IJAAR PUBLISHING®

Scholarly Journal of Social Sciences Research | ISSN: 2955-0785
Vol. 5, Issue 1 (2026) | www.ijaar.org/sjssr

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF VOTER EDUCATION IN COMBATING VOTE BUYING AND SELLING IN NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL PROCESS: A STUDY OF BAYELSA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the impact of voter education on combating vote buying and selling in Nigeria, specifically focusing on Bayelsa State. Vote buying has become increasingly prevalent in Nigeria's electoral system, as political actors battle to win elections at all costs. Unfortunately, many voters in Nigeria now prefer selling their votes instead of voting for the right candidates. Despite voter education campaigns, the practices of vote buying and selling continue to thrive, adversely affecting the credibility and integrity of our electoral process. The study adopted the survey research design method. The primary data was obtained through questionnaires and oral interviews. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to respondents in selected communities in Yenagoa and Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area, with 270 completed questionnaires returned. The arithmetic mean was used to analyze the data collected from the questionnaires. The findings revealed that financial inducements from politicians and party agents in the polling unit were the major reasons why voters sell their votes. Additionally, the study found that voter education programmes and enlightenment campaigns have not effectively curtailed vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State. The study recommended, among other things, continuous voter education programmes to educate voters against selling their votes. The study also recommends the use of local languages to educate voters in rural communities about the dangers of trading their votes for money. Town hall meetings and town criers could be effective strategies for disseminating information against vote buying and selling.

Keywords: Vote buying, Vote Selling, Voter Education, Electoral Process

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of vote buying is a major concern in democracies around the world, particularly in developing countries, where the behaviour of political actors is to win elections at all costs. The actions of political actors indulging in vote buying undermine the integrity of the electoral process in many developing democracies. Nigeria has faced the challenge of vote buying and selling since the return to civil rule in 1999.

Today, money plays a significant role in Nigerian politics, with impoverished masses often targeted for vote buying due to their vulnerability to material inducements. Vote buying involves a straightforward economic transaction in which candidates "purchase" votes from voters, who, in turn, trade their votes as commodities for cash. In Nigeria, vote buying and selling transactions typically involve the exchange of money, goods such as food items, skill acquisition and empowerment programmess, as well as promises of employment after elections. This practice has transformed Nigeria's democracy into a "cash and carry" democracy, where the candidate with the highest bid for votes wins the election.

Vote buying and selling have become widespread in Nigeria, with almost every election involving the monetary inducement of voters. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), there was a 5% increase in vote buying and selling during the 2023 general elections. The NBS reported that vote buying recorded 22% in the 2023 general elections compared to 17% in the 2019 general election (Uthman, 2024).

The 2022 electoral Act of Nigeria in Section 22 criminalized both the buying and selling of votes, making it an offense that can result in a fine of up to N500,000, imprisonment for a maximum of two years, or both upon conviction. Despite this legal prohibition, vote buying and selling have continued to thrive, driven by the competitive nature of candidates and political parties vying for votes at any cost.

Bayelsa State, one of the oil-rich states located in the Niger Delta region, faces significant socio-economic challenges such as poverty and unemployment, providing fertile ground for vote buying and selling to flourish. The state has witnessed recurrent incidents of vote buying and selling in its recent elections. For instance, in the 2023 governorship election, voters were reportedly paid betweenN40, 000 to N12, 000. The Labour Party (LP) governorship candidate in the election, UdengsEradiri, expressed his displeasure at the high level of vote buying. He cited an example of a woman from his community who, despite being offered a scholarship for her son, sold her vote for N14,000 (Daily Trust, 2023).

Voters in Bayelsa State have unfortunately come to view selling their votes as a means of making money during elections. This perspective has led to an increase in vote buying, thus compromising the integrity of the electoral process and its outcomes. To combat the menace of vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State and Nigeria in general, various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have launched campaigns through town hall meetings, radio and television broadcasts, and social media platforms to educate voters about the negative impacts of these practices. However, despite these campaigns, vote buying and selling continue to thrive.

Generally, voter education campaigns are designed to empower voters, providing them with essential information concerning their rights and responsibilities before and during elections. These campaigns aim to increase citizens' civic participation and equip them with the

information needed to make informed decisions in casting their ballots, thereby enhancing the integrity and legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

Effective voter education can help combat the problem of vote buying and selling. It is crucial for voters to be well-informed about the electoral process, the candidates vying for elective positions, and the issues at stake before and during elections. Voter education plays a significant role in promoting political participation and informed decision-making among citizens (Xie& Newman, 2008). Furthermore, voter education is fundamental in ensuring a well-functioning democracy (Smith, 2016).

One of the responsibilities of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria is to conduct voter and civic education. Civil society organizations have also played significant role in voter education campaigns aimed at informing voters about the electoral process, including efforts to combat vote buying and selling. This study assesses the impact of voter education in addressing vote buying and selling in Nigeria, with particular attention to Bayelsa State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Vote buying has become widespread in Nigeria's political landscape since the return of democracy in 1999. Unfortunately, it is increasingly accepted as a normal part of the country's political culture, making it challenging to conduct fair and credible elections. Despite laws prohibiting the buying and selling of votes, as well as campaigns against these practices, vote buying has become deeply entrenched in Nigeria's electoral system. Political parties and candidates regularly provide financial inducements to voters during election to secure electoral victories.

In Bayelsa State, vote buying and selling have become an accepted political norm, with many voters opting to sell their votes rather than vote for their preferred candidates. Recent elections in Bayelsa State indicate that these practices are a persistent issue that undermines the integrity of the electoral process in the state. While voter education plays a crucial role in promoting informed electoral participation, there appears to be a significant gap in awareness and understanding among voters regarding the consequences of vote buying and selling. Many voters in Bayelsa State now leave their homes on Election Day primarily in search of monetary compensation (Ogbomah & Okoko, 2024).

This troubling scenario continues to threaten the electoral process in Bayelsa State and Nigeria as a whole. The inducement of voters raises serious doubts about the integrity and credibility of the electoral system and its outcomes. The problem thus is the effectiveness of voter education campaigns in combating the menace of vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of voter education in combating vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State. The specific objectives of the study are:

(i) To identify the reasons why voters sell their votes during elections in Bayelsa State.
(ii) To assess the impact of voter education in combating vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State?
(iii) Identify strategies that can further enhance voter education campaigns aimed at combating vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions.

(i) What are the factors contributing to vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State elections?
(ii) What is the impact of voter education in combating vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State?
(iii) What strategy can be adopted to enhance voter education in Bayelsa State?

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

VOTER EDUCATION

Voter education is a critical aspect of any democratic system. It aimed at enhancing citizens' understanding of the electoral process, their voting rights and responsibilities during and after election. It plays a major role in promoting democratic participation and ensuring that citizens are informed about the electoral process.

Fletcher et al., 2020 noted that voter education plays an important role in democratic participation, as it empowers citizens with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions during elections. They added that voter education can help combat misinformation. Misinformation is a growing concern in today's digital world as it can discourage voter participation and skew perceptions about candidates.

Voter education refers to efforts aimed at informing and empowering citizens about their rights and responsibilities in the electoral process. It includes providing information on how to register, understanding the voting process, and raising awareness about candidates and issues on the ballot. Effective voter education enhances civic engagement and can lead to increased voter turnout (Shaw, 2020).

Voter education is used to describe the dissemination of information, materials and programmes designed to inform voters about the specifics and mechanics of the voting process for a particular election. It involves providing information on who is eligible to vote; where and how to register; how electors can check the voter lists to ensure they have been duly included; what type of elections are being held; where, when and how to vote; who the candidates are; and how to file complaints (Voter and Civic Education, n.d).

Waheed (2011) sees voters' education as an enterprise to ensure that now voters are ready to participate in electoral process and to know who the best choice is beyond political, ethnic or other affiliations." He added that elections are always defining moments in the history of nations, so major stakeholders of elections, i. e., voters should have sufficient education as to how, when and to whom the choice is made.

The Executive Director of the Peering Advocacy and Advancement Center in Africa (PAACA), Ezenwa Nwagwu, emphasized that voter education extends beyond merely understanding the voting process. It also includes civic education, which imparts knowledge about a country's political system and context. He highlighted the vital role of voter education in sustaining democracy in Nigeria, stating that an informed electorate is essential for democratic governance, as it empowers citizens to make informed decisions at the polls (PAACA, 2025).

Voter education, from the foregoing, is the process of sensitizing and educating voters in a country about the electoral process. This includes information on how to register and collect their voter's card, the polling units where they can vote during elections, how to correctly thumbprint

on the ballot paper, and information about the candidates and political parties they are voting for. Voter education also aims to inform voters against any form of inducement that could influence their decisions before and during the casting of their votes. The primary goal of voter education is to ensure that voters are properly informed about the electoral process and that the electoral process is fair and credible.

VOTE BUYING AND SELLING

Vote buying has been described as a "prebendal democracy," a concept developed by Professor Richard Joseph. It involves self-serving elites using state power to accumulate resources, a phenomenon known as elite capture of democracy (Okoli, 2022).

Bratton and van de Walle, (1997) described vote buying, as a tactic often employed in electoral processes, involves providing monetary or material incentives to voters in exchange for their votes. Ajayi (2025) averred that vote-buying is the practice of rewarding someone for casting a specific ballot. He added that vote buying is a simple economic transaction whereby voters sell their votes to the highest bidder in an election. The transaction is between the voter and buyer of the votes who are usually candidates or party agents.

According Oliver and Vasil, (2022), vote buying is the offer of financial or material inducements to voters by candidates or political parties during an election campaign period and/or on Election Day in exchange for electoral support. Vote buying therefore is the financial and non-financial inducement of voters by politicians and political parties to influence voters to vote for their candidates. Vote buying is now a common practice in Nigeria where politicians induce voters with money to vote for candidate other than their choice. It is a corrupt practices used by unpopular politicians to win election.

Opponents of vote buying often argue that it infringes on the principle of free and fair elections, as it distorts the true will of the electorate. More critically, countries where vote buying is rampant may experience diminished political engagement and disillusionment among voters, further perpetuating cycles of corruption (Manion, 2006).

Kramon and Posner (2013) noted that buying undermines the democratic process, leaning towards the manipulation of voters and eroding public trust in institutions. They added that vote buying can significantly influence electoral outcomes, especially in an environment with high poverty levels where voters may prioritize immediate financial gain over long-term political considerations.

Vote selling, also known as vote trading is a fundamental issue facing many democracies. Vote selling undermines the integrity of elections and can lead to skewed representation. Individuals who sell their votes during elections often do so out of economic necessity, perceiving it as a viable means to address their immediate financial needs. Bratton (2008) discovered that in many developing nations, economic hardship drives voters to sell their votes despite understanding the long-term implications for governance and political accountability.

The phenomenon can also be attributed to the influence of political parties and candidates who may encourage such practices to secure electoral victories. Furthermore, vote selling can have cascading effects on political accountability. When elected officials rely on purchased votes to secure their positions, they may prioritize the interests of their financial backers over those of their constituents (Gonzalez, 2016). This is can create a political environment where the needs of

the masses are often overlooked and the people marginalized in terms of distribution of resources of the state since the voters have benefited by selling their votes during elections.

The impact of vote selling extends beyond just the immediate electoral outcomes. Scott (2011) point out that it can lead to a general disillusionment with the political process, as citizens come to see voting as a transactional activity rather than a civic duty. This can weaken public trust in democratic institutions and reduce overall political participation.

The foregoing clearly shows that both vote buying and selling involves complex interplay of economic transaction between the voters and vote buyers. The transaction takes place when the voters sell their vote by voting for the candidate of the buyer in exchange for either money or material gift.

There are willing and unwilling sellers of votes. Willing sellers are those who have made up their mind to seller their votes during elections irrespective of the pedigree of candidates contesting election. For them, selling their votes is one of way of benefiting from the national cake in the country. Willing sellers of votes are ready to sell their votes for any amount without bargain. Unwilling seller of votes are voters who are been persuaded by candidates and political parties to sell their votes. Unwilling seller bargains for highest amount of money before the sell their votes during or before election.

It is important to note that vote buying and selling is a criminal offence in Nigeria. It can be liken to giving and receiving bribe to perform a duty. Section 22 of electoral act of 2022 made vote buying and selling a criminal offence which is punishable under the law. It therefore means that both the seller who is the voter and buyer who in most cases are candidates contesting election or their party agent are all guilty of the offence.

SOME FORMS OF VOTE BUYING IN NIGERIA

Vote buying can take several forms. Below are some of the common methods of vote buying currently taking place in Nigeria:

1. **Financial Inducement:** Financial inducement is the most prevalent form of vote buying in Nigeria. It involves giving money to voters to influence them to vote for a candidate other than their preferred choice. This usually occurs before or during elections. For example, during election in Nigeria, party agents are stationed at polling units to monitor voters and offer them money to vote against their conscience. Additionally, financial inducement can occur before Election Day, as party agents visit prospective voters in their homes and distribute money to them.

2. **Distribution of Food Items:** In addition to cash inducements, the distribution of food items, such as rice which is the most staple food in the country, is another common method of vote buying in Nigeria. These food items are often distributed at the ward level within local government areas by political parties to eligible voters in an attempt to influence their votes in favour of the candidates of the party.

3. **Government Empowerment Programmes:** Government empowerment programmes, particularly those initiated by the ruling party, represent another form of vote buying in Nigeria. These programmes can take the form of cash transfers to individuals in the guise of supporting them financially or empowering them to start a business. The objective is to influence voters to

cast their votes for the party in power. For example, former Nigeria's Vice President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo was accused of "bribing voters" ahead of the 2019 general elections with the Trader-Moni scheme, officially called the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). Traders were given a paltry sum of N10, 000 as a loan to be repaid within six months (Adebulu, 2018).

4. **Promise of Employment:** Another strategy employed by politicians to secure votes as elections approach is the promise of employment. Many politicians, particularly state governors in Nigeria, utilize this tactic to sway voters indirectly. Prior to election periods, state governors often advertise job opportunities in the civil service with the aim of influencing voters by promising them jobs if the party wins election.

SOME NEGATIVE IMPACT OF VOTE BUYING AND SELLING IN NIGERIA

1. It Undermines the Integrity of the Electoral Process: When votes are bought with money, it leads to the monetization of the electoral process, thereby compromising the integrity of the entire election.

2. Breeds Bad Governance: When money is used to secure electoral victories, there is a tendency for those who have spent money to seek to recoup their monies. This promote high levels of corruption and mismanagement of public funds with impunity.

3. **Promotes Elitist Politics:** Vote buying encourages elitist politics in Nigeria and weakens the participation of ordinary citizens in the political process. The rate at which votes are bought, along with the substantial amounts of money used in these transactions, means that only individuals with financial resources can contest for political office. This situation aligns with Professor Richard Joseph's concept of "prebendal democracy," where elites use state power to accumulate resources and capture democracy (Okoli, 2022).

4. Subverts the Will of the People: A fundamental tenet of democracy is that the will of the people should prevail through free and fair elections. However, due to the current prevalence of vote buying and selling in Nigeria, the voters' will is often undermined, as monetary influence determines election outcomes rather than the democratic choice of the people.

5. Destroys Democracy: Democracy is fundamentally based on the principle of fair and transparent elections, and the equal participation of the masses in the electoral process. However, with the current state of vote buying in Nigeria's, elections are no longer fair and transparent as electoral victory is often determined by the highest bidder for votes. In this situation, voters lose their significance, and what matters most is the money to purchase vote. This undermines the sovereignty of the people who decide those that govern them through democratic process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored in the Social Exchange Theory, which emerged in the late 1950s. Since its inception, the theory has developed extensively into a substantial body of research. The development of the theory is attributed to the works of scholars such as John Thibaut, George Homans, Peter Blau, and Harold Kelly. Although the four scholars have divergent approaches to the construction and analysis of the theory, they share a common idea that human behavior in social groups is a form of exchange (Davlembayeva & Alamanos, 2025).

Thibaut and Kelly, two of the foremost advocates of the theory, applied theoretical concepts to human decision-making in social groups and developed matrices to predict the outcomes of relationships. These matrices represent different outcomes of exchange defined by varying proportions of costs and rewards that people receive or incur in interpersonal relations. They stated that an individual's decision to participate in an exchange depends on the degree to which it provides better rewards (e.g., social power, profit) or lower costs compared to other competing relationships (Davlembayeva & Alamanos, 2025).

At the core of the Social Exchange Theory is the idea that individuals assess their relationships with others in terms of the costs and benefits they will receive. This means that people weigh the benefits or rewards they will gain against the costs incurred when making decisions. In other words, individuals in any social setting perceive their relationships as transactional, based on what they stand to gain from it.

From the Social Exchange Theory point of view, voters will always weigh their decision in voting for any candidate against what they will gain before casting their vote. Voters are likely to cast their votes for candidates only if they believe that the candidate will reciprocate their vote with monetary or financial rewards.

The relevance of the Social Exchange Theory to the study lies in its ability to unravel the reasons why voters sell their votes during elections in Nigeria. The prevalence of vote buying and selling highlights the rewards or benefits voters perceive from casting their votes during elections. Voters see their decision to cast their vote as a transactional relationship that benefits them financially.

METHOD OF THE STUDY

This study utilized the survey method, using both questionnaires and oral interviews to gather primary data. The population targeted by the study consisted of 283,758 registered voters from Yenagoa and Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Areas in Bayelsa State. According to the INEC report of 2023, Yenagoa Local Government has 218,394 registered voters making it the local government with highest number of voters, while Kolokuma/Opokuma has the smallest with 65,364 registered voters.

A sample size of 300 respondents was selected from the population of registered voters in selected communities in Yenagoa and Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area. Out of the 300 distributed questionnaires, 270 were successfully retrieved from respondents in the two local government areas.

The purposive sampling technique was employed to select the voters who participated in the study. The reason for using the purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that only voters who are willing and understood the objectives of the study were included in the survey. The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using the arithmetic mean.

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULT

The formula and decision rule used in the analysis of the research questions is stated below.

$$\text{Criterion Mean} = \frac{\text{SA}(4) + \text{A}(3) + \text{D}(2) + \text{SD}(1)}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.50$$

$$\text{Arithmatic Weighted Mean } \frac{\sum \bar{x} W}{W}$$

The figures in bracket ( ) are the Weighted Scores

Decision Rule: We accept if the weighted mean is greater than (>) the criterion mean (2.50) and reject if the criterion mean is greater (>) than the weighted mean.

Table 1: Voters are induced with money to sell their votes during elections.

Item	Category	Frequency	WMS	Decision
	Strongly Agree	170	3.5	Agree
	Agree	74		
	Disagree	17		
	Strongly Disagree	9		
	Total	270		

Source: Authors field data, 2025.

The data in Table 1 indicate that the arithmetic weighted mean of 3.5 is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. The result shows that voters were influenced by money to sell their votes. It clearly indicates that one of the reasons vote buying is so prevalent during elections is the monetary incentives offered to voters at polling units.

The findings from the questionnaire align with information gathered from several individuals interviewed regarding why voters choose to sell their votes. Most respondents noted that politicians and party agents use money to influence voters at polling units. They pointed out that, given the high level of poverty, many people prefer to accept money and vote for the party that rewards them, rather than returning home empty-handed after casting their votes. Additionally, the respondents mentioned that even civil servants, who have stable salary, often accept money to vote.

Table 2: INEC and civil society organizations organize voter education to enlighten voters about the dangers of selling their votes.

Item	Category	Frequency	WMS	Decision
	Strongly Agree	89	2.71	Agree
	Agree	77		
	Disagree	41		
	Strongly Disagree	63		
	Total	270		

Source: Authors field data, 2025.

The data presented in Table 2 indicates that the arithmetic weighted mean of 2.71 is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. This finding reveals that Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and civil society organizations in Bayelsa State organizes voter education campaigns aimed at combating vote buying.

The result above align with the views of several individuals interviewed whether voter education programmes are organize to address vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State. Some voters interviewed noted that while there are voter education campaigns against vote buying in the state, these efforts are not carried out regularly; they usually occur during election periods.

However, some persons interviewed particularly those residing in rural communities disagreed, asserting that INEC and civil society organizations do not conduct voter education programmes to enlighten voters about the dangers of selling their votes during elections.

Table 3: Voter education programmes in Bayelsa State are effective in combating vote buying and selling.

Item	Category	Frequency	WMS	Decision
	Strongly Agree	57	2.24	Disagree
	Agree	31		
	Disagree	97		
	Strongly Disagree	91		
	Total	270		

Source: Authors field data, 2025.

The data in Table 3 indicates that the arithmetic weighted mean of 2.24 is less than the criterion mean of 2.50. This suggests that voter education programmes in Bayelsa State have not effectively address the issue of vote buying and selling in the state.

These findings are consistent with the opinions of several individuals interviewed regarding the impact of voter education on combating vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State. Most interviewees expressed that voter education campaigns through television, radio, and billboards have not succeeded in reducing vote buying and selling during elections. The majority of those interviewed asserted that despite these voter education campaigns prior to elections, vote buying and selling remain rampant in Bayelsa State.

Table 4: Regular voter education and the use of local languages to educate rural voters can help combat vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State.

Item	Category	Frequency	WMS	Decision
	Strongly Agree	138	3.33	Agree
	Agree	99		
	Disagree	19		
	Strongly Disagree	14		
	Total	270		

Source: Authors field data, 2025.

The data presented in Table 4 indicates that the arithmetic weighted mean of 3.33 is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. The result show that regular voter education and the use of local language to disseminate information to voters is an effective strategy for combating vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State.

The findings are consistent with information obtained from several persons interviewed who emphasized that regular voter education can help counteract vote buying. They emphasized that voter education should be a continuous exercise rather than a one-time exercisethat is limited to the election period. Also, majority of the people interviewed noted that using a language familiar to the local population for voter education is a more effective strategy to address the issues of vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State.

DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

The findings on the factors contributing to vote buying reveal that the use of money by politicians and party agents at polling units to induce voters is one of the reasons why voters sell their votes instead of voting for their preferred candidates. The findings indicate that voters often cannot resist the money offered to them at the polling units, thus making vote buying and selling thrive in Bayelsa State. These findings corroborate the report from the Centre for Democracy and Development, which documented widespread vote buying and electoral violence during the 2023 off-cycle elections conducted in Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi states. Dr. Jack Johnson, a member of the CDD Election Analysis Centre (CDD-EAC), noted that election observers reported incidents of voter inducement ranging from N5,000 to N22,000 in Polling Unit (PU) 1, Ward 8, and PU 11, Ward 1 in Sagbama LGA in Bayelsa West. In Bayelsa Central, similar reports came from PU 16, Ward 6 in Yenagoa LGA and PU 22, Ward 13 in Southern Ijaw LGA (CDD, 2023).

The findings regarding the effectiveness of voter education programmes in combating vote buying and selling reveal that voter education campaigns have failed to curb the menace of vote buying and selling in Bayelsa State. Both the questionnaire responses and the oral interviews affirm that voter education campaigns have not effectively addressed the issue of vote buying and selling. Voter education programmes must go beyond merely informing voters through television, radio, and billboards. It should be deliberately designed using various strategies to inform voters about the dangers of selling their votes during elections.

Furthermore, the findings presented in Table 4 indicate that regular voter education is an effective strategy for curbing vote buying. Voter education should be a continuous exercise rather than a seasonal one done only when elections are near. Regular voter education can help create awareness among voters about the dangers of trading their votes for money.

Additionally, the findings revealed that using local languages can be an effective strategy to address vote buying and selling. For example using local language in town hall meetings and employing town criers to highlight sections of the electoral law that criminalize vote buying and selling are effective strategies to curb vote buying and selling, particularly in rural communities where electricity is a major challenge. Messages such as "If you sell your vote, you sell your future," "Your vote is your power—don’t sell your power," and "If you sell your vote, politicians won’t develop your community," convey more meaning to the rural populace.

CONCLUSION

Vote buying and selling is a major challenge confronting Nigeria’s democracy and electoral system since the return to civil rule in 1999. It has transformed Nigeria's democracy into a “cash and carry” system, where candidates who are the highest bidders for votes win elections. Voters in Nigeria now prefer to sell their votes rather than vote for their preferred candidates, largely due to the financial inducement by politicians and party agents. The influence of money has undermined the sovereignty of the people in Nigeria’s democracy, as monetary incentives now determine election outcomes rather than the democratic choice of the electorate.

To address the prevalence of vote buying and selling, it is essential to implement robust voter education programmes that extend beyond the mere use of television, radio, and social media to educate voters only during election seasons. Instead, there should be continuous voter education exercise that consistently tackles the issue of vote buying and selling. Voter

education campaigns that seek to inform voters about the dangers of trading their votes should not be limited to the period leading up to elections, as this will not effectively combat the widespread menace of vote buying and selling in Nigeria.

Voters must be well-informed about the danger of selling their votes during elections. Targeted messages, particularly aimed at rural voters, such as "If you sell your vote, you sell your future" or "Your vote is your power—don't sell your power," should be communicated in local languages. This approach can play a crucial role in addressing the problem of vote selling among voters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended the following based on the findings from the questionnaires and oral interviews:

1. INEC and civil society organizations should make voter education a continuous exercise to educate voters against selling their votes. Voter education programmes should not only be conducted during or prior to elections; it should be a regular and ongoing exercise.

2. Voter education programmes should be communicated in local languages that the rural populace, can understand. Messages such as "If you sell your vote, you sell your future" or "Your vote is your power—don't sell your power" should be communicated directly to the people.

3. Town hall meetings and town criers should be utilized to highlight sections of the electoral law that criminalize the selling of votes. This can instill a sense of apprehension among voter, thus discouraging them from selling their votes.

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