting credible elections that truly reflect the will of the people. Elections, which should serve as the cornerstone of democracy, have been marred by various irregularities, including electoral violence, rigging, and, more prominently, vote buying (Gberevbie, 2014). This persistent challenge has raised serious concerns about the credibility of Nigeria's electoral process.

Historically, Nigeria's political landscape has been turbulent, marked by multiple military coups largely attributed to electoral fraud and governance failures. Between 1966 and 1993, the country witnessed seven successful coups, each disrupting civilian governance and further delaying democratic consolidation (Ikelegbe, 2005). The return to civilian rule in 1999 was seen as a significant milestone in Nigeria's democratic journey, but the persistence of electoral malpractice, particularly vote buying, continues to undermine democratic sustainability. Despite the absence of military interventions since 1999, political contests remain heavily influenced by financial inducements rather than genuine democratic participation (Ferreira, 2009).

Vote buying has become an entrenched strategy in Nigeria's electoral process, posing a significant threat to election credibility. Onapajo, Francis, and Okeke-Uzodike (2015) argue that vote buying is not merely an isolated occurrence but a systemic issue influenced by socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors. While money in politics is not inherently negative, as it facilitates campaign logistics such as mobilization, printing of materials, and organization of rallies, its corrupting influence when used to manipulate voter choices remains a major concern. In Taraba State, as observed in the 2019 and 2023 elections,

politicians distributed cash, foodstuffs, and other material goods to electorates, significantly compromising the integrity of the electoral process. Instead of engaging in policy-driven debates or presenting viable manifestoes, political actors focused on financial inducements, reducing elections to mere transactions rather than a democratic exercise (INEC, 2019). Thereby undermining the credibility of elections.

Election credibility hinges on free and fair voting processes, where outcomes are determined by the electorate's informed choices rather than financial influence. Nnoli (2006) asserts that elections, when conducted transparently, not only entrench democracy but also confer legitimacy on elected leaders, institutions, and policies. However, when vote buying becomes a decisive factor in electoral outcomes, it raises fundamental questions about the quality of democracy in Nigeria. Obayori (2009, p. 17) emphasises that "all democracies in modern time must be participatory," yet growing voter apathy in Nigeria suggests widespread disillusionment with the electoral process. Many citizens believe their votes no longer count, as the highest "bidder" often secures power, regardless of competence or public trust. This perception undermines electoral choices and could jeopardise Nigeria's democratic future if left unchecked. This study, therefore, examined the effect of vote buying on election credibility during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Taraba State.

**Statement of the Problem**

The credibility of elections is a fundamental pillar of democracy, ensuring that leaders emerge through a transparent and fair process that reflects the true will of the electorate. However, in Nigeria, electoral credibility has been repeatedly compromised by various forms of malpractice, with vote buying emerging as a major challenge. Vote buying, a form of political bribery and corruption, distorts the democratic process by prioritising financial influence over merit, competence, and public service. Instead of elections being determined by sound policies, governance capacity, and public trust, they are often reduced to transactional affairs where votes are exchanged for money or gifts. This practice weakens political accountability, as elected officials, having secured their positions through financial inducements rather than genuine electoral support, may feel less obligated to serve the interests of the people.

Furthermore, the prevalence of vote buying fuels voter apathy, as many citizens lose confidence in the electoral system, believing that their votes do not matter unless they

receive financial benefits. If this trend persists, it could erode democratic principles, undermine good governance, and further entrench corruption in Nigeria's political landscape. Given the significance of free and fair elections to democratic consolidation, this study sought to examine the effect of vote buying on the credibility of the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State.

**Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent was vote buying carried out during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State?
2. What methods were employed by politicians to buy votes in Taraba State during the 2023 gubernatorial election?
3. What factors motivated vote buying during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State?
4. What is the impact of vote buying on voters voting decision during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State?

**Understanding Vote Buying: An overview**

Scholars have defined vote buying in various ways, leading to a lack of definitional uniformity and conceptual ambiguity (Nichter, 2014). Nichter (2014) observed that researchers differ in how they conceptualize and study vote buying as a social science phenomenon. Gonzalez, Ocantos, Jonge, and Nickerson (2014) defined vote buying as "the exchange of private goods for votes during electoral campaigns." Similarly, Lahoucq (2007) argued that vote buying involves trading valuable goods for votes on election day. Owen (2013, p. 250) described it as "a process consisting of an offer to purchase the vote of an eligible voter, who accepts the offer, receives compensation, shows up at the polling station, and votes as paid."

Vote buying is fundamentally an economic transaction in which money plays a central role (Ovwase, 2014). Although it follows the logic of market exchange, it does not operate under open, competitive market norms. In this illicit trade, votes become commodities that candidates 'buy' and citizens 'sell,' much like consumer goods (Ojo, 2008, p. 111). Mares and Young (2016) categorized vote buying as a form of positive inducement, involving "offers of rewards such as money, goods, or favors" (p. 270). Lucky (2013) further described it as the use of financial inducements by candidates to persuade voters to support

them. Nichter (2014) concluded that most scholars agree that the contingent distribution of cash for political support constitutes clientelist vote buying.

Vote buying, as described by Ekpo and Olawole (2016), is a dishonest and strategic method used in election campaigns, particularly in political systems where money politics is tolerated. Similarly, Echem (2020) explains that politicians exploit a system in which the influence of money overrides moral principles and ethical standards, using financial incentives to gain political support and relevance. Akinwole (2020) further emphasizes that vote buying represents a corrupt practice in which politicians invest money to secure electoral victories, with the expectation of significant financial returns following their success. According to Dubem (2023), this practice often leads to the misuse of public funds for personal gain. The complexity of vote buying as a phenomenon is partly due to differing scholarly perspectives on its attributes. Wang and Kurzman (2007) identified three key characteristics: contingent exchange, occurrence during elections, and the use of cash. Kennedy (2010) expanded these attributes to include immediate material rewards and promises of future state benefits. Nichter (2014) identified additional characteristics, such as the distribution of goods and services, food and alcohol, employment offers, and rewards for voter turnout. Given these varying definitions and attributes, it is crucial for researchers to clearly define vote buying and specify its attributes in their studies (Nichter, 2014).

Vote buying reduces electoral campaigns and voter mobilization to a marketplace where votes are auctioned to the highest bidder. Political parties and candidates engage in competition to purchase electoral support by offering material inducements in cash or kind. However, vote buying is not limited to elections. A similar practice occurs within the legislative arm of government, where lawmakers trade votes for financial or material incentives, a practice euphemistically referred to as 'executive lobbying' (Okeke, 2014). In such cases, legislators may accept payments to support specific bills or policy proposals.

**Election Credibility**

Electoral credibility refers to the expectation that elections should be conducted with transparency, fairness, accountability, probity, and inclusiveness (Efebeh, 2015). As Idris (2013) suggests, the results of an election should reflect the principles of a fair and just process. In alignment with this, Itoro (2018) emphasizes that electoral credibility requires all stakeholders to exhibit high moral standards and integrity throughout the electoral

process. Furthermore, Ihunwo (2022) argues that the credibility of an election is validated when its outcome shows no signs of electoral malpractice. In essence, a credible election should mirror the true outcome, free from manipulations or distortions of the election's ethical standards. The absence of significant irregularities is a key indicator of an election's integrity (Okebukola, 2016). According to Idris (2013), electoral credibility is achieved when the candidate declared as the winner genuinely secures the most votes. However, this definition has been critiqued as overly simplistic and restrictive. Efebeh (2015) asserts that while eliminating rigging is a critical component of credibility, an election cannot be considered credible if irregularities occurred during the process before the voting itself.

Bagudu (2021) argued that for election to be consider credible the election process must be fair, all candidates must adhere to electoral laws—especially those prohibiting financial inducements for voters—eligible voters must be properly registered, and the number of votes cast must match the number of accredited voters. Additionally, ballot papers and boxes must remain secure, and the processes of collating, sorting, counting, and announcing results must be transparent. Only when these conditions are met can an election be regarded as credible. This definition incorporates the insights of various scholars and highlights the importance of transparency, fairness, and inclusiveness in determining electoral credibility.

**Effect of vote buying on electoral process: Prior Empirical Evidence**

The literature on vote buying highlights its harmful effects on the electoral process, particularly in emerging democracies like Nigeria, where it erodes election credibility and distorts democratic representation. Studies indicate that vote buying limits the electorate's ability to freely elect competent leaders, thus hindering democratic consolidation (Yakubu, 2020). The practice has been identified as a significant obstacle to free and fair elections in Nigeria between 1999 and 2011, often resulting in electoral outcomes that fail to reflect the genuine will of the people (Yakubu, 2020). Ajayi (2025) identifies poor governance, weak electoral institutions, and poverty as major drivers of vote buying, which undermines election credibility. Furthermore, Ajayi (2025) emphasizes the consequences of vote buying, including distorted democratic representation and weakened electoral accountability, urging the need for comprehensive electoral reforms.

Ogbomah and Sinizibe (2024) explore the impact of vote buying on the election of credible candidates in the 2023 National and State Assembly elections in Bayelsa Central Senatorial

District. They argue that poverty and the financial inducements offered by politicians have made vote buying a widespread practice in the region, undermining the prospects of electing capable candidates without financial backing. The study also identifies the failure of security agents to enforce laws and prosecute offenders as a contributing factor. Vande (2019) examines the effects of vote buying on election credibility in Nigeria, highlighting its negative impact on the democratization process. By using both primary and secondary data, the study employs the General Incentive Model to analyze the causes, prevalence, and consequences of vote buying, revealing that the integrity of Nigeria's electoral process continues to be compromised, hindering the institutionalization of democratic best practices.

Similarly, Efebeh and Ohis (2023) investigate the pervasive issue of vote buying in Nigeria's electoral system between 2015 and 2023. Their study points out that vote buying, driven by voter poverty and illiteracy, significantly contributes to election fraud and poor governance. It notes that this practice facilitates the election of incompetent leaders, resulting in widespread insecurity, corruption, and a lack of accountability. The authors advocate for the adoption of modern technologies in the electoral process to mitigate vote buying and its negative effects, stressing the importance of addressing the root causes of poverty and illiteracy to curb this issue.

Ewum and Obi (2024) analyze the persistence of vote buying in Nigeria's democratic process, particularly in the 2023 general elections in Biase Local Government Area, Cross River State. Using rational choice theory, the study explores the factors contributing to vote buying, including poverty, lack of education, political manipulation, and voter apathy. The authors argue that vote buying undermines democracy by promoting ineffective leadership, questioning election results, and perpetuating voter disengagement. They recommend stronger enforcement of laws against vote buying, collaboration between the government and civil society to address root causes, and voter education to encourage informed voting decisions. The study advocates for a comprehensive approach, combining legal measures and societal reforms to protect the integrity of the electoral process.

Ugwu (2023) reviews the impact of vote buying on democracy in Nigeria, noting how money politics undermines electoral outcomes and governance. The study argues that vote buying reduces the incentive for politicians to perform well in office, as success is often determined by financial influence rather than merit. This dynamic leads elected officials to

prioritize private interests, including those of political godfathers, over public welfare, thereby weakening accountability and good governance. The paper also asserts that vote buying fosters corruption, as politicians who win through financial means are more likely to misuse public funds. Ugwu calls for more transparent and effective screening processes by political parties and electoral bodies to prevent the election of candidates prone to corrupt practices.

Nwoko, Briggs, and Offor (2023) examine the negative impact of vote buying on electoral credibility during the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Rivers State, Nigeria, using Emohua Local Government Area as a case study. They identify high poverty levels, systemic tolerance of money politics, and the lack of strict laws and penalties as key factors contributing to the rise of vote buying. The study argues that these factors compromised the integrity of the elections, leading to widespread irregularities, voter inducement, and post-election litigations. The authors recommend the implementation of stringent laws and penalties to combat vote buying and improve the credibility of future elections.

Nwakpu, Uduma, and Alozie (2024) analyze the implications of vote buying on democratic consolidation in Nigeria, focusing on the 2023 National Assembly election in the Ebonyi Central Senatorial Zone. The study identifies the manifestations, impacts, and catalysts of vote buying, particularly in the context of this election. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study adopts clientelism as its theoretical framework. The findings suggest that vote buying significantly influenced the election outcome, with poverty, lack of voter education, and inadequate enforcement of sanctions being key drivers. The study concludes that addressing these factors is essential to reducing vote buying and ensuring more credible elections in Nigeria.

Onayinka, James, Ignatius, and Fehintola (2024) explore the dynamics of vote buying and election campaigns in Nigeria from a media study perspective. The study examines the role of political campaign strategies and the practice of vote buying, which continues to undermine the integrity of Nigeria's electoral process despite more than two decades of uninterrupted democratic rule since 1999. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and secondary data, the study reviews existing literature to understand the communication systems and mass media strategies that facilitate vote buying. It applies the agenda-setting theory to explain how political agendas influence voter expectations and perceptions. The

study identifies poverty, unemployment, and weak institutions as major contributors to vote buying.

**Research Gap**

The existing literature on vote buying in Nigeria primarily focuses on its prevalence and impact in national and state elections, with studies highlighting regions such as Bayelsa, Rivers, and Ebonyi states, and addressing factors such as poverty, illiteracy, and weak electoral institutions. However, there is a noticeable gap in research specifically examining the effects of vote buying on election credibility in Taraba State, particularly during the 2023 gubernatorial elections. Additionally, while previous studies have explored the broader implications of vote buying on democratic consolidation and electoral integrity, there is limited research on how these practices affect voter behavior, election outcomes, and governance at the state level in Taraba. This gap in literature underscores the importance of this study, which aims to explore the dynamics of vote buying in the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Taraba State and its direct impact on the credibility of the electoral process in the state.

**Theoretical Framework: Marxist Political Economy Theory**

This study is grounded in the Marxist Political Economy Theory, which views power primarily through the lens of a society's economic system. According to Marxist theorists, the political elite in any system is a product of the economic structure, particularly capitalism, which shapes the political system's dynamics. Marx and Engels (1959) argue that power is concentrated in the hands of those who control the economic resources of society. This concentration of power extends beyond economic relationships and influences political structures. In all societies, the superstructure—comprising institutions, values, and beliefs—is largely shaped by the economic base, or infrastructure, which includes the relations of production. These relationships of domination and subordination in the infrastructure are reflected and perpetuated in other social institutions.

The dominant social group, or ruling class, which controls the means of production, monopolizes political power. This power is reinforced by laws designed to protect and promote the interests of the ruling class. As Liazos (1982, p. 13) notes, "The basic tenets of capitalist society shape everyone's life: the inequalities of social classes and the importance of profits over people." Furthermore, Leys (1975) highlights that the state is controlled not

by an independent capitalist class, but by a 'comprador' bourgeoisie, a group that uses state power to enhance its wealth, often at the expense of the public. In such a system, governance is viewed as an investment, with leaders expecting to make profits in return for their resources. Democracy, therefore, is not seen as a sacred value, but as a tool for the accumulation of wealth and power. In this context, politicians often utilize state power to reinforce their material base, ensuring political dominance through practices such as vote-buying.

In Nigeria, political leaders since independence can be seen as "political entrepreneurs" who use money to secure political power, either through direct vote buying or by receiving "capital" from political godfathers who sponsor their campaigns. This sponsorship is akin to a business transaction, where the sponsor expects to recover their investment through prebendal benefits awarded by the politician upon assuming office (Eze, 2006). Given the considerable resources deployed to capture political office in Nigeria, the connection between the Marxist Political Economy Theory and vote-buying becomes evident. Richard Joseph (1991) used the concept of prebendalism to explain this phenomenon, noting how the prebendal nature of Nigerian politics has shaped the pursuit and utilization of state power, especially through money politics and vote-buying. This theoretical framework provides a critical lens through which the impact of vote buying on election credibility in the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Taraba State can be examined, highlighting the influence of economic control on political manipulation and the distortion of democratic processes.

## METHODS

The study employed a descriptive survey research design, which facilitates the collection, summarization, presentation, and interpretation of data on respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions regarding vote buying. An ex-post facto design was also used to review existing literature related to the topic. The study was conducted in Taraba State, located in northeastern Nigeria, known for its diverse agricultural activities and ethnic communities. Taraba is divided into three senatorial zones, each containing various local government areas (LGAs). A questionnaire was used to collect primary data from the population, consisting of voters who participated in the 2023 elections. A sample size of 390 respondents was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula. The sampling process involved a multi-stage technique, beginning with the division of the state's 16 LGAs into

the three senatorial zones, followed by the random selection of two LGAs from each zone. One ward was then selected from each LGA, and purposive sampling was applied to choose voters who had participated in the election. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, and tables.

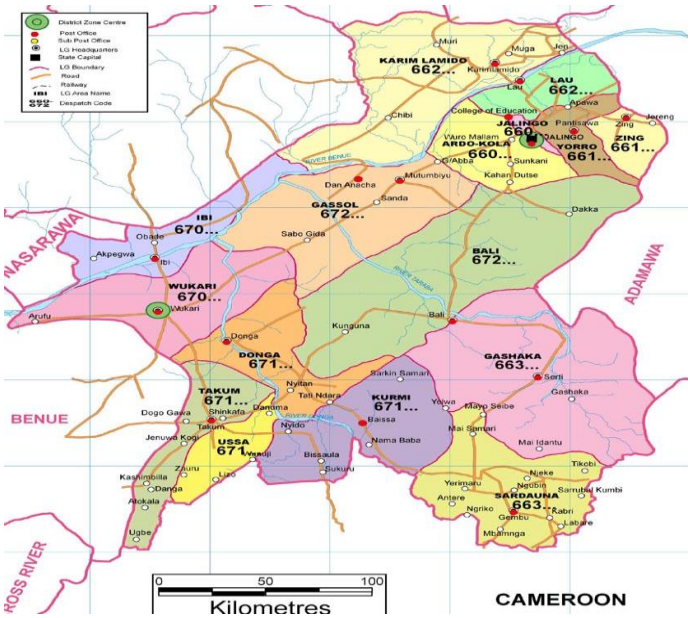



Fig 1. Map of Taraba State

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Demographic description of the Respondents**

| Demographic Variable | Category | Frequency (n=390) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 210 | 53.8% |
| | Female | 180 | 46.2% |
| Age Group | 18-25 years | 120 | 30.8% |
| | 26-35 years | 100 | 25.6% |
| | 36-45 years | 80 | 20.5% |
| | 46-55 years | 50 | 12.8% |
| | 56 years and above | 40 | 10.3% |
| Educational Level | Primary Education | 50 | 12.8% |
| | Secondary Education | 140 | 35.9% |
| | Tertiary Education | 160 | 41.0% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Postgraduate Education | 40 | 10.3% |
| Occupation | Civil Servants | 120 | 30.8% |
| | Artisans | 80 | 20.5% |
| | Business Owners | 90 | 23.1% |
| | Students | 50 | 12.8% |

Source: Survey, 2025

Table 1 presents a demographic breakdown of the 390 respondents, revealing key variables such as gender, age group, educational level, and occupation. The gender distribution shows a slight male majority (53.8%), indicating a relatively balanced representation of both genders. The age group distribution reveals that a large proportion of the respondents are young adults, with 30.8% in the 18-25 years range and 25.6% in the 26-35 years group, suggesting that the study predominantly captures the views of younger voters, which could influence their perceptions of vote buying. In terms of educational level, the majority (41%) have tertiary education, indicating a relatively well-educated sample, which may affect their awareness and attitudes toward political issues like vote buying. Occupation-wise, the respondents are fairly diversified, with civil servants (30.8%) and business owners (23.1%) forming the largest groups, which may influence their socio-political views and voting behaviors.

**Table 2: Respondents' opinion regarding the Extent of Vote Buying during 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State**

| **Responses** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
|---|---|---|
| Never | 30 | 7.7% |
| Rarely | 50 | 12.8% |
| Occasionally | 70 | 17.9% |
| Frequently | 100 | 25.6% |
| Always | 140 | 35.9% |
| **Total** | **390** | **100%** |

Source: Survey, 2025

The table indicates that a majority of respondents perceived vote buying as a widespread issue during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State. Specifically, 35.9% of respondents reported that vote buying occurred "always," while 25.6% stated it happened "frequently." Additionally, 17.9% observed it "occasionally," and 12.8% reported it occurred "rarely." Only 7.7% of respondents indicated that they never witnessed or heard

about vote buying. This suggests that a large proportion of respondents believed vote buying was a common and persistent occurrence during the election, reflecting a significant concern regarding electoral integrity in the state.

**Table 3: Respondents opinion on the common form of vote-buying during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Taraba State**

| Form of Vote Buying | Frequency (n=390) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Direct cash payments | 180 | 46.2% |
| Material gifts (e.g., food stuff, clothes) | 160 | 41.0% |
| Transport allowances | 90 | 23.1% |
| Drinks and cooked food | 70 | 17.9% |
| Others | 40 | 10.3% |

Source: Survey, 2025

Table 3 reveals that the most common forms of vote buying observed during the 2023 gubernatorial elections in Taraba State were direct cash payments, reported by 46.2% of respondents, and material gifts such as food, clothes, and other items, which accounted for 41.0%. These findings suggest that politicians predominantly used financial and material incentives to influence voters. Transport allowances and the provision of drinks and cooked food were observed by 23.1% and 17.9% of respondents, respectively, indicating these methods were also employed but to a lesser extent. Other forms of vote buying were less prevalent, with only 10.3% of respondents reporting them.

**Table 4: Respondents opinion on factors that contributed to Vote during the 2023 guberntoral election in Taraba State**

| **Factors Motivating Vote Buying** | **Yes** | **No** | **Can't Say** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Economic hardship in the community influenced vote buying during the election. | 250 (64.1%) | 100 (25.6%) | 40 (10.3%) |
| The lack of political education and awareness contributed to the prevalence of vote buying. | 200 (51.3%) | 130 (33.3%) | 60 (15.4%) |
| Politicians' promises of material gifts or financial incentives motivated voters to accept vote buying. | 220 (56.4%) | 120 (30.8%) | 50 (12.8%) |
| Low trust in political institutions and the electoral system led voters to accept bribes in exchange for votes. | 180 (46.2%) | 140 (35.9%) | 70 (17.9%) |
| Widespread corruption in the political system encouraged politicians to engage in vote buying. | 210 (53.8%) | 120 (30.8%) | 60 (15.4%) |
| Peer pressure and social norms within the community | 190 | 130 | 70 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| played a role in encouraging vote buying. | (48.7%) | (33.3%) | (17.9%) |
| Intense political competition and rivalry between political parties influenced the use of vote buying. | 210 (53.8%) | 120 (30.8%) | 60 (15.4%) |
| Weak enforcement of electoral laws contributed to the prevalence of vote buying. | 230 (59.0%) | 100 (25.6%) | 60 (15.4%) |

Source: Survey, 2025

Table 4 presents the respondents' opinions on the factors that contributed to vote buying during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State. The majority of respondents (64.1%) indicated that economic hardship in the community influenced vote buying, while 51.3% highlighted the lack of political education and awareness as a contributing factor. Politicians' promises of material gifts or financial incentives were seen as a motivator by 56.4% of respondents. Low trust in political institutions and widespread corruption in the political system were also identified by 46.2% and 53.8% of respondents, respectively, as significant factors. Peer pressure and social norms were mentioned by 48.7%, while intense political competition and weak enforcement of electoral laws were cited by 53.8% and 59.0% of respondents, respectively.

**Table 5: Respondents' opinion about the impact of vote buying on voters' decisions during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State:**

| **Items** | **Yes** | **No** | **Can't Say** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Did the offer of material gifts (e.g., food, clothes) influence your voting decision during the election? | 250 (64.1%) | 90 (23.1%) | 50 (12.8%) |
| Did you feel compelled to vote for a particular candidate due to financial incentives or direct cash payments? | 220 (56.4%) | 100 (25.6%) | 70 (17.9%) |
| Did vote buying play a significant role in your final voting choice during the election? | 180 (46.2%) | 140 (35.9%) | 70 (17.9%) |
| Did you accept any form of bribe or incentive during the election in exchange for your vote? | 160 (41.0%) | 160 (41.0%) | 70 (17.9%) |
| Do you believe that vote buying led to the election outcome being swayed in favor of certain candidates? | 200 (51.3%) | 120 (30.8%) | 70 (17.9%) |
| In your opinion, would you have voted differently if vote buying had not been present during the election? | 210 (53.8%) | 120 (30.8%) | 60 (15.4%) |

Source: Survey, 2025

The data in Table 5 reveals that a significant portion of respondents believed vote buying influenced their decisions during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State. A majority (64.1%) reported that material gifts, such as food and clothes, influenced their voting choice, while 56.4% indicated that financial incentives or direct cash payments also played a role. A notable percentage (46.2%) felt that vote buying significantly affected their final voting decision. Although 41.0% of respondents admitted to accepting bribes or incentives during the election, an equal percentage (41.0%) denied doing so, suggesting a division in participation. Moreover, over half of the respondents (51.3%) believed that vote buying contributed to swaying the election outcome in favor of certain candidates, and 53.8% felt they might have voted differently had vote buying not been present.

## DISCUSSION

The first goal of this study was to determine the extent to which vote buying occurred during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State. The results revealed that vote buying was a widespread issue during the election, with many respondents indicating that it occurred frequently or consistently. The practice was not limited to a small segment of the population but was seen as a common occurrence throughout the election, reflecting concerns about its pervasive impact on the electoral process. The literature on vote buying aligns with this finding, confirming that the practice is widespread in Nigeria, particularly in the context of emerging democracies. Several studies have highlighted how vote buying undermines the electoral process, leading to outcomes that do not reflect the genuine will of the electorate. Yakubu (2020) discusses the harmful effects of vote buying, stating that it erodes the credibility of elections and distorts democratic representation, which is consistent with the widespread nature of vote buying reported in this study. Similarly, Efebeh and Ohis (2023) observe that vote buying is a significant factor contributing to election fraud and poor governance in Nigeria, reflecting how the practice pervades elections at all levels. This widespread occurrence of vote buying is a major challenge to Nigeria's democratic consolidation, as it impedes the election of competent leaders.

Secondly, the study sought to determine the methods employed by politicians to buy votes in Taraba State during the 2023 gubernatorial election. The results indicated that politicians primarily used financial and material incentives to influence voters. This included offering direct cash payments, as well as providing material gifts such as food, clothes, and other

goods. These methods were common, and other forms of inducement, such as transport allowances and provisions of food and drink, were also used, though to a lesser extent. These approaches suggest that politicians employed tangible rewards to sway voters' decisions. This finding is in line with prior literature that identifies financial inducements and material gifts as common methods of vote buying in Nigerian elections. Ajayi (2025) and Ogbomah and Sinizibe (2024) highlight how financial incentives, such as money and gifts, are frequently used to secure votes. These methods of inducement are linked to poverty, where voters are enticed by immediate material gains, despite the long-term negative impact on the democratic process. The use of such incentives not only influences voters' decisions but also distorts the election outcome, as politicians can essentially buy support through material means rather than earning it through merit and good governance.

Furthermore, the study sought to identify the factors that motivated vote buying during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State. It was established that several key factors contributed to the prevalence of vote buying. Economic hardship played a significant role, as many voters faced financial challenges, making them more susceptible to accepting bribes. Additionally, a lack of political education and awareness left voters less informed about the consequences of vote buying. Other factors included politicians' promises of gifts or money, low trust in political institutions, widespread corruption, and weak enforcement of electoral laws. Social pressure and intense political competition were also noted as contributing factors that encouraged this practice. The findings are consistent with the work of multiple scholars, including Efebeh and Ohis (2023) and Ewum and Obi (2024), who identify poverty and illiteracy as primary drivers of vote buying. These conditions make voters more susceptible to manipulation through financial inducements. Additionally, the weak enforcement of laws, as discussed by Ogbomah and Sinizibe (2024), plays a critical role in perpetuating vote buying, as perpetrators face little to no consequences. This reflects a broader pattern of weak governance and accountability mechanisms in Nigeria’s electoral system, contributing to the persistence of vote buying despite its negative implications for democracy. Ajayi (2025) underscores the need for electoral reforms to address these root causes, which aligns with the study's findings on the persistent role of poverty and lack of education in enabling vote buying.

Additionally, the study examined the impact of vote buying on voters' voting decisions during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba State. The results revealed that vote buying had a notable influence on voters' decisions, with many individuals indicating that

the offer of material goods and financial incentives impacted their voting choices. Some respondents felt compelled to vote for a specific candidate because of these incentives. The practice not only influenced individual choices but also appeared to affect the overall election outcome, with many voters believing that vote buying played a significant role in swaying the results. Some even indicated that, had vote buying not been involved, their voting decisions might have been different. This underscores the considerable impact of vote buying on the integrity of the election process. This finding supports the findings of Vande (2019), who examined how vote buying distorts the integrity of elections by impacting voters' decision-making. Vote buying often leads voters to choose candidates based on immediate material benefits rather than policy alignment or the candidates' abilities to govern effectively. Efebeh and Ohis (2023) also point out how this practice contributes to the election of incompetent leaders, a consequence of voters prioritizing short-term financial gain over long-term governance outcomes. This undermines the democratic process by allowing financial resources, rather than ideas or competence, to determine the outcome of elections. It is clear that the practice of vote buying not only compromises the integrity of elections but also affects the quality of leadership, as candidates who rely on such tactics often lack the necessary qualifications to lead effectively.

## CONCLUSION

The study reveals prevalent of vote buying during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba state driven largely driven by economic hardship, which made voters vulnerable to inducements from politicians offering financial and material incentives. This practice reflects the Marxist view that political power in capitalist societies is concentrated in the hands of those who control economic resources, a situation that extends to the electoral process. Politicians in Taraba State, as in many parts of Nigeria, used their economic resources to manipulate the political system, reinforcing their dominance and securing their positions of power. The theory's assertion that the ruling class, or dominant social group, manipulates political structures to maintain its control is reflected in the findings of this study. Politicians utilized financial incentives, such as cash payments and material gifts, to influence voters' decisions. This practice not only undermines the integrity of the election

process but also reveals how the economic structure influences political behavior, with politicians using state power as a tool for wealth accumulation.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, these recommendations are proposed to address the issue of vote buying and its detrimental effects on the integrity of the electoral process in Taraba State and Nigeria at large:

1. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should work closely with law enforcement agencies to ensure that all forms of electoral malpractices, including vote buying, are detected and punished. This could involve the implementation of stricter penalties for those found guilty of engaging in vote buying, as well as for those who offer material inducements.
2. Given that many voters in the study were driven to accept bribes due to economic hardship and a lack of political education, there is an urgent need for robust voter education campaigns. These should focus on raising awareness about the negative consequences of vote buying on democracy and governance.
3. Tackling poverty and improving the socioeconomic conditions of the electorate is crucial in reducing the effectiveness of vote-buying tactics. Government policies should focus on poverty alleviation, including the provision of social welfare programs, job creation, and investments in education and healthcare.
4. Civil society organizations, the media, and international observers should be given greater access to monitor election processes at all levels. These groups can play a critical role in detecting vote-buying activities and publicizing cases of electoral fraud.
5. Political leaders, particularly those in positions of power, must be encouraged to promote integrity and transparency in their campaigns and governance.
6. Effective implementation of the 2022 Electoral reforms aimed at addressing the root causes of vote-buying should be prioritized by all stakeholders.

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