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VOTE BUYING IN THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN BIASE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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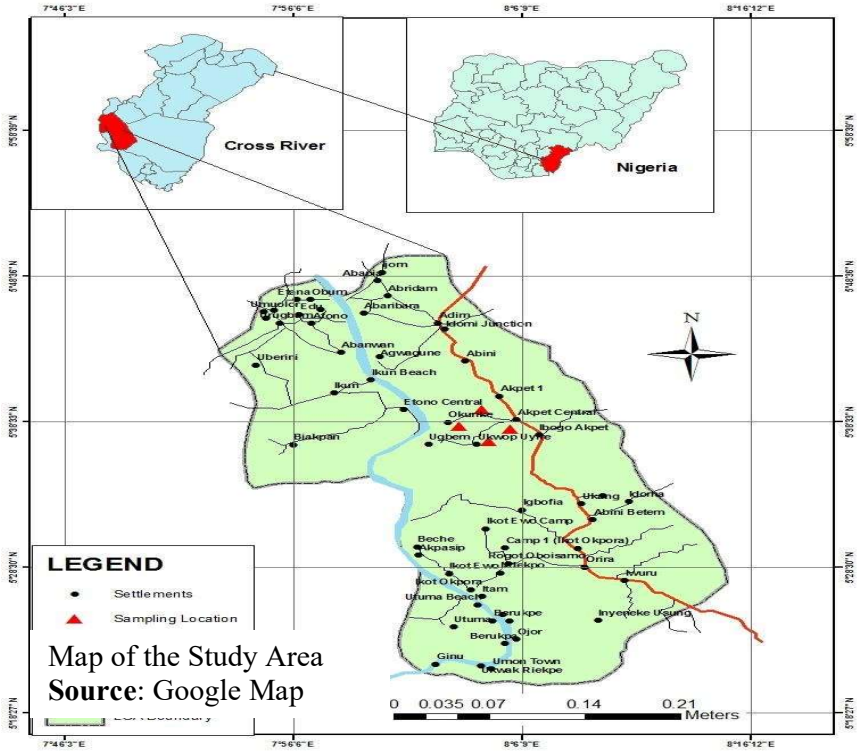
Abstract
Vote buying continues to be a recurring problem in Nigeria's democratic process, posing a risk to the credibility and results of elections. Although vote buying is widespread, there has been limited research undertaken to show a clear connection between vote buying and the outcome of elections. The study employed rational choice theory to investigate the occurrence of vote buying in the Biase local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study aimed to ascertain the determinants of vote-buying in the 2023 general elections in the Biase local government area and evaluate its influence on electoral results. The study utilised primary and secondary data sources to identify the factors that facilitate vote buying, which encompass poverty, restricted access to education, political manipulation, dishonesty, unfulfilled promises by politicians, and voter indifference. The study also found that vote buying harms the democratic process. It undermines the interest of the voters, promotes the election of ineffective leaders, questions the integrity of election results, and perpetuates illegitimacy and a lack of interest in the electoral process. The study suggests that the enforcement of current laws prohibiting vote buying should be carried out thoroughly. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for collaboration between the government and civil society actors to address underlying factors such as poverty, ignorance, and corruption that contribute to the occurrence of vote buying. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of educating voters on the value of their vote and the significance of choosing leaders based on their qualifications and policies rather than monetary incentives. By increasing awareness and promoting transparency in the electoral process, we can reduce the prevalence of vote buying and strengthen democratic principles. Ultimately, tackling this issue requires a multi-faceted approach that involves both legal enforcement and societal change. Only through concerted efforts can the negative impacts of vote buying be mitigated, and the integrity of the democratic process be preserved.

Keywords: Election, Electoral process, Democracy, Ignorance, Inducement, Poverty, Vote buying.

Introduction

Vote buying, or the practice of exchanging money or gifts for votes, is a serious issue that has impacted politics and the electoral process in several nations, including Nigeria. Though it can seem like a simple case of corruption, poverty, educational attainment, and cultural norms are some of the elements that play a role. Factors such as poverty and inadequate education contribute to a setting where voters are susceptible to manipulation and bribery, resulting in the erosion of the electoral process and the emergence of ineffective leaders.

Voter inducement, which undermines the concept of free and fair elections, is not uncommon in Nigeria's democracy. Recently, other forms of electoral fraud and misconduct, such as ballot snatching, buying and selling of permanent voter cards (PVC), and plural voting, have escalated in the nation's democratic process. The main reason behind this trend can be attributed to the excessive ambition of politicians and the unchecked desperation displayed by their willing subordinates. In any society, the electoral process should ideally provide a crucial platform for creating an environment where citizens can participate in governance and promote the delivery of democratic benefits (Victor & Olabode, 2019). Nevertheless, the widespread occurrence of electoral fraud and misconduct weakens the fundamental principles of democracy and diminishes confidence in the democratic system. This not only deprives voters of their rights but also sustains a cycle of corruption and impunity among politicians and their followers. The scenario in the study area of Biase local government area in Cross River State, Nigeria is similar to the situation at the national level.



Map of the Study Area
Source: Google Map

Although vote-buying is widespread and has significant implications for the democratic process, there is a lack of empirical study on the factors contributing to vote-buying and its influence on electoral outcomes in Biase local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The general objective of this study is to provide an in-depth knowledge of the processes by which vote-buying takes place and how it affects the democratic process in Biase local government area. The specific objective is to analyse the elements that contribute to vote-buying to develop effective measures to prevent this phenomenon and ensure that elections in the region are conducted freely and fairly. It is hoped that the results of this study will enhance understanding of the challenges that were encountered in the electoral process in Biase local government area and facilitate necessary improvements.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design. A hybrid methodology was implemented to gather primary data. This entailed the implementation of standardised questionnaires (quantitative) and the execution of oral interviews with key informants (qualitative). Using these methods, data on people's attitudes, convictions, experiences, and actions concerning the 2023 general elections in Biase Local Government Area was gathered. The vexing issue of vote-buying was also examined, along with its causes and effects on the local election system.

According to (Ewum, 2014), the study population of Biase LGA, as reported by the National Population Statistics, was 169,000 in 2006. The study employed the Taro Yamane formula to

calculate the sample size, resulting in a sample size of 220 individuals who participated as respondents for the quantitative surveys. In addition, eleven (11) participants were purposively and consciously selected for the qualitative segment of the study. This study deployed the descriptive analysis technique to interpret the primary data obtained from the respondents. The data was analysed using frequency distribution tables, which provided easy frequency and corresponding percentages. These statistical metrics were used to gain valuable and useful insights from the data. To strengthen the quantitative data, the qualitative data gathered from oral interviews, along with the matching data received from secondary sources, provided a thorough triangulation of the data analysis.

Background of the study area

Biase is a local government area (LGA) situated in Cross River state, which falls under the South-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The headquarters of the LGA is situated in Akpet, which includes several other towns and villages like Ubaghara, Okurike, Agwagune, Obum, Umuolor, Egbor, and Akparavuni. The estimated population of Biase LGA is 169,000 (Ewum, 2014) residents, with the predominant ethnic groups in the region being the Efik and the Ukpet. Christianity and traditional religion are the main religious affiliations in Biase LGA, while the Efik language is widely spoken in the region. The LGA covers an area of 1,310 square kilometres and has a humidity level of 93 percent. The region has a mean temperature of 24 degrees Celsius, accompanied by an average wind speed of 13 km per hour. The region is marked by numerous rivers and tributaries (About Biase Local Government Area). The fishing industry in Biase LGA is a vital economic activity due to the region's rich seafood resources. Agricultural activities in Biase LGA contribute significantly to the local economy, with residents cultivating a variety of crops such as banana, cashew, kolanut, oil palm, and yam. The presence of oil mining companies in the Biase Local Government Area (LGA) plays a crucial role in driving economic growth in the region. Trade flourishes in the region, with vibrant markets such as the Akpet main market attracting a multitude of traders and customers daily. The study context has experienced voter inducement with concomitant impacts on the electoral outcome.

Theoretical Anchorage

The study is based on the Rational Choice Theory. Jon Elster (Elster, 2009) proposed the rational choice theory, which posits that individuals make decisions that optimise their interests by carefully evaluating the costs and benefits involved. Based on the philosophical perspective of this theory and supported by (Downs, 1957) voters, who are rational actors, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of selling their votes. Meanwhile, party candidates attempt to increase their electoral success by targeting specific voters who are willing to accept monetary or material incentives based on their political preferences or economic circumstances. A transaction takes place between voters and political actors, where voters swap their ballots for monetary or material incentives or both. When it comes to voting, individuals will make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis, according to the rational choice theory, which argues that individuals will make decisions based on this analysis. In the instance of the general elections that took place in the Biase local government area in 2023, voters may have been persuaded to accept monetary or material incentives in exchange for their votes if they considered that the benefits exceeded the ethical considerations. Some people may argue that this theory oversimplifies the intricacies of human behaviour; yet, it has been extremely helpful in gaining an understanding of the prevalence of vote-buying and the impact that it has on the outcomes of elections.

Conceptual considerations

It is necessary to provide clarification on some concepts that are related to the problem of vote-buying. Because of this, it is essential to try to conceptualise some of the ideas that can help us better understand the phenomenon considered.

The phenomenon of vote-buying

Vote buying, as defined by (Danjibo & Oladeji, 2007), refers to offering a gift or gratuity to influence the recipient's behaviour, specifically in elections. This can involve providing money or other valuable compensation in exchange for the recipient betraying a trust or fraudulently fulfilling their duty, such as casting their vote in a particular way. Vote buying refers to the act of offering money or other rewards to individuals in exchange for their vote, intending to influence their voting behaviour according to specific instructions (Bello-Imam & Akande, 2007). According to (Efebeh & Ohis, 2023), vote buying is considered a kind of electoral fraud. The distribution of vote-buying incentives often targets the impoverished and less educated members of the population. This phenomenon can be explained by gifts' greater influence within impoverished communities (Mohammed, 2020). They can be more susceptible to being influenced by the prospect of instant monetary benefits in return for their vote. This manipulation of the electoral process subverts the fundamental tenets of democracy and distorts the genuine expression of the people's will.

Election

An election is a formal and organised process in which a community chooses one or more individuals to hold public offices. Election is the process of choosing a leader to represent the people through popular vote (Roger Scully, 2006). Elections are essential for maintaining democracy and promoting extensive citizen participation. They facilitate elected officials in understanding the preferences of the general public and provide individuals the opportunity to select these representatives and policies based on their preferences. It is crucial to differentiate between what appears to be outside and the underlying essence of elections. In other circumstances, electoral forms exist but the substance of an election is missing, such as when voters are denied a free and true choice between at least two options. This absence of authentic alternatives can arise as a result of diverse circumstances, including a scarcity of candidate choices, constraints imposed on political parties, or strategies employed to reduce voter participation (Birch, 2010). In the absence of a genuine election, the integrity of the democratic process is undermined, resulting in the suppression of the people's voice. To accurately represent the will of the people, a functioning democracy must include both the formal and substantive aspects of elections. Furthermore, ensuring transparency and accountability in the electoral process is crucial for preserving the integrity of elections and sustaining democratic norms.

Drivers of vote-buying

Secondary sources provide extensive data regarding the elements that influence vote-buying in Nigeria. Several variables that contribute to this issue include poverty, limited access to education, political manipulation, and voter apathy. These variables contribute to a setting in which individuals may perceive their vote as insignificant or believe that they might get personal benefits by selling their vote. Politicians or political parties may exploit these vulnerabilities to purchase votes, so distorting the electoral process for their benefit. Secondary data (Adamu, Ocheni, & Ibrahim, 2016) has also indicated that vote buying in contemporary Nigeria is caused by weak institutions, poverty, lack of voter education, the political class's desperation to retain power, and the overall failure of the Nigerian state. In the Nigerian environment, poverty, inadequate political education, and weak institutions are prevalent. For individuals living in extreme poverty, receiving financial inducements and

material goods on election day could provide them and their families with a respite from misery for a week. Due to a higher percentage of ignorant individuals within the voting populace in Nigeria, people readily exchange their votes for a token without taking into account the potential repercussions. They do not perceive vote buying and selling as a malicious act that will ultimately have negative consequences for them, and also as an inducement that leads to poor governance. When the institutions entrusted with the constitutional duty to uphold the electoral laws are involved in the misconduct, and the electoral body that should remain neutral is feeble and shows favouritism, it creates an environment conducive to vote dealing. The current scenario has had a profound and destructive effect on the credibility of Nigeria's electoral and political framework (Fiemotongha, Love, & Ifidi, 2022).

Poverty and Vote Buying

In their study, (Olanrewaju & Coastman, 2023) discovered a correlation between poverty and vote buying. They concluded that vote buying significantly influences the voting behaviour of economically disadvantaged and vulnerable voters. According to (Jenson & Justesen, 2014) the results of multilevel regressions indicate that poor voters are significantly more prone to being targeted for vote buying than wealthier voters. This effect is further intensified in extremely competitive elections. Micro-level poverty in Africa is a major cause of vote buying, which has serious consequences for the functioning of electoral democracy. According to (Efebeh & Ohis, 2023), vote buying and other forms of electoral inducement are common in Nigerian politics due to the average voter's poverty and lack of knowledge. These voters are unable to resist the allure of unregulated electoral rewards, such as money or goods. This fosters a circle of corruption and undermines the democratic process, as politicians exploit the susceptible public for personal benefit. The absence of education and economic prospects exacerbates the situation, rendering it arduous for residents to make well-informed judgments following their best interests.

Ignorance and Vote Buying

According to (Essien & Oghuvbu, 2021), ignorance is often considered bliss, but they argue that it is a dangerous state to be in due to its detrimental outcomes. Lack of knowledge is a significant catalyst for the practice of vote buying, as many voters, unfortunately, exchange their prospects for a simple meal, oblivious to the substantial adverse consequences of their choices. (Ajakaiye, 2002) suggests that voters' low level of education is responsible for their low political awareness. This lack of awareness makes it easier for self-centered politicians to manipulate the majority of poor individuals. This supports the idea that knowledge is power and ignorance is a disadvantage. According to a study, (Adamu, Ocheni, & Ibrahim, 2016) vote buying disproportionately affects individuals with lower levels of education. These individuals are frequently more vulnerable to deception and are readily influenced by offers of instant gratification, such as money or food, without fully understanding the long-term repercussions of their choices. This maintains an ongoing cycle of poverty and ignorance, which serves to further marginalise and exclude the most vulnerable individuals in society. Moreover, the absence of adequate access to high-quality education further intensifies this problem by restricting individuals' capacity to engage in critical thinking and make well-informed choices. Insufficient knowledge and skills make individuals susceptible to exploitation and manipulation by those in positions of authority. This not only obstructs their progress and advancement but also sustains systemic disparity and unfairness within society.

Impact of vote buying on the electoral process

Vote buying is a detrimental behaviour that compromises the integrity of the political process by influencing voter choices and, consequently, election outcomes. It diminishes the importance of individual votes, which should be grounded in legitimate political convictions and policy preferences and substitutes them with monetary incentives. Engaging in the exchange of votes can lead to a dearth of confidence in the democratic system, fostering voter apathy and disillusionment. Vote buying fundamentally undermines the fundamental tenets of democracy and obstructs the attainment of genuine political representation. The authentic expression of public opinion is suppressed when monetary incentives are prioritised over well-informed decision-making. Not only does this undermine the democratic process, but it also facilitates corruption and the exploitation of political power.

According to (Musa & Umar, 2022), vote buying contributes to weak governance and limits citizens' power to hold elected leaders responsible. It discourages potential political leaders from pursuing office as it implies that financial resources, rather than ideas or experience, are the key to winning an election. They mentioned that the increasing prevalence of vote buying contributes to a system of elitist politics and undermines political engagement. It is important to note that leaders who gain political power through financial inducement often prioritise their interests over the welfare of the country. This is because their rise to power is driven by commercial objectives, which can lead to a focus on self-serving behaviour while in office. It has been determined that vote buying can lead to corruption among politicians once they are elected into office. This perpetuates a cycle of corruption and undermines the principles of democracy. In addition, the practice of vote buying can result in a lack of accountability, as politicians may prioritise the interests of those who have paid for their votes instead of focusing on the needs of the general public.

Vote buying hinders the establishment of democracy in Nigeria, as it involves the excessive commercialisation of transition initiatives by wealthy individuals and contributes to political instability through repeated electoral and political violence among different political factions. This instability undermines the overall strength of the national economy. According to (Hadiza, 2020), candidates and parties engage in a different type of vote buying by offering money to voters in exchange for not participating in the voting process. The objective here is to hinder their ability to vote in favour of one's opponent. This type of vote purchasing is commonly known as 'negative vote buying'. Engaging in negative vote buying poses a significant threat to the already precarious democratic process in Nigeria. Candidates are employing deceitful strategies instead of addressing policies and solutions to gain power. Not only does this erode the confidence of the voters, but it also sustains a pattern of corruption and instability.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Findings

The previous section presents data obtained from secondary sources. In this section, the data collected from primary sources is presented and analysed. A total of 220 questionnaires were distributed and subsequently collected. Nevertheless, 40 questionnaires were inaccurately completed and not submitted, leading to a total of just 180 valid responses for the study. This analysis aims to identify the factors that influenced vote-buying in the 2023 general elections in Biase local government area and assess its impact on electoral outcomes.

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Table 1. Questions to determine drivers of vote-buying in the 2023 general elections in Biase local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

	Factors driving vote buying in Biase LGA in the 2023 general elections.	SA	A	SD	D	U	TOTAL
1	A high prevalence of poverty among voters does not promote the practice of vote-buying.	36 (20%)	27 (15)	92 (51.11%)	15 (8.33%)	10 (5.56 %)	180 (100%)
2	Vote-buying was spurred by voters' scepticism towards the government and the promises of candidates.	70 (38.89 %)	29 (16.11 %)	35 (19.44%)	26 (14.44%)	20 (11.11 %)	180 (100%)
3	The act of buying votes is facilitated by the low level of enlightenment, poor education, and illiteracy among voters.	93 (51.67 %)	60 (33.33 %)	19 (10.56%)	5 (2.78%)	3 (1.67 %)	180 (100%)
4	The absence of enforcement of relevant electoral laws by security agents promotes vote-buying.	108 (60%)	18 (10%)	25 (13.89%)	12 (6.67%)	17 (9.44 %)	180 (100%)
5	Candidates who purchase ballots are regarded as generous and this encourages vote-buying.	82 (45%)	36 (20%)	30 (16.67%)	24 (13.33%)	8 (4.44 %)	180 (100%)

6	Vote-buying is marginally encouraged by INEC's inadequate voter education.	54 (30%)	20 (11.11 %)	70 (38.89%)	30 (16.67%)	6 (3.33 %)	180 (100%)
7	The rate of vote-buying is not amplified by a high level of corruption.	20 (11.11 %)	15 (8.33%)	102 (56.67%)	40 (22.22%)	3 (1.67 %)	180 (100%)
8	The act of vote-buying is motivated by the desperation of party leaders and candidates.	63 (35%)	50 (27.78 %)	34 (18.89%)	18 (10%)	15 (8.33 %)	180 (100%)
9	vote-buying is not influenced by the poor performance of elected government officials.	38 (21.11 %)	20 (11.11 %)	85 (47.22%)	34 (18.89%)	3 (1.67 %)	180 (100%)
10	Vote-buying is fueled by unemployment and greed.	80 (44.44 %)	28 (15.56 %)	42 (23.33%)	20 (11.11%)	10 (5.56 %)	180 (100%)

Source: Compiled by the authors (2024)

Analysis and discussion of findings

The data regarding the elements contributing to vote buying in the 2023 general elections in Biase LGA is presented in Table 1 above. The table presents a succinct summary of the frequency and responses of the participants. Regarding the question of whether a high poverty rate among the voters encourages vote buying, 92 respondents, or 51.11%, strongly disagreed, while 15 respondents, or 8.33%, simply disagreed with this idea. A total of 107 respondents, accounting for 59.44% of the sample, strongly agree that elevated poverty rates significantly contribute to the occurrence of vote buying. Conversely, 36 participants, accounting for 20% of the total, strongly agreed, whereas 27 respondents, equivalent to 15%,

simply agreed that a high poverty rate does not facilitate vote buying. Out of the total number of respondents, 10 individuals, which represents 5.56% of the total, expressed uncertainty regarding the influence of poverty on vote buying. The results suggest a notable disparity among participants in their views on the correlation between poverty and vote buying. Although most people believe that there is a strong link between high poverty rates and the widespread occurrence of vote buying, a significant minority disagrees and does not perceive a direct connection. A minority of participants exhibited ambiguity, indicating the need for further investigation and examination to completely grasp the intricacies of this matter.

Out of the total number of those surveyed, 93 respondents, which is equivalent to 51.67%, strongly agreed with the assertion that vote buying is promoted by illiteracy, inadequate education, and a lack of voter awareness. Furthermore, 60 respondents, or 33.33%, agreed with this statement. A total of 153 persons, which accounts for 85% of the total, agreed. Meanwhile, 19 persons, making up 10.56% of the total, strongly disagreed, while 5 respondents, representing 2.78%, merely disagreed with this premise. Three participants, constituting 1.67% of the total, indicated a neutral position. The answers to supplementary inquiries are recorded in Table 1 in their original form. The poll data reveals a significant majority of those who hold the belief that vote buying is influenced by illiteracy, insufficient education, and an inadequate level of voter awareness. The consensus among 85% of participants reveals a pervasive concern on these matters. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that a minority of participants held opposing opinions or remained impartial, indicating a range of perspectives on the subject.

Out of the respondents, 107 participants, which accounts for 59.44% of the total, recognised that a significant level of poverty among voters is a key element in the phenomenon of vote buying. The leader of a political party in the local area, along with nine other interviewees out of a total of eleven, strongly believes that poverty, among other issues, contributes to the conditions that facilitate vote buying. The political leader attributes vote-buying to poverty, ignorance, poor governance, and a lack of law enforcement. This discovery is consistent with research undertaken by (Stokes, 2007b) and (Blaydes, 2006), which emphasize that poverty, in particular, is a major cause of vote buying. This enables political parties to take advantage of the material needs of impoverished voter groups by exchanging gifts for votes. The correlation between poverty and vote-buying in Nigeria has been thoroughly examined in studies conducted by (Bratton, 2008), in Kenya (Kramon E. , 2009), and in Malawi and Mozambique. Multiple instances of this study have consistently demonstrated that poverty engenders vulnerability, increasing individuals' propensity to succumb to vote-buying methods. Lack of education and awareness in underprivileged communities enables political parties to abuse them through unethical means to secure votes. Furthermore, the ineffectiveness of government processes in addressing these issues fosters a favourable atmosphere for corruption, thereby intensifying the cycle of poverty and marginalisation. To ensure that elections are conducted in a manner that is equitable and unbiased, and to empower marginalised communities to make choices that are informed by their genuine interests rather than monetary incentives, it is imperative to address these underlying structural issues. One way to accomplish this is by organising educational programmes in these regions to enhance knowledge regarding political power and corruption. In addition, bolstering government institutions and implementing stringent anti-corruption measures can facilitate the establishment of a more transparent and responsible political system. By tackling these underlying factors, marginalised communities can gain the ability to actively engage in the democratic process and champion their rights, ultimately ending the cycle of poverty and marginalisation.

Table 2. Questions to determine the impact of vote-buying on the outcomes of the 2023 general elections in Biase local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

S/N	**Impact of vote buying on the outcomes of 2023 general elections In Biase LGA**	SA	SD	SD	D	U	TOTAL
1	The outcome of the election was marginally influenced by vote buying.	32 (17.78%)	13 (7.22%)	87 (48.33%)	44 (24.44%)	4 (2.22%)	180 (100%)
2	Vote buying undermines and invalidates the fundamental notion of fairness that is essential for an election to be considered genuine.	92 (51.11%)	34 (18.89%)	30 (16.67%)	15 (8.33%)	9 (5%)	180 (100%)
3	Vote buying does not contribute to the bad performance of elected government leaders.	30 (16.67%)	14 (7.78%)	91 (50.56%)	39 (21.67%)	6 (3.33%)	180 (100%)
4	Vote buying encourages corruption.	125 (69.44%)	26 (14.44%)	15 (8.33%)	10 (5.56%)	4 (2.22%)	180 (100%)
5	Vote buying creates distrust in candidates.	62 (34.44%)	37 (14.44%)	27 (15%)	33 (18.33%)	21 (11.67%)	180 (100%)
6	Some people believe their votes were invalidated because of vote-buying.	30 (16.67%)	42 (23.33%)	72 (40%)	25 (13.89%)	11 (6.11%)	180 (100%)

7	Vote-buying erodes confidence in the integrity of elections.	95 (52.78%)	58 (32.22%)	17 (9.44%)	10 (5.56%)	——— (0.00)	180 (100%)
8	Vote-buying leads to the emergence of incompetent leaders.	56 (31.11)	43 (23.89%)	25 (13.89%)	47 (26.11%)	9 (5%)	180 (100%)
9	Vote buying encourages a lack of accountability by the elected leaders.	55 (30.56%)	26 (14.44%)	45 (25%)	36 (20%)	18 (10%)	180 (100%)
10	Vote buying engenders the reign of impunity.	70 (38.89%)	38 (21.11%)	42 (23.33%)	28 (15.56%)	2 (1.11%)	180 (100%)

Source: Compiled by the authors (2024)

Analysis and discussion of findings

The data obtained from respondents' feedback regarding the impact of vote buying on the 2023 general elections in Biase LGA are displayed in Table 2. Among the responses, 95 participants, or 52.78% of the total, strongly agreed, while 58 respondents, equivalent to 32.22%, agreed that vote buying undermines trust in the integrity of elections. Conversely, 17 participants, accounting for 9.44% of the total, expressed significant disagreement, while 10 persons, representing 5.56%, disagreed with this viewpoint. Hence, a total of 153 participants, accounting for 85% of the total number of participants, maintain the perspective that the practice of vote buying threatens the integrity of elections. In addition, a total of 56 respondents, accounting for 31.11% of the sample, expressed strong agreement, whilst 43 persons, equivalent to 23.89%, agreed that vote buying results in the selection of inept leaders. This indicates that a collective of 99 persons, which accounts for 55% of the total, endorse the idea that vote buying leads to poor leadership. Conversely, a total of 25 individuals, representing 13.89% of the whole, strongly disagreed, whilst 47 persons, equivalent to 26.11%, simply disagreed. Therefore, it may be inferred that 72 participants, which accounts for 40% of the responses, do not endorse this assertion. Ultimately, a total of 9 or 5% of the participants conveyed a sense of uncertainty. Ultimately, the study reveals that a significant proportion of participants hold the belief that the practice of vote buying plays a role in the election of inept leaders. A substantial 55% of individuals concur with this notion, indicating a profound worry about the influence of corruption on the quality of leadership. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that a significant proportion, specifically 40% of the participants, hold the belief that vote buying does not necessarily result in ineffective

leadership. This signifies a multitude of viewpoints regarding the subject matter among the participants. In addition, a minority of participants, specifically 5%, are uncertain about the correlation between vote buying and leadership skills.

Overall, the majority of participants think that vote buying ultimately leads to the choice of incompetent leaders. However, a significant number of individuals have a differing opinion regarding this statement. It is essential to continue the discussion and tackle the problems associated with vote buying and its impact on leadership to achieve a more transparent and effective democratic process. It is imperative to consider that the viewpoints of a minority who have expressed doubt or disagreement should not undermine the dominant perception that vote buying leads to inefficient governance. It is crucial to give priority to the majority of respondents who support this claim. Through a more thorough analysis of the fundamental origins and outcomes of vote buying, we may enhance our understanding of its influence on the broader democratic framework. By directly confronting these problems, we can strive to establish a more equitable and equitable society, where leaders are chosen based on their qualifications rather than financial motivations. Continuing the debate and working towards a future free from vote buying is crucial to fostering genuine democracy.

A total of 153 respondents, accounting for 85% of the participants, unequivocally agreed that vote buying affects confidence in the integrity of the general elections in Biase LGA in 2023. Out of them, 95 respondents (52.78%) and 58 respondents (32.22%) confirmed this. Out of the eight individuals interviewed orally, which accounts for 72.73% of the total, one of them is the leader of a political party. He argues that "vote buying undermines the integrity of the electoral process and its outcomes, giving the impression that victories are determined by the person who offers the most money." This observation aligns with the findings of (Adamu, Ocheni, & Ibrahim, 2016) assert that vote buying weakens the integrity, legitimacy, and validity of elections. The legitimacy of elections is compromised when victorious candidates are routinely selected primarily on financial incentives rather than their popularity or integrity. Furthermore, a significant majority of participants, specifically 92 persons (51.11%) and 34 individuals (18.89%), firmly believe that the act of vote buying undermines and violates the crucial value of impartiality, which is essential for maintaining the integrity of an election. Out of the oral interviewees, 63.64% agree with this opinion. The analysis supports the findings of (Oju & Adebayo, 2023), processes. In addition, (Ejue & Ekanem, 2011) noted that the illicit practice of buying votes infringes against the electoral participants' right to freedom of speech during the entire electoral procedure. The findings indicate a prevailing conviction among both participants in the survey and individuals interviewed that the act of vote buying undermines the equity and neutrality of elections. The scholarly research undertaken by (Oju & Adebayo, 2023), and (Ejue & Ekanem, 2011) provides additional evidence to support this idea, emphasising the detrimental effect of vote buying on the honesty and credibility of electoral and political institutions. The act of purchasing votes not only undermines the integrity of elections but also violates the democratic rights of individuals to exercise their voting preferences without interference.

Recommendations and concluding remarks

When addressing the problem of vote buying in the 2023 general elections in Biase Local Government Area, it is crucial to emphasize that stakeholders at different levels have roles to play.

Government

To improve legal frameworks:

- The government should enact more rigorous legislation and impose stricter punishments to deter prospective offenders from participating in vote buying. This

entails amending existing election legislation to rectify any vulnerabilities that may be susceptible to manipulation for vote buying.

- The government must enhance the capacity of electoral bodies by allocating sufficient resources for vigilant election monitoring and swift intervention in cases of vote-buying.
- To promote the economic empowerment and self-worth of the electorates, the government, civil society, and donor partners must engage in generating skills and livelihood opportunities.

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)
Enhancing Voter Education:

- INEC must carry out comprehensive voter education initiatives to enlighten residents about the perils linked to vote buying, the importance of unbiased and equitable elections, and the value of their votes. The sensitization must incorporate the unique needs of the people with disabilities.
- INEC must implement restrictions on campaign finance that can effectively restrict the availability of funds for vote buying while enhancing transparency in campaign financing. Enforcing transparency in campaign financing is essential to guarantee thorough examination and responsibility.
- INEC must leverage on technology. By incorporating electronic voting systems, the use of technology in the voting process can bolster security and reduce the likelihood of manipulation, effectively addressing problems associated with vote buying.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)
Advocating for Civic Participation:

- The civil society sector must take the lead in campaigning for an election process that is inclusive, free, fair, and just. It is imperative to encourage greater participation of all stakeholders in the electoral process, including civil society organisations, media outlets, and the general public. Their participation can improve the oversight of elections and the documentation of instances of vote buying.
- CSOs must assist in the development of the capacity of traditional institutions and electorates to identify and report instances of vote-selling and buying, as well as to educate them on the perils of this practice.

Local Government Empowerment

- Through the allocation of resources towards technological advancements and educational programmes, the local government can enhance the capabilities of its residents, enabling them to engage more actively in economic and political affairs. By applying these techniques, Biase Local Government Area can ultimately serve as an exemplar for conducting fair and transparent elections in the region.
- Establishing collaborations with nearby educational institutions and industries can further augment the skills and employment prospects accessible to the community.

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