


Dimensions of Vote-Buying and Voters' Turnout in Nigeria's 2023 Elections

Fatai Gbadebo Adeleke,^{*} Musediq Olufemi Lawal,[†] Emmanuel Adebayo Akinyemi[‡]

<p>Journal Volume & Issue: Vol. 5, No. 2 (August, 2024) pp. 59 – 79</p> <p>Received: 14 January, 2024 Revised: 26 July, 2024 Accepted: 25 August, 2024 Published: 31 August, 2024</p>  <p>Copyright: ©2024 by Jimma University, Ethiopia. Under Open Access Journal, the creative common attribute 4.0 international license permits any interested person to copy, redistribute, remix, transmit and adapt the work provided that the original work and source is appropriately cited.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Abstract</p> <p><i>Studies have established that giving incentives for votes is extremely widespread in many democracies; however, only little is known about the new dimension of vote-buying in Nigeria's 2023 elections. The study utilized qualitative tools to select four states, 32 interviewees, and 12 discussants. The study revealed that vote-buying increased the voters' turnout and became institutionalized and rampant with ruling parties and general elections rather than off-cycle elections. Voters were enticed with branded materials, financial incentives in kangaroo inducement activities (funeral/birthday/idol ceremonies, cooperative/artisan societies), and temporary social incentives (camouflage community, aged/less privileged assistance, age-grade social competitions). Other dimensions were the payment of salaries to parties' executives and fake committees, the use of community leaders in pretentious social care, and the welfare of their subjects mainly for the exchange of their votes. There is a need for electoral acts to capture these new dimensions and improve the activities of law enforcement agents.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>Dimension, Vote-Buying, Voters' Turnout, 2023 Elections, Nigeria</i></p>
--	--

Introduction

In a representative government, a high turnout of voters in the periodical elections significantly gives more beauty to democratic processes because the system relies very much on the participation of the majority. Liberal democracy is increasingly becoming an institutionalized system across sub-Saharan African countries (Nkwede, 2019; Osimen & Iloh, 2022), and voting behavior, especially voters' turnout, now plays a vital role. However, scholars (Vicente, 2014;

^{*}Osun State University, Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. Email: gbadebo.adeleke@uniosun.edu.ng

[†]Osun State University, Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. Email: musediq.lawal@uniosun.edu.ng

[‡]Osun State University, Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. Email: adebayo.akinyemi@uniosun.edu.ng

Gadjanova, 2017) have noticed that voters' turnout is steadily declining in most established democracies in the world, especially in sub-Saharan African countries (Aluaigba, 2016; Chukwurah *et al.*, 2019; Vasudevan, 2019). Thus, scholars like Balogun and Olapegba (2017) have examined the various aspects of re-democratization and how political parties have designed more ways to entice the citizens to participate in the voting exercises in Nigeria. Once the people become the source of authority and the majority participates in voting, the political parties will do everything possible to appeal to prospective voters during the election periods (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2017; Ugwuala *et al.*, 2020). In Nigeria's electoral processes, different types of incentives have been used to influence voters (Aiyede & Aregbeyen, 2012), and vote-buying is one of them. Vote-buying has become a new political culture where the voters exchange their votes for short-term and long-term monetary and non-monetary items. Similar to clientelism, which involves a relationship of exchange between a patron and a client (Weghorst & Linberg, 2013), the new dimension of vote-buying involves proffering material items and financial packages to voters before during or after the election in exchange for votes.

The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reported widespread allegations of vote-buying in the off-cycle governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States in 2016 and Anambra State in the 2017 gubernatorial election. They recorded the same for Ekiti and Osun States in 2018 and Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi States in 2023. Osimen and Iloh (2022) argued that the door-to-door campaigns and mobilization of voters were a guise for the distribution of cash to all the registered voters in a specific polling booth. They noted that these campaigns were also a decoy for online transactions of votes between the political leaders and prospective voters. They described the empowerment programs as suspicious because they expected that the electorate who received cash would surely reciprocate by voting for their party's candidates. The slogan on Election Day becomes '*diboki o se obe*,' meaning '*vote for us and cook soup*.' According to Yakubu (2020), the range of payment for vote-buying is between ₦2,000 and ₦5,000. The records of the Transition Monitoring Group (2023) and Transparency International (2023) indicated that during the internal primary elections within some political parties between 2015 and 2023, over 8,000 delegates who participated in the selection of party candidates allegedly received US\$5,000 from the candidates. Babatunde *et al.* (2019) condemned the brazen incidences of vote-buying and commercialization of votes for a price range of ₦3000 to ₦4000. These happened in several polling units, depending on the

voting locations. The voters even commented on the presence of security officers during these vote trades, yet no arrest was made.

A great deal of research has examined the impact of vote-buying on voters' choices (Nkwede, 2019; Muhtadi, 2019), on rural and urban areas (Onuoha & Ojo, 2018), and on low- and high-income earners (Aiyede & Aregbeyen, 2012; Keefer & Vlaicu, 2017). Though past studies have clearly shown voters' reaction to vote-buying (Weitz-Shapiro, 2012; Vasudevan, 2019), only a few studies examined different novel dimensions of vote-buying and their effects on voters' turnout in Nigeria's elections. Despite this gap, some scholars are more worried about the steady decline in voters' turnout and the negative consequences of vote-buying (Magaji & Musa, 2022). Empirical research on vote-buying has revealed new insights about when, where, how, and from whom candidates attempt to purchase votes (Hicken *et al.*, 2018). To fill these gaps in knowledge, our study investigated the new dimensions of vote-buying in Nigeria's 2023 elections, examined how vote-buying increases voters' turnout in Nigeria's elections and determined how the institutionalization of vote-buying helped political parties to win elections in Nigeria's 2023 elections. This study, therefore, complemented other studies on democratic processes and re-examined the various aspects of the re-democratization process in Nigeria's elections.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, apathy towards democratic processes led to low voters' turnouts during the general elections between 1999 and 2003, and this has been a matter of concern to both the political parties and the democrats (Yakubu, 2020). Although the concept of financial incentives during campaigns, electoral, and voting processes is not new, its enticing dimension in the 2023 election has received scant scholarly attention. In Nigeria, various electoral acts have been enacted against vote-buying, and previous studies have established that the cultures and customs of many ethnicities are against vote-buying (Vicente, 2014; Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, 2022). Despite these norms, rules, and Article 130 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended), many political leaders strategically persuaded voters with financial and material incentives in exchange for their votes (Electoral Act, 2022). Muhtadi (2019) established two types of vote-buying: cash-for-vote, which involves giving or promising the prospective voter some agreed amount of

money before they cast their vote, and vote-for-cash, which involves an agent rewarding a voter with an agreed amount of money or material compensation after the voter has shown evidence that they voted for the agent's party. Aliyu *et al.* (2020) elaborated that the voter shrewdly displays the ballot paper (already thumb-printed in favor of a particular party) to the respective party agent, who is strategically standing nearby to confirm.

A large volume of research has clearly shown voters' reactions to vote-buying in an election (Weitz-Shapiro, 2012; Vasudevan, 2019). However, there is limited empirical evidence on vote-buying in nationwide general elections and off-cycle elections in Nigeria. Also, different novel dimensions of vote-buying and their effects on voters' turnout in Nigeria's elections have not received enough scholarly attention.

Vote-buying and social exchange theory in Nigeria's 2023 elections

Empirical studies have shown that political parties bought votes from people who gave them the highest level of political support, irrespective of their areas, locations, or classes (Mares & Young, 2016; Oladapo *et al.*, 2020). Parties gave more incentives to their factions for support in internal primaries (Yakubu, 2020). Ugwual *et al.* (2020) argued that in urban areas in Nigeria, vote-buying was targeted at low-income earners and slum dwellers, while rural dwellers received the highest incentives because of the peculiarities of rural areas. In Nigeria, where the majority of people live below the per capita income standard, voters' turnout is determined by the pattern and level of incentives offered by political parties (Aiyede & Aregbeyen, 2012). Like in most sub-Saharan African countries with a poor standard of living, Chasukwa and Banik (2019) advanced that the political parties' leaders investigate the voters' immediate needs and induce them with incentives in exchange for their votes. Mueller (2011) observed that swing voters and those with low incomes were more likely to be targeted for mobilization in Kenya. The same opinion is shared in almost all African countries, where people who live below the poverty level are easy targets for political parties during elections. However, in developed democratic countries, the receipt of bribes does not affect voters' support because of the voters' political maturity, knowledge and education, and the solid and advanced economy (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2014). Lyon and Scott (2012) further argued that Chicago residents who received party services were no more likely to vote for the Democratic Party than those who did not receive government favor. Szwarcberg (2012) mentioned that the Argentinean party workers were given ten tiny bags

of food, with which they bought 40 voters in their neighborhoods. On this premise, Ozoemena and Evangeline (2019) analyzed that the standard of living in a particular area always determined whether the vote-buying would be higher or whether the vote-buying would influence the voters' turnout or the election outcomes. A large volume of research (Aiyede & Aregbeyen, 2012; Onuoha & Ojo, 2018) has established that services for votes affected voters' turnout and voting behavior between the 1999 and 2023 elections in Nigeria.

Transparency International (2023) examined the impact of vote-buying, voters' turnout, and voters' choice in Rivers State during the general elections. They compared the incidence of vote-buying to that of Bayelsa State, where off-cycle elections were conducted, and discovered that the latter was more prone to selling votes. This occurred because electoral malpractice increases the level of vote-buying. Magaji and Musa (2022) argued that vote-buying is a contract, or perhaps an auction, in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder – this occurs more in off-cycle elections than in general elections. Past scholars (Nwankwo, 2018; Oduntan, 2022) have established that buying takes place at multiple stages of the electoral cycle, ranging from voter registration, the nomination period, and campaigning to Election Day. There is a close relationship between poverty and vote-buying because the poor standard of living has driven the majority of the people to sell their votes for any amount. Ozoemena and Evangeline (2019) argued that the level of education and awareness, the condition of the living areas, low political attachment, and the nature and types of elections (general and off-cycle elections) determine the magnitude of vote-buying.

The premise of the exchange paradigm reveals that all social life consists of actors who exchange rewards and resources (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017), and social change and stability are a process of negotiated exchange between parties (Methot *et al.*, 2016). The interactions between human beings are established within the norm of reciprocity, whether positive or negative (Chernyak-Hai & Rapenu, 2018). Social exchange theory posits that all human relationships are formed using subjective cost-benefit analysis and comparing alternatives. Nkwede and Abah (2019) attributed voters' action of exchanging their votes for financial incentives to the loss of faith in the operation of democratic principles or fair sharing of democratic dividends. Scholars like Cooper-Thomas and Morrison (2019) have identified poor standards of living, lack of basic

amenities, and voting illiteracy as other causes of vote-buying; they claim that voters maximize the voting opportunity for their benefit. Cooper-Thomas and Morrison (2019) submitted that this exchange theory provides a clear conception of the material and resource bases of social action. In the social exchange process, a return is expected; the voters may decide to vote because of material rewards from the political leaders or because of a great expectation of improved living conditions. On the one hand, candidates provide voters with material inducements to increase their chances of winning an election, especially when there is competition between political parties or political actors.

On the other hand, prospective voters may agree to sell their votes and support to a particular candidate because they value their immediate needs and gains more than their preferred democratic dividends. Social exchange theory proposes that social behavior results from an exchange process to enjoy rewards, avoid punishments, maximize profits, and minimize costs during election times (Mitchell *et al.*, 2012; Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017). Since the purpose of this exchange is to maximize benefits and minimize costs, people weigh the potential benefits and risks of social relationships before deciding. The theory neglects the political and cultural contexts of democracy culture, and sticks with the give and take system. Thus, drawing from past scholars (Magaji & Musa, 2022), the study concludes that people value their immediate needs and gains more than their preferred future democratic dividends.

Materials and Methods

The study i) investigated new dimensions of vote-buying in Nigeria's 2023 elections, ii) examined how vote-buying increases voters' turnout in Nigeria's elections in general, and iii) determined how the institutionalization of vote-buying helped political parties to win elections in Nigeria's 2023 elections. We adopted mixed sampling techniques (purposive, simple random, and convenience) and qualitative tools (in-depth interviews and focus group discussion) for data collection. These multiple approaches were utilized to eliminate possible elements of bias and overcome the limitations inherent in each technique.

Because of the wide geographical spread – Nigeria has 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory (Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999), we relied on the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) records to purposively select the states where the general gubernatorial elections and off-cycle elections were conducted. This was done because of the homogeneity of behaviors

towards electoral and political processes of states in the two types of elections (general gubernatorial and off-cycle elections) in Nigeria's democratic processes. Through purposive sampling selection and simple random sampling, we selected a total of four states (Akwa-Ibom *et al.*) for this study. Akwa-Ibom and Taraba States were purposively selected out of the three states that were ruled by a single party from 1999 to 2023, and their gubernatorial elections followed the general elections. Also, Bayelsa and Kogi States were selected through simple random sampling out of the 5 states with off-cycle elections, that is, the states whose elections were not conducted at the same time as the general elections.

First, we conducted in-depth interviews. The interviewees were selected through a convenience sampling technique, but we strictly ensured that only participants who met up with the following criteria participated. These criteria were followed in order to make sure that we targeted the active members of selected political parties in the selected states: i) they must be permanent residents with at least one means of identification; ii) they must be registered voters who are actively involved in the political activities of their areas with any means of identification, iii) they must be a minimum of 26 years and must have met up with the legal voting age of 18 years in the two previous general elections in Nigeria and iv) only the participants who were present in the offices of the two dominant political parties in selected states were selected. A total of 32 interviewees were selected from each state, as well as the ruling and opposition parties. This included 4 party leaders, 2 women leaders, 2 youth leaders, 14 party loyalists, 5 political office holders, and 5 party executive members.

Secondly, this method was complemented by focus group discussions (FGD). The participants were 4 key community leaders, 4 law enforcement officials, and 4 civil servants, totaling 12 discussants. We utilized convenience sampling in the recruitment of the discussants and administered a well-structured 10-minute baseline questionnaire to differentiate the required characteristics from the variables. Only key discussants who met up with the following criteria were selected to participate in the FGDs — i) they must be permanent residents in the selected areas; ii) they must be the head or most senior officers; and iii) they must be a minimum of 26 years, in order to have witnessed at least two general elections in their areas. Only participants who met these preliminary conditions were selected. This was done to overcome the inherent

lapses of generalization that emanate from this sampling technique. The study used secondary sources of data collection, such as records, archival documents, journals, and newspapers.

In order to achieve the main objective of the study, we adopted a three-compound question — what were the new dimensions of vote-buying in the general and off-cycle elections in 2023 in Nigeria? ii) How did the vote-buying increase voters' turnout in the general elections and off cycle-elections? and iii) How does the institutionalization of vote-buying help the party to win an election? We examined all forms of incentives that were earlier established by Gonzalez *et al.* (2014) and drew the relationship between them and the ones used in the 2023 elections in Nigeria. Also, many sub-variables, as enunciated by Hicken *et al.* (2018), were examined in relation to the peculiar dimensions of vote-buying. These variables were investigated based on how the political parties used them before, during, and after electoral processes in order to increase the turnout of voters in their favor in both the general and off-cycle elections. Data collected from the qualitative methods were transcribed using content analysis and ethnographic summaries.

New Dimensions of vote-buying and voters' turnout in Nigeria's 2023 Elections

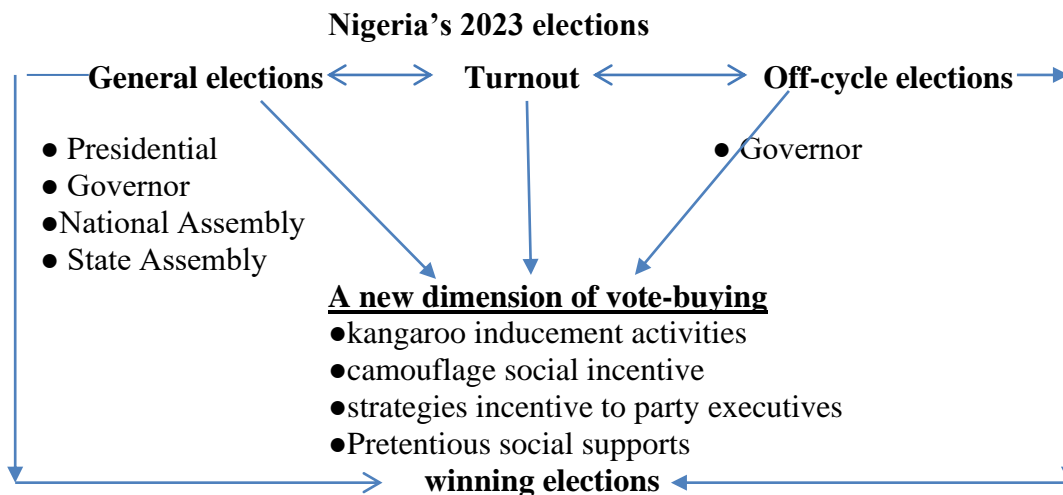


Figure 1. Dimensions of Nigeria's 2023 Elections
Source: Authors' Conceptualization

Results and Discussions

This section presents data on the new dimensions of vote-buying in Nigeria's 2023 general and off-cycle elections. We relied on various principal components and sub-variables that were established by previous studies (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2014; Hicken *et al.*, 2018) as major incentives

for participating in the elections. Then, we linked these to voters' turnout. Figure 1 presents a summary of the findings, showing the interaction among the new dimensions of vote-buying and how some government institutions were used as tools within the social exchange theory. Its full explanation is developed under succeeding themes.

Dimensions of vote-buying, institutionalization, and voters' turnout in Nigeria's 2023 elections

Based on this exchange theory paradigm, the study examined forty-two (42) incentives within political sociology and management studies, as earlier established by previous studies (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2014; Hicken *et al.*, 2018). Then we devised a means to find out the following: i) how many of these incentives really follow the reciprocal advantages of voters' turnout, ii) how did these incentives meet up with the new dimensions of vote-buying in the 2023 elections. A large number of research studies have established that when transactions in relationships are not reciprocal, there is a tendency for discontinuity (Methot *et al.*, 2016; Cooper-Thomas & Morrison, 2019). Social exchange theory investigates the reciprocal advantages (mainly materialistic) that individuals enjoy in their exchanges and transactions. Lyon and Scott (2012) argued that a person may continue to be in a relationship without being adequately satisfied because there is no alternative relationship available; however, when there are many alternatives available to an individual, they are less dependent on such a relationship and vice versa. The qualitative data shows that the new dimensions of vote-buying were proposed to specific individuals or categories of people in the general and off-cycle elections. These propositions were made before, during, and after the 2023 elections. From various sub-variables, we selected four principal dimensions of vote-buying because the participants chose these variables many times. The variables were kangaroo inducement activities, temporary social incentives, strategic incentives to parties' executives, and traditional pretentious assignments.

Kangaroo inducement activities

Prior to the 2023 elections in Nigeria, a large volume of research had established different types of incentives for voting, such as financial and material inducements and see and buy style (Aiyede & Aregbeyen, 2012; Ferree *et al.*, 2019). However, we discovered that short-term and long-term dimensions of vote-buying were introduced by different political parties before, during, and after the 2023 elections. The qualitative data revealed that the entire political and

electoral process was characterized by kangaroo inducement activities ranging from fake funerals, birthday celebrations, and artisans' cooperative societies to unscheduled and untimely idol celebrations. The data collected in both the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews revealed that these new dimensions of vote-buying increased voters' turnout in the off-cycle and general elections in 2023. The interviewees agreed that there were long-term kangaroo inducement activities in the general elections. They noted that these happened especially where the ruling party had stayed in power for more than 2 terms of 4 years. Thus, some channels of vote-buying had become institutionalized.

The discussants revealed that political parties organized a remembrance ceremony for one of their party leaders who had died about 10 years ago in order to woo voters during the election period. They revealed that prospective voters were won over during these remembrance ceremonies, which were held before the elections. A discussant, who is a community leader, said that during the recruitment of voters, he noticed that all the registered voters in various polling booths assembled at the ceremony and were grouped on the basis of their polling booths. They were given some material items such as kerosene, branded clothes, and other customized gifts and items. Similarly, one of the interviewees, a political leader, said that these actions were designed to beat the imagination of law enforcement officials who may try to prosecute them for vote-buying.

The qualitative data showed that there were many small cooperative and thrift societies that were established for different artisans, professional groups, and age-group societies, and different wards' party leaders were selected to be the chairpersons. These different cooperative societies were not government-registered but were under the management of some governmental institutions prior to the general elections. These different cooperative societies were formed for the purpose of providing welfare for their members and financially assisting them to expand their business or attend to their urgent needs. A party leader in the same ward or polling booth oversaw this assignment. The participants, who were observers, agreed that these episodes of cooperative assistance were freely given with the purpose of inducing the voters to turn up for the election. Towards the commencement of the off-cycle elections, huge amounts of money were released to these fake cooperative and thrift societies by different political parties and leaders with no intention of recouping either the loan or its accrued interests. The executives of political parties were nominated as the principal officers of these cooperative societies. There

was also a unit that distributed the loan and canvassed for votes in the cooperative society meetings. An interviewee, a women leader, said that branded and packaged goods were distributed in anticipation of receiving votes, and financial incentives were given to prospective voters in an organized kangaroo cooperative society prior to Election Day.

A discussant, a community leader, revealed that some political parties threw birthday parties for their followers in order to entice them. Similarly, established party leaders fixed unscheduled birthday ceremonies to attract prospective voters to their houses. Another interviewee, a youth leader, buttressed this finding by saying that, in most communities where a political party had fewer supporters during the off-cycle elections, in order to weaken the opposition party that had more supporters, the minority party would throw a big birthday party for their followers about a day to the Election Day in order to win more votes for their party. Different materials and money were distributed to the people during the birthday, mainly to entice them.

Furthermore, the study discovered that many traditional idol festivals were fixed, and arrangements were based on the types of deities. Some participants noticed that only two types of ceremonies were organized – where a party had few followers and where the residents were immigrants; they organized a type of festival that restricted strangers' movement, especially during the general elections. This happened less during the off-cycle elections. Also, where the ruling party used the government institutions and had many supporters, they threw a party to share the incentives freely with their followers.

Temporary and camouflage social incentives

Like Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) that carry out their set objectives towards socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political transformation in all facets of society (Mair & Marti, 2006; Awogbenle, 2010), the qualitative data revealed that various political parties that participated in the 2023 general and off-cycle elections were pretentious in their participation in the processes. They functioned like non-profit enterprises in delivering social services for the uplift and well-being of society. They did this through temporary and camouflaged social incentives to the citizens. The discussants agreed that the idea behind this was to effect desired changes in their voting pattern by increasing voters' turnout and enticing them to effectively support their parties during the election processes. The discussants highlighted a number of

prominent social incentives – skill acquisition, economic empowerment, adult literacy scheme, capacity building, charity, and age-group charitable incentives.

The FGD data showed that during the electoral processes, such as election campaigns, voters' registration exercises, and internal parties' primaries, political parties sponsored some age-group associations and social groups. These were formed and named after some political leaders, and various social competitions in the form of games were organized for these different groups. Most interviewees agreed that it was a new dimension of vote-buying and was more rampant in the off-cycle elections than in the general elections because of its short-term incentive pattern. Some of the organized games included football, draught, ludo, idol worship, and other local games, and attractive prizes, gifts, and money were distributed at these games prior to Election Day. These events were directly sponsored by some party leaders.

It was revealed by most discussants that the political leaders and candidates established social projects in some communities in order to induce the beneficiaries to vote for their political parties during the 2023 elections. Some of these projects were the erection of basic infrastructure and the provision of social amenities. A discussant, who is a community leader, said that their community benefitted from the sudden attention when a party candidate built 3 classrooms and employed 3 temporary teachers for their primary schools through government monitoring agencies. The discussants corroborated this finding and said that most less privileged and aged people in many communities were on their payroll, and these political parties provided some aid before Election Day.

The qualitative data showed that party leaders distributed airtime vouchers of various telecommunication networks to the people's phone lines a week before Election Day. Most of the interviewees corroborated this finding and said that names and numbers were collected from the aged and less-privileged people in various areas according to their polling booths and centers, and airtime vouchers were sent to them during the campaign process and on the day of the election; phones were also distributed freely to them. This finding tallies with Nwankwo (2018) that the only language the voters understand, because of the high cost of living and poverty level, is financial incentives. They speak this language before getting involved in any electoral or political process.

Strategic incentives to parties' executives

Several studies have suggested what should be the remuneration packages for political office holders in Nigeria (Eme, 2009; Nkwede, 2019); however, the qualitative data revealed that the idea of monthly salaries for party executives at the ward, local government, state, and federal zones is new in Nigeria's party politics prior to 2023 elections. All the executives of the party elected within several political parties received allowances and salaries on a monthly basis; the discussants revealed that the executives of the political parties, from the ward to the federal levels, expanded the number of authorized members by recruiting prospective voters through the various committees and political canvassers. They then placed them on monthly salaries prior to the Election Day. These expanding committees were recruited based on their registration in every polling booth, and material incentives were distributed to them every week before Election Day. These new salary packages increased the voters' turnout because most of the executives came out in the form of mobilization teams and did a door-to-door campaign. The interviewees agreed that this strategy was employed more during the general elections than the off-cycle elections because the ruling parties, in most cases, had institutionalized this salary being paid by the local and state government accounts. This finding corroborates the opinion of Muhtadi (2019) that most political parties and political leaders in the local communities pay cash to individuals of voting age during voter registration exercises in order to get them to vote for their party in future elections.

One of the interviewees, a youth leader, corroborated this finding and said that some political parties constituted 10 different committees per polling booth, and each committee had 30 prospective voters. Also, party recruitment was carried out because the candidates could present their voter cards and phone numbers. The recruitment took place a year before Election Day, and each member was paid a salary every month directly from the purse of the political party leaders. Paradoxically, Oladapo *et al.* (2020) argued that vote-buying has become a dominant factor at the center of democratic processes in Nigeria and Africa's elections.

The FGD data revealed that about a week before Election Day, the political leaders invited members of the rural communities and various heads of artisan groups and professional organizations to their houses, and they distributed financial and material incentives to them for the purpose of logistics. One of the interviewees, an observer, noted that in most cases, the

ward's political leaders sent private invitations to all the eligible and prospective voters, inviting them to their houses for impromptu meetings, during which they shared incentives for onward distribution. This is contrary to the past evidence that the political parties and their agents distributed around the polling booths on the day of the election (Kramon, 2018). The data from the in-depth interviews (IDIs) showed that vote-buying took many dimensions, such as giving out liquor, food, clothes, milk, and refreshments, all in different branded forms – these mobilized and enticed people to vote. One of the interviewees, a youth leader, buttressed this finding by saying that the branded and packaged goods were collected throughout the campaign and that some political agents and the parties' executives moved from one household to another, distributing these branded materials till the day of the election.

Another interviewee, a party leader, claimed that his party assigned him to cover three wards, and he had to employ the services of party members in distributing this money a day before the election. Some prospective voters even registered their names and submitted their accounts to party leaders a month before the general election on the promise that they would vote for their political party. Immediately after they voted, the party agents transferred the money into their accounts after ascertaining that they actually voted for their party in the election. The discussants noticed that there were many prospective voters who were neither members of any political party nor active participants in political meetings and campaigns, yet some party agents collected their accounts and enticed them with financial incentives on the day of the election.

Pretentious social and traditional supports

Clark and Monin's (2006) study revealed that communal relationships in rural areas mean that people's primary concern is being responsive to the other person's needs. The qualitative data revealed that the political parties identified various age-group heads, community leaders, and traditional rulers and fused their responsibility of care, welfare, and headship as a means to induce prospective voters in their areas. The discussants lamented that the citizens perceived their leaders as representatives of their ancestors who also put their relatives' welfare above their own and spent years providing emotional and tangible support. Leaders are unconditionally responsive to the other person; thus, they bear more responsibility. In order to buttress this assertion, one of the discussants, a community leader, claimed that different political parties recruited community, traditional, youth, and religious leaders in order to care for their people's needs and get their votes

during the election. The discussants agreed that community leaders have a general obligation to be concerned about other people's welfare, especially in times of need, without expecting any benefit in return. However, these political leaders intend to gain the people's support and votes in exchange for their care. They further claimed that this instrument of vote-buying was more common during the general elections than during the off-cycle elections in the 2023 elections. They also noted that it was done more by the ruling party.

The qualitative data showed that the political parties honored the traditional and community leaders who held various social statuses and played some political roles in their community, and they channeled their activities towards them. These leaders suddenly became their intermediaries and compiled the names of their followers in order to have incentives transferred through them to their followers. In most cases, the community leaders indirectly tendered the needs of their subjects to these political leaders for assistance and mandated the needy to vote for a political party during an election. The participants who were observers said that the traditional rulers compelled their subjects to vote for their party during the elections. This was especially the case for those followers who benefitted in one way or the other from these political leaders. One of the interviewees, who was a community leader, said that the elderly and young less-privileged in their community often rushed to the leaders to seek their consent on who to vote for, indicating that the party leaders served as instruments for this dimension of vote-buying in the 2023 general elections.

One of the youth leaders corroborated this finding by saying that the traditional institutions chose to have a traditional worship day for one of their deities one day before the election. As a result, each family head had to compile and forward the names of party loyalists within their families to the community heads, and on this basis, the party leaders distributed money and goods.

Discussion

Scholars have established the importance of voters in a democratic system of government (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2017; Corstange, 2018). Also, Aiyede and Ayegbeyan (2012), Weghorst and Lindberg (2013), and Gadjanova (2017) have highlighted the negative effect of vote-buying in electoral processes. Despite the different enacted laws and Acts against vote-buying in the election process, political parties have adopted different strategies to sensitize or entice voters in

order to win in elections. Kramon (2018) lamented that if this trend continues, the beauty of the liberal democratic political system may be eroded totally. The records of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2022) showed various allegations of vote-buying and incentive distribution in the recent elections in sub-Saharan African countries. Thus, it was pertinent to examine how new dimensions to vote-buying have undermined the 2023 elections in Nigeria.

Previous studies have established different types of incentives in various elections (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2014; Hicken *et al.*, 2018); however, they failed to consider the new dimensions of vote-buying in relation to the general elections and off-cycle elections in Nigeria. Despite the emergence of different electoral acts that forbid vote-buying and incentives on the day of the election, we discovered a new dimension of vote-buying in Nigeria's 2023 elections. We dug deeper and linked these new dimensions of vote-buying to an increase in voters' turnout in both the general and off-cycle elections.

With qualitative tools of data collection, we selected 4 states. Akwa-Ibom and Taraba States were purposively selected from the states that were only ruled by a single party from 1999 to 2023 democratic process. Bayelsa and Kogi States were selected out of the five states with off-cycle elections, that is, the states whose governorship elections were not conducted at the same time as the general elections of the other parts of the country. In these four states, we purposively considered only the two major political parties, that is, the ruling party and the major opposition party. These were the Peoples' Democratic Party and the All Progressive Party. Because of the wide geographical spread and homogeneous characteristics of voters in sub-Saharan African countries, as earlier established by Aapengnue (2010) and Ikenobe (2015), we used the convenience sampling technique with specific and strict criteria to select the participants. The study focused on the general elections and off-cycled elections in 2023 elections and was limited to only the use of qualitative methods to consider the new dimensions of vote-buying in Nigeria. Future studies can expand this study by examining vote-buying and other forms of incentives during the local and national elections and how the electoral institutions and agencies collaborate with political parties to rig elections through vote-buying.

New dimensions to vote-buying and voters' turnout

Exchange theory, as modified by Cropanzano *et al.* (2017) and Corstange (2018), holds the fundamental premise that all social life is treated as an exchange of rewards or resources between actors and that social change and stability are a process of negotiated exchange between parties (Cooper-Thomas & Morrison, 2019). With the basic assumption of the theory and the basic objectives of the study, we used qualitative tools to establish dimensions of vote-buying in Nigeria's 2023 elections. The first dimension of vote-buying was the kangaroo inducement activities, which involved giving material incentives and financial assistance to attendees and prospective voters in the rural areas, organizing fake funerals and birthday ceremonies prior to the election day, forming free cooperative and thrift societies for artisans, and strategically setting up worship of idols. These new dimensions of vote-buying have been institutionalized by some states and political parties in order to monitor and coordinate. In the long run, these types of incentives increased voters' turnout more in the general elections than in the off-cycle elections.

Secondly, the political parties embraced the social incentives to the less-privileged and aged people's groups. They also provided social assistance and delivered temporary social services for the uplift and well-being of community members prior to Election Day. The beneficiaries came out to vote for such parties and a high level of voters' turnout was recorded. The study revealed that this was more prominent in the general elections than in the off-cycle elections 2023. Thirdly, political parties introduced strategic incentives to parties' executives by paying them monthly salaries and allowances at the ward, local government, states and federal zones. The political parties conducted a camouflaged recruitment exercise into more than 10 committees, whose members were also placed on salaries. These committees could be found in every polling booth and membership was based on submission of voter's card. They tagged these committees mobilization and canvass squad. These mobilization and canvass teams gave incentives from door-to-door. The study showed that these types of incentives were prominent among the ruling party and that it was more common in the general elections than in the off-cycle elections. The fourth dimension of vote-buying is pretentious social support from the community leaders. The political parties identified the various age-group heads, the community leaders, and the traditional rulers and merged their responsibility of care, welfare and headship with inducing prospective voters in their areas. These leaders suddenly became intermediaries between the

political parties and their subjects, and the leaders compiled and gave the names of their needy subjects to the party leaders, who channeled the benefits towards them. With these benefits, the leaders mandated their subjects to vote these parties during the general elections, however, they did this more during the general elections than the off-cycle elections because the ruling parties control the traditional institutions and other community leaders. The study further revealed that these community leaders ordered their subjects to go out to cast their votes on election day, thus explaining the increase in the turnout of voters. These findings corroborate the analysis of Krueger and Stone (2014) that the traditional system and citizens' perception of cultural values influence voters' turnout in most electoral and political processes.

Conclusion

Vote-buying has enveloped most of the elections in sub-Saharan African countries and has gradually eroded the beauty of democracy. The 2023 elections in Nigeria witnessed new dimensions to vote-buying. The study showed the different dimensions of vote-buying in both short-term and long-term. Also, the study showed that vote-buying, which increased the voters' turnout, was more rampant in the general elections than in the off-cycle elections. The ruling party institutionalized vote-buying in the respective states, and the study identified the following as the vote-buying strategies: distribution of financial incentives and material goods in organized kangaroo cooperative and thrift organizations, age-grade social competitions, untimely schedule of traditional idol worshipping, and remembrance parties where branded goods were distributed by political parties and party leaders. Traditional rulers and community leaders were coyly assigned stalemate political roles in order to create easier channels for vote-buying. Specifically, the names of the needy, less privileged, and aged persons were collected, and prospective voters among them were identified and targeted for care by the community leaders. Political parties provided pretentious social incentives, assistance, and delivery of temporary social services for the uplift and well-being of prospective voters prior to Election Day. The political parties introduced strategic incentives to parties' executives and different camouflage committees by paying monthly salaries and allowances. The government needs to legislate against these various vote-buying strategies by the political parties in order to eradicate vote-buying in Nigeria's elections. There is also a need to rapidly improve on the activities of law enforcement to reduce this trend in Nigeria's elections.

References

- Aapengnue, C. M. 2010. Misinterpreting ethnic conflicts in Africa. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2(1), 213-225.
- Aiyede, E. and Aregbeyen, A. (2012). The cost of the 2011 general elections. *Journal of African Elections*, 11(1), 136-152. doi: 10.5465/annals.2015.0099
- Aliyu, M.K., Olawoyin, K. W. and Bamidele, S. K. (2020). Electoral malpractice as a challenge to sustainable development in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, 8(1), 15-25.
- Aluaigba, M.T. (2016). Democracy deferred: The effects of electoral malpractice on Nigeria's path to democratic consolidation. *Journal of African Elections*, 15(2), 136 – 158
- Awogbenle, A. C. (2010). Youth unemployment: entrepreneurship development programme as an intervention mechanism. *African Journal of Business Management*, 4(6), 21 – 35.
- Babatunde, H.O., Iwu, H, N., & Osuji, A. O. (2019). Money politics and vote buying in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Implications for national security. *Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities*, 4(2), 40–55
- Chasukwa, M. & Banik, D. (2019). By-passing government: Aid effectiveness and Malawi's local development fund. *Politics and Governance*, 7(2), 103–116.
- Chernyak-Hai L. & Rabenu E. (2018). The new era workplace relationships: is social exchange theory still relevant? *Organizational Psychology*, 11, 456–481. doi: 10.1017/iop.2018.5
- Chukwurah, D.C.J., Egodike, E., Nnamani, D. & Nduba, J. (2019). The effect of vote-buying and 2019 general elections in Nigeria. *Nnadiesube Journal of Social Sciences*, 2 (2), 1–20
- Clark, M. & Monin, J. (2006). Giving and receiving communal responsiveness as love. In R. J. Sternberg & K. Weis (Eds.), *the new psychology of love* (pp. 200–223). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Cooper-Thomas H. D. & Morrison R. L. (2019). Give and take: needed updates to social exchange theory. *Industrial Organizational Psychology*, 11, 493–498. doi: 10.1017/iop.2018.101
- Corstange, D. (2018). Clientelism in competitive and uncompetitive elections. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(1), 76–104.
- Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999. *Official gazette*. Abuja, Nigeria: FRN Publisher.
- Cropanzano R., Anthony E. L., Daniels S. R. and Hall A. V. (2017). Social exchange theory: A critical review with theoretical remedies. *Academics Management Annals*, 11, 479–516.
- Electoral Act (2022). Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, No 61, Vol. 109, A353–463
- Eme, O.I. (2009). Political finance and the future of Nigeria political parties: Agenda for reform. *Nigerian Journal of Administrative Science*, 8(1 and 2), 142-162.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, (2022). *Electoral Act, 2022*. Lagos: The Federal Government Printer.
- Ferree, K., Gibson, C. and Hoffman, B. (2019). Why the salience of social divisions matters

- in party systems: Testing the interactive hypothesis in South Africa. *Party Politics*, 25(2), 208–220.
- Gadjanova, E. (2017). Electoral clientelism as status affirmation in Africa: Evidence from Ghana. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 55(4), 593–621.
- Gonzalez, O. E., Jonge, C. K. and Nickerson, D. W. (2014). The conditionality of V.B. norms: Experimental evidence from Latin America. *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(1), 197–211.
- Hicken, A., Leider, S., Ravanilla, N. and Yang, D. (2018). Temptation in vote-selling: Evidence from a field experiment in the Philippines. *Journal of Development Economics*, 131, 1–14.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, (2022). *The global state of democracy 2022: Forging social contracts in a time of discontent*. Stockholm: International IDEA.
- Ikuenobe, P. (2015). *Philosophical perspective on communalism and morality in African traditions*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Keefer, P. and Vlaicu, R. (2017). V.B. and Campaign Promises. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 45(4), 773–792.
- Kramon, E. (2018). *Money for votes: The causes and consequences of electoral clientelism in Africa*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Krueger, A.B. and Stone, A. A. (2014). Progress in Measuring Subjective Well-Being: Moving toward national indicators and policy evaluations. *Science*, 34(6), 32–43.
- Lyons B. J. & Scott B. A. (2012). Integrating social exchange and affective explanations for the receipt of help and harm: a social network approach. *Organization Behaviour Human Decision Process*, 117, 66–79. doi: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2011.10.002
- Magaji, M. and Musa, U.A. (2022). Vote-Buying and the electoral process in Nigeria: Trends and challenges, 2015 –2019. *Zamfara Journal of Politics and Development*, 3(2), 93 - 101.
- Mair, J. and Marti, I. (2006). Social entrepreneurship research: a source of explanation, prediction, and delight. *Journal of World Business*, 41(1), 36-44.
- Mares, I., and Young, L. (2016). Buying, expropriating, and stealing votes. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 19, 267–288.
- Methot J. R., Lepine J. A., Podsakoff N. P. & Christian J. S. (2016). Are workplace friendships a mixed blessing? Exploring tradeoffs of multiplex relationships and their associations with job performance. *Personnel Psychol.* 69, 311–355. doi: 10.1111/peps.12109.
- Mitchell M. S., Cropanzano R. S. and Quisenberry D. M. (2012). Social exchange theory, exchange resources, and interpersonal relationships: A modest resolution of theoretical difficulties in Törnblom K., Kazemi A's *Handbook of Social Resource Theory*. eds. New York, NY: Springer. 99–118.
- Mueller, S. (2011). Dying to win: Elections, political violence, and institutional decay in Kenya. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 29(1), 99–117.
- Muhtadi, B. (2019). *The determinants of vote-buying: The profile of typical vote 'sellers in vote buying in Indonesia*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan
- National Bureau Statistics (2023) *National population estimate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: Analytical report at the national level*. Lagos, Nigeria: Abuchie Publisher, 125.
- Nkwede, J.O. (2019). Political parties, citizen participation, and voter behavior in Africa: A

- study of Nigeria. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 152(1), 83-92.
- Nkwede, J.O. and Abah, E.O. (2019). Elections and vote-buying in Nigeria: An albatross to democratization process. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 24(8), 56-62.
- Nwankwo, C. F. (2018). Vote buying in the 2018 governorship election in Ekiti State, Nigeria. *Open Political Science*, 1, 93-97. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/openps-2018-005>.
- Oduntan, A. A. (2022). Vote buying: A critical election risk factor in Nigeria. *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research*, 8(3), 148 – 156
- Oladapo, S.O., Oyewale, A. O. and Abayomi, H. O. (2020). Influence of vote buying among electorates: Its implications to Nigeria's future democracy. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 18(1), 73-78
- Onuoha, F. & Ojo, J. (2018). Practice and perils of vote buying in Nigeria's recent Elections. *Conflict Trends*, 3,21-29
- Osimen, G. U. and Iloh, C. E. (2022). Vote-buying, voting behavior and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Science*, 3(3), 64– 75.
- Ozoemena, A.M. and Evangeline, D.E. (2019). Electoral frauds and challenges of good governance in Nigeria. *International Journal of Contemporary Applied Researches*, 6(11), 15 –27
- Szwarcberg, M. (2012). Uncertainty, political clientelism, and voter turnout in Latin America: Why parties conduct rallies in Argentina. *Comparative Politics*, 45(1), 88–106.
- Transition Monitoring Group, (2023). An Election Programmed to Fail: Final Report of the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. Abuja: TMG.
- Transparency International, (2023). Sub-Saharan Africa: Undemocratic regimes undermine anti-corruption efforts. A continuous struggle in fighting corruption across the region. <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi2018-subsaharan-africa-regional-analysis>
- Ugwuala, U.D., Kalu, U. G., and Elechi, F.A. (2020). Electoral fraud is a major challenge to political development in Nigeria. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, 13(2), 50 - 60
- Vasudevan, S. (2019). Diminishing the effectiveness of V.B.: Experimental evidence from a persuasive radio campaign in India (Working Paper). Poverty Action Lab. Retrieved from https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/research-paper/Diminishing-the-Effect-of-Vote-Buying_Jan2019.pdf.
- Vicente, P. C. (2014). Is V.B. effective? Evidence from a field experiment in West Africa. *The Economic Journal*, 124(4), 356–387.
- Weghorst, K. R., and Lindberg, S. I. (2013). What drives the swing voter in Africa? *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(3), 717–734.
- Weitz-Shapiro, R. (2012). What wins votes: Why some politicians opt out of clientelism. *American Journal of Political Science*, 56(3), 568–583.
- Yakubu, H.B. (2020). The effects of vote buying on the electoral process in Nigeria. *Journal of Current Issues in Arts and Humanities*, 6(1), 75–86.