

Vote buying and electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Vote buying remains one of the most persistent threats to democratic consolidation and electoral integrity in Nigeria, particularly in states characterized by socio-economic vulnerability and institutional fragility. This study examined vote buying and electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria, with the aim of analyzing the socio-economic determinants of vote buying among registered voters, evaluating the effectiveness of existing electoral safeguards in mitigating transactional voting, and proposing a policy framework for strengthening electoral integrity in the region. Specifically, the study addressed three research questions: the extent to which localized poverty influences voters' susceptibility to financial inducements; how institutional and security lapses facilitate the operational success of vote buying; and the behavioural shifts required to decouple economic necessity from electoral participation. A comparative cross-sectional survey research design was adopted to obtain empirical evidence from registered voters across selected local government areas in both states. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through a multistage sampling procedure. Descriptive statistics comprising mean and standard deviation were employed to summarize respondents' perceptions, while the Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was used to examine significant associations between socio-economic conditions, institutional factors, voter behaviour, and electoral integrity at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed significant inter-state similarities and variations in the dynamics of vote buying. In both Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, localized poverty, unemployment, and declining household income significantly increased voters' susceptibility to financial inducement. However, the prevalence of vote buying was comparatively higher in Akwa Ibom State, where greater financial resources available to political actors enabled more extensive distribution of cash and material incentives during election periods. Conversely, respondents in Cross River State reported relatively stronger influence of community networks, party loyalty, and interpersonal relationships in facilitating electoral inducements. The study further established that institutional weaknesses, including inconsistent enforcement of electoral laws, inadequate prosecution of electoral offenders, and lapses in election security, significantly undermined the effectiveness of existing electoral safeguards in both states despite the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). The study concludes that technological innovations alone cannot eliminate transactional politics without complementary socio-economic and institutional reforms. The study recommends the implementation of comprehensive poverty-reduction and social protection programmes targeted at economically vulnerable communities; the establishment of an independent Electoral Offences Commission with enhanced investigative and prosecutorial powers supported by technology-driven election surveillance systems; and sustained civic and voter education programmes involving electoral institutions, civil society organizations, educational institutions, religious bodies, and traditional leaders to strengthen democratic values, discourage transactional voting, and promote long-term electoral integrity in Nigeria.

Keywords: Vote buying, electoral integrity, registered voters, poverty, BVAS, electoral safeguards, Cross River State, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The integrity of electoral processes serves as the bedrock of modern democratic consolidation, ensuring that the will of the electorate is accurately reflected in governance. Globally, the legitimacy of any representative system

is predicated on the ability of citizens to participate in free, fair, and transparent elections. However, in Nigeria, this fundamental pillar is increasingly undermined by the pervasive monetization of the ballot, where vote trading has evolved from a peripheral irregularity into a systemic threat. This degradation of electoral integrity not only erodes public trust in democratic institutions but also facilitates the emergence of political leaders whose legitimacy is derived from financial muscle rather than popular mandate, thereby stalling the country's democratic maturation. The phenomenon of vote buying has undergone a sophisticated transformation, transcending traditional forms of bribery to become a transactional exchange that characterizes the modern Nigerian polling unit. No longer confined to the surreptitious distribution of cash, the practice now encompasses a wide array of inducements, including the distribution of food items, household commodities, and, increasingly, direct digital financial transfers (Akinola, 2021). This commodification of the vote effectively transforms polling stations into open trading centers, where the sanctity of the ballot is bartered for immediate, albeit ephemeral, economic relief. This shift signals a dangerous normalization of electoral corruption, where the act of voting is perceived not as a civic duty, but as a commercial opportunity (Biezen & Nohlen, 2008).

Situated within Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone, the states of Cross River and Akwa Ibom present a unique microcosm of the nation's socio-political dynamics. The region, while historically significant in the country's economic and political architecture, is characterized by fragile citizen oversight and a history of recurring election malpractices (Isola, et al., 2021). The interplay between entrenched political elites and a disenchanting electorate creates a volatile environment where electoral integrity is frequently sacrificed for political expediency. Understanding the specific mechanics of vote buying within this region is essential for identifying how broader national trends in electoral decay manifest in localized contexts. In Nigeria, recent field observations reveal a disturbing reliance on party-induced financial strategies designed to exploit the vulnerabilities of both rural and urban voters. Political actors in these states have institutionalized "see-and-buy" tactics, utilizing elaborate networks of agents to ensure compliance at the point of voting (Ezeabasili, 2025). Whether in the densely populated urban centers or the more isolated rural communities, the strategy remains consistent: targeting the electorate's immediate needs to secure electoral outcomes. This localized approach to voter manipulation highlights a sophisticated understanding of voter demographics, where the economic realities of the populace are leveraged to circumvent the democratic process.

The success of these inducements is deeply rooted in the socio-economic drivers prevalent in the region, particularly systemic poverty and the persistent failure of political promises (OECD, 2022). When citizens are confronted with chronic economic hardship and a lack of basic infrastructure, the immediate financial incentive offered by political parties becomes a rational, albeit short-sighted, survival strategy. This weaponization of poverty forces the electorate into a cycle of dependency, where the promise of future development is routinely traded for the certainty of current financial gain. Consequently, the electorate is rendered susceptible to inducement, making them active, if reluctant, participants in the erosion of their own democratic rights. Institutional and technological efforts to curb these practices have met with limited success, revealing significant gaps in the electoral framework. While the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has introduced measures such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) to enhance transparency, these innovations are often undermined by technical glitches and, more critically, by lax security enforcement at polling stations. The inability of security agencies to effectively police the proximity of polling units to party agents who facilitate these transactions suggests a disconnect between policy design and field implementation. These institutional weaknesses effectively provide a permissive environment for vote buying to thrive despite the presence of technological safeguards (Ezeabasili, 2025).

Despite the prevalence of these issues, existing literature often fails to provide a rigorous, granular analysis of the direct statistical and behavioral correlation between localized voter inducement and compromised electoral outcomes in these specific twin states. Much of the current discourse remains anecdotal or focused on national aggregates, leaving a significant empirical gap regarding how specific socioeconomic variables in Nigeria, interact with voter behaviour. There is a pressing need to bridge this gap by moving beyond descriptive accounts to a more analytical investigation of how vote buying specifically distorts the democratic preference of registered voters in this region.

To address these challenges, this study aims to: (1) analyze the socio-economic determinants of vote buying among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom; (2) evaluate the effectiveness of current electoral safeguards in mitigating transactional voting; and (3) propose a policy framework for strengthening electoral integrity in the region. This research is guided by three primary questions: To what extent does localized poverty influence the susceptibility of voters to financial inducement? How do institutional and security lapses facilitate the operational success of vote buying in these states? And what behavioural shifts are required to decouple economic necessity from electoral participation? By investigating these dynamics, this study seeks to offer empirical policy solutions that are critical for revamping electoral integrity in Nigeria.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature on vote buying increasingly conceptualizes electoral inducement as a multidimensional phenomenon capable of weakening the quality and legitimacy of democratic elections. Rather than being restricted to the direct exchange of money for votes, contemporary studies identify a wider range of inducements, including cash payments, food and other material gifts, patronage relationships, electoral bribery, promises of future benefits and community-based distribution of resources. In Nigeria, these practices have persisted across successive electoral cycles and have become embedded in broader patterns of political clientelism. Ezeabasili's study of the 2023 general elections, for instance, argues that vote buying involves material inducements that can distort voters' preferences and undermine the integrity of elections. Similarly, recent Nigerian scholarship associates vote buying with the weakening of free, fair and credible elections and with broader problems of democratic consolidation (Ezeabasili, 2025).

A major explanation emerging from the literature concerns the socioeconomic conditions that make voters vulnerable to electoral inducements. Earlier evidence associated vote buying in Nigeria with poverty, illiteracy and political exclusion, while more recent analyses continue to identify socioeconomic hardship as an important condition facilitating vote trading (Nwankwo, 2019). Hoffmann and Patel's analysis of vote-selling behaviour in Nigeria shows that socioeconomic hardship can encourage citizens to participate in transactional relationships with political actors, even though many citizens simultaneously regard exchanging votes for money or gifts as unacceptable. This apparent contradiction is important for the present study because voters may normatively reject vote buying while nevertheless becoming susceptible to cash inducement or material gifts under conditions of economic vulnerability. The literature therefore suggests that an adequate examination of vote buying should consider not only whether inducements occur but also the social and economic conditions under which voters encounter them.

Significantly, vote buying considered in the present study is cash inducement. Cash remains one of the most visible forms of electoral inducement because it provides an immediate and tangible benefit to voters. Previous Nigerian studies have associated monetary inducements with the erosion of credible elections and the distortion of voters' choices (Ezeabasili, 2025). Vande's study of the 2019 general election in the Federal Capital Territory found that monetary inducement had become sufficiently prominent to raise concerns about the credibility of the electoral process. The implication is that when electoral competition becomes substantially dependent upon financial exchanges, voters may begin to evaluate candidates according to immediate material benefits rather than programmes, policies or leadership capacity. For the present study, cash inducement is therefore examined as a specific mechanism through which vote buying may affect electoral transparency, fairness, credibility and accountability among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States.

Therefore, material gifts, which extends vote buying beyond direct monetary transactions. Material inducements may involve food, household items, agricultural inputs, transportation support or other tangible benefits distributed to voters or communities. Recent evidence from Nigeria's off-cycle elections demonstrates how the language of "voter logistics" can sometimes obscure the boundary between legitimate campaign mobilization and electoral inducement. Braimah and Fajimbola's analysis of the 2024 Edo and Ondo elections argue that food and transportation-related benefits could function as veiled forms of vote buying, particularly within contexts characterized by poverty, political patronage and institutional weakness (Shehu, et al., 2025). This development is significant because material gifts may be more difficult to identify and regulate than explicit cash-for-vote

transactions. The present study consequently treats material gifts as a distinct sub-variable and examines their potential relationship with voters' perceptions of electoral integrity.

Furthermore, the dimension patronage and clientelism, which places individual vote buying within longer-term relationships between political elites, intermediaries and citizens. Clientelistic exchanges differ from one-off electoral payments because they may involve expectations of reciprocal support extending across several electoral cycles. Recent Nigerian literature describes vote buying as part of a transactional political environment in which financial and material inducements can overshadow issue-based political engagement and strengthen patronage relationships (Ezeabasili, 2025). Such relationships have implications for electoral accountability because political leaders who acquire electoral support through patronage may become more responsive to patrons and intermediaries than to the broader electorate. Consequently, the literature suggests that vote buying can have effects extending beyond election day, potentially influencing the relationship between citizens and elected officials and weakening the accountability component of electoral integrity.

However, electoral bribery, represents a more direct form of electoral corruption in which material benefits are used deliberately to influence electoral behaviour. The literature generally treats electoral bribery as inconsistent with the principles of free and fair elections because it transforms political choice into a transactional exchange. Studies of Nigerian elections have repeatedly connected vote buying with broader electoral malpractice, including manipulation, coercion and other practices that undermine democratic competition. From an electoral-integrity perspective, electoral bribery is particularly relevant to electoral fairness, because candidates who possess greater financial resources may acquire an advantage that is unrelated to their programmes or public support. It may also undermine electoral credibility when citizens perceive electoral outcomes as products of financial transactions rather than genuine voter preferences (Shehu, et al., 2025).

The concept of promises of future rewards, which represents a less immediate form of electoral inducement. Unlike cash or material gifts delivered before or during voting, promises of future employment, development projects, appointments, access to government programmes or other benefits may be used to secure electoral support through expectations of post-election rewards. This form of inducement is closely related to patronage and clientelism because it creates expectations of reciprocal political relationships (Shehu, et al., 2025). The literature's emphasis on political patronage and the transactional character of Nigerian politics suggests that vote buying should not be understood solely as an exchange occurring at polling stations. For the present study, promises of future rewards are therefore important because they permit an assessment of whether electoral inducement operates through expectations of future government benefits as well as immediate material exchanges.

More the dimension community-based vote buying, through which inducements may be channelled through community leaders, local associations, religious or social networks, political intermediaries or other collective structures. This form of vote buying is analytically significant because electoral inducement may not always occur between an individual candidate and an individual voter (Ibeanu, 2007). Recent literature on Nigerian elections points toward the importance of political networks and intermediaries in sustaining clientelistic relationships. Community-based inducement can therefore create collective expectations and social pressures that make individual electoral autonomy more difficult to maintain. Examining this dimension in Calabar South, Calabar Municipal, Uyo Metropolitan and Uyo Urban, may reveal whether the social organization of electoral inducement varies across the selected LGAs and whether community-level practices have implications for electoral fairness and voter autonomy.

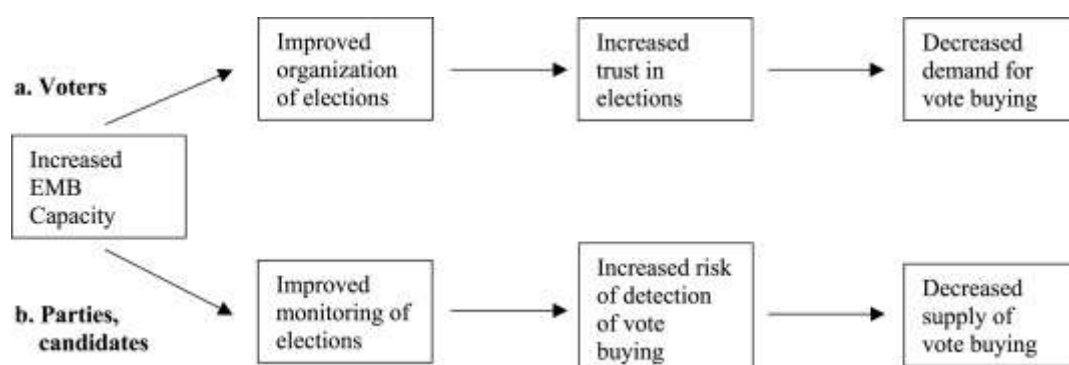
The literature on the dependent variable, electoral integrity, increasingly supports a multidimensional understanding of the concept. Electoral integrity cannot be reduced to whether votes are counted correctly; it also concerns the extent to which elections are conducted transparently, fairly, credibly and accountably. Vote buying is relevant to each of these dimensions. Electoral transparency may be weakened when inducements occur covertly and are difficult for electoral authorities to detect. Electoral fairness may be compromised when financially powerful candidates possess greater capacity to influence voters. Electoral credibility may decline when citizens believe that electoral outcomes have been purchased rather than freely determined. Electoral accountability may also be weakened when politicians depend upon patronage networks and vote brokers rather

than broad-based citizen support. Recent Nigerian studies directly associate vote buying with threats to electoral credibility and integrity, reinforcing the importance of examining these dimensions together (Shehu, et al., 2025).

Technological reforms have introduced another important dimension to the literature. The adoption of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) has strengthened voter accreditation and introduced additional technological safeguards into Nigeria's electoral administration (Shehu, et al., 2025). However, technological improvements in voter authentication do not automatically eliminate vote buying because inducement can occur before voters reach polling units and can take forms that are difficult to detect electronically. The literature therefore suggests that electoral technology should be understood as one component of a broader integrity framework rather than as a complete solution to electoral corruption. The persistence of vote-buying concerns in recent elections demonstrates the capacity of political actors to adapt their strategies to institutional reforms, including the use of indirect distribution mechanisms and forms of "voter logistics." This reinforces the need to investigate both conventional and evolving forms of vote buying alongside institutional dimensions of electoral integrity (Birch, 2011).

Despite the considerable literature on vote buying in Nigeria, an important contextual and empirical gap remains. Much of the existing research examines Nigeria at the national level, focuses on particular election cycles, or concentrates on single locations such as Abuja or individual LGAs in other states. For example, existing studies have examined the 2019 and 2023 elections nationally, the Federal Capital Territory, and Emohua LGA in Rivers State. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to a systematic examination of the relationship between the different forms of vote buying and multiple dimensions of electoral integrity across selected LGAs in Nigeria. The present study addresses this gap by examining registered voters in Calabar South, Calabar Municipality, Uyo Metropolitan and Uyo Urban. It specifically links six dimensions of vote buying cash inducement, material gifts, patronage and clientelism, electoral bribery, promises of future rewards and community-based vote buying to four dimensions of electoral integrity electoral transparency, electoral fairness, electoral credibility and electoral accountability. This multidimensional and comparative approach extends the existing literature by moving from a general discussion of vote buying toward an empirical assessment of the specific mechanisms through which electoral inducement may influence the integrity of elections within two neighbouring Nigerian states. The findings are consequently expected to provide evidence useful for electoral administration, enforcement of electoral offences, voter education and socioeconomic interventions aimed at reducing voters' vulnerability to electoral inducement.

FIG 1. Structure of election vote buying systems and management



Source: Researcher's pilot study

Conceptual framework

i. Vote buying

Vote buying has become one of the most persistent threats to electoral integrity in many emerging democracies, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Conceptually, vote buying refers to the exchange of money, gifts, food items, or other material benefits for electoral support, either before or during elections. Electoral integrity, on the other hand, encompasses adherence to internationally accepted democratic principles throughout the electoral cycle,

including transparency, accountability, fairness, inclusiveness, and credibility in the conduct of elections. The conceptual relationship between vote buying and electoral integrity is grounded in the understanding that monetary inducements distort voters' free choices, undermine democratic accountability, weaken political competition, and erode citizens' trust in electoral institutions. Scholars argue that vote buying transforms elections from contests of policy preferences into transactions driven by immediate material gains, thereby reducing the legitimacy of democratic governance (Birch, 2011; Norris, 2014). Within the context of Uyo Metropolis and Calabar Metropolis, where socio-economic inequalities remain evident, this conceptual framework explains how economic vulnerability, institutional weaknesses, political patronage, and voter psychology interact to influence both the prevalence of vote buying and the quality of electoral integrity.

ii. Socio-economic drivers

The socio-economic drivers of vote buying. Existing literature consistently identifies poverty, unemployment, income inequality, low educational attainment, and social exclusion as major predictors of vote-selling behaviour. Citizens experiencing chronic economic hardship are more likely to prioritize immediate economic survival over long-term democratic accountability, making them susceptible to electoral inducements. Lindberg (2003) argues that economically disadvantaged voters often perceive elections as rare opportunities to receive tangible benefits from politicians. Similarly, Vicente and Wantchekon (2009) found that poverty significantly increases voters' willingness to exchange electoral support for financial incentives. In Nigeria, studies by Bratton (2008) and Isola et al. (2021) demonstrate that unemployment and inadequate social welfare systems strengthen clientelistic politics, particularly in urban and peri-urban communities. Consequently, socio-economic deprivation functions as an intervening factor that facilitates vote buying while simultaneously weakening electoral integrity.

Beyond poverty, educational attainment and political literacy significantly shape voters' susceptibility to electoral inducements. Illiteracy and limited civic education reduce voters' understanding of democratic values, electoral rights, and the long-term consequences of transactional politics. Conceptually, citizens with higher educational levels are more likely to evaluate candidates based on competence, policy alternatives, and governance records rather than immediate financial benefits. Conversely, politically uninformed voters may perceive vote buying as a legitimate campaign strategy or as compensation for years of governmental neglect. Research conducted across Nigeria by Okechukwu Ibeanu and colleagues indicates that voter education significantly reduces tolerance for electoral corruption, while civic engagement enhances electoral accountability. Therefore, socio-economic status and educational exposure jointly influence voters' resistance or vulnerability to inducement, making them essential explanatory variables within the conceptual framework (Ibeanu, 2007; Bratton, 2008).

iii. Electoral integrity and institutional effectiveness

Electoral integrity and institutional effectiveness, particularly the roles of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security agencies in safeguarding credible elections. Electoral integrity depends largely on the capacity, neutrality, professionalism, and independence of electoral institutions. Norris (2014) conceptualizes electoral integrity as compliance with universal democratic standards across pre-election, election-day, and post-election activities. When electoral management bodies effectively enforce campaign finance regulations, monitor polling units, prosecute electoral offenders, and ensure transparent vote counting, opportunities for vote buying diminish considerably. However, institutional weaknesses such as inadequate logistics, delayed deployment of electoral materials, insufficient election monitoring, political interference, and poor prosecution of electoral offenders create opportunities for illicit electoral practices. In Nigeria, several studies conclude that although INEC has introduced technological innovations such as the BVAS and electronic transmission systems, enforcement against vote buying remains relatively weak, thereby allowing politicians to exploit institutional gaps (Norris, 2014; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023).

Security institutions equally constitute an important component of electoral integrity because they determine whether electoral laws are effectively implemented. The Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Department of State Services (DSS), and other security agencies are expected to

prevent voter intimidation, monitor financial inducements around polling units, and arrest electoral offenders. Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests that inconsistent enforcement, inadequate personnel, selective policing, and occasional political interference reduce the effectiveness of security agencies during elections. Conceptually, institutional weakness increases the perceived benefits of vote buying while reducing its perceived risks among political actors. Consequently, electoral integrity becomes compromised as citizens lose confidence in electoral institutions and democratic governance. Strong institutional capacity therefore moderates the relationship between political inducement and electoral credibility (Birch, 2011; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023).

Strategies of vote buying

This dimension explores the mechanisms and evolving strategies of vote buying. Traditional vote buying in Nigeria primarily involved direct cash distribution before elections. However, contemporary studies indicate that politicians increasingly employ more sophisticated approaches including food distribution, clothing materials, transportation allowances, household items, agricultural inputs, educational scholarships, medical outreach programmes, and the widely discussed "stomach infrastructure" strategy. More recently, digital financial technologies have transformed vote-buying operations through electronic bank transfers, mobile money platforms, airtime purchases, POS payments, and other cashless mechanisms that reduce detection by election observers. Scholars argue that technological innovations have altered the operational dynamics of electoral corruption without necessarily reducing its prevalence. These evolving mechanisms make monitoring increasingly difficult and require corresponding institutional innovations to preserve electoral integrity (Vicente & Wantchekon, 2009; OECD, 2022).

v. Voter behaviour and psychological determinants

Voter behaviour and psychological determinants of electoral choices. Behavioural theories suggest that accepting money does not always translate into voting for the candidate providing the inducement. Some voters strategically accept financial incentives while exercising independent voting decisions because ballot secrecy protects their electoral preferences. Such behaviour is explained by rational choice perspectives, where voters maximize immediate personal benefits without necessarily compromising political preferences. Conversely, other studies demonstrate that social norms, reciprocal obligations, family influence, ethnic loyalty, community expectations, religious affiliations, and peer pressure may compel voters to honour agreements made after accepting inducements. Social psychological perspectives further explain that repeated exposure to clientelistic politics normalizes vote buying, making it socially acceptable within certain communities. Therefore, individual perceptions, moral values, political efficacy, trust in institutions, and peer influences collectively determine whether vote buying successfully alters voting behaviour (Finan & Schechter, 2012; Nichter, 2008).

Overall, this conceptual framework posits that vote buying among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, are influenced by interconnected socio-economic conditions, institutional effectiveness, evolving inducement mechanisms, and voter psychological dispositions. Poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy increase vulnerability to electoral inducements, while weak electoral institutions and inconsistent law enforcement create opportunities for politicians to engage in vote buying. Simultaneously, modern distribution mechanisms enhance the efficiency of inducement, whereas individual voter psychology determines whether inducements ultimately influence electoral choices. Electoral integrity therefore serves as the dependent construct reflecting the cumulative effects of these interacting variables. The framework provides a theoretical foundation for examining how strengthening socio-economic welfare, improving civic education, enhancing institutional accountability, modernizing electoral enforcement, and promoting democratic values can collectively reduce vote buying and improve the credibility of elections in Nigeria.

1.3 Theoretical framework

This study will be analyzed within two theoretical dimensions:

- Clientelistic Politics and Perverse Accountability Theory- Stokes (2005).

- Electoral Integrity Theory/Framework- Pippa Norris and colleagues (2014).

Clientelistic Politics and Perverse Accountability Theory

One of the theories underpinning this study is Clientelistic Politics and Perverse Accountability Theory, principally associated with Stokes (2005). The theory explains how political machines or clientelist parties mobilize electoral support through the exchange of particularistic benefits for political support. Stokes argues that clientelistic politics creates a distinctive form of accountability in which politicians and political machines seek to influence voters through targeted material benefits, while voters are expected to reciprocate with electoral support. The theory is particularly relevant to vote buying because it shifts attention from elections as purely programmatic contests to elections as transactional relationships involving politicians, brokers and voters. Stokes further explains that political machines can use voters' social networks and other mechanisms to overcome the difficulty created by the secret ballot, enabling them to monitor or infer electoral behaviour. The theory therefore provides an important foundation for explaining why vote buying may persist even where formal electoral rules prohibit the buying and selling of votes.

The principal components of the theory include political patrons, brokers, clients/voters, targeted benefits, electoral reciprocity, monitoring and enforcement. Political patrons are candidates or political organizations that possess resources and seek electoral support; brokers act as intermediaries connecting political patrons to voters; clients are voters or groups who receive targeted benefits; and the exchange involves material or particularistic benefits in anticipation of political support. Monitoring is particularly important because the secret ballot theoretically allows voters to accept benefits without necessarily voting for the benefactor. Stokes (2005), therefore, emphasizes the importance of social networks and political-machine structures in enabling politicians to infer voter behaviour and enforce clientelistic exchanges. Nichter (2008) extends this logic by distinguishing conventional vote buying from turnout buying, arguing that political actors may reward supporters for participating in elections even where they cannot directly observe their vote choice. This distinction is useful to the present study because it demonstrates that electoral inducement can take several forms beyond the simple purchase of a particular vote.

The relevance of Clientelistic Politics and Perverse Accountability Theory to the present study is substantial because the independent variable, vote buying, contains several dimensions that correspond directly with the theory. Cash inducement and material gifts represent targeted benefits offered to voters; patronage and clientelism represent the reciprocal political relationship at the centre of the theory; electoral bribery represents the transactional exchange of material benefits for electoral support; promises of future rewards reflect the expectation of continuing patron-client relationships; while community-based vote buying corresponds with the role of social networks and intermediaries in distributing political benefits. Contemporary evidence from Nigeria similarly shows that clientelistic networks can depend on social embeddedness, perceptions of monitoring and compliance with partisan bargains. The theory consequently provides a coherent explanation of how and why different forms of vote buying may emerge among registered voters in Calabar South, Calabar Municipality, Uyo Metropolitan and Uyo Urban.

However, the major limitation or theoretical gap of Clientelistic Politics and Perverse Accountability Theory is that it concentrates primarily on the transactional relationship between political actors and voters and does not provide a sufficiently comprehensive framework for measuring the wider quality of the electoral process. The theory explains why politicians provide targeted benefits and why voters may participate in clientelistic exchanges, but it does not fully explain how such practices affect electoral transparency, electoral fairness, electoral credibility and electoral accountability as multidimensional components of electoral integrity. It also tends to emphasize the micro-level relationship between patrons, brokers and clients, whereas electoral integrity involves broader institutional issues such as electoral management, impartiality, procedural standards, legitimacy and public confidence. The limitation is particularly important in the Nigerian context, where technological reforms, electoral administration and institutional enforcement can affect the manner in which vote buying occurs. Thus, although clientelistic theory is highly appropriate for explaining the independent variable, it requires a complementary theoretical perspective capable of explaining the dependent variable.

ii) Electoral Integrity Theory/Framework

The second theoretical foundation is Electoral Integrity Theory/Framework, developed principally through the work of Pippa Norris and colleagues (2014). Norris conceptualizes electoral integrity in relation to internationally recognized standards and norms governing elections and examines the conditions under which elections succeed or fail to meet these standards. The framework considers not only whether votes are properly counted but also whether electoral processes are conducted effectively, impartially and transparently throughout the electoral cycle. Norris, Frank, and Martínez Coma (2014) emphasize challenges to electoral integrity, the effectiveness and independence of electoral authorities, and the consequences of electoral integrity or its absence for citizens' trust and political legitimacy. This perspective is particularly appropriate for the present study because it permits electoral integrity to be treated as a multidimensional construct rather than as a narrow assessment of election-day procedures.

The major components of the Electoral Integrity framework include the electoral cycle, institutional standards, electoral administration, impartiality, transparency, accountability, legitimacy and citizens' confidence in elections. The electoral-cycle perspective is particularly important because electoral integrity begins before polling day and extends through campaigning, voter registration, voting, counting, tabulation and the declaration of results. Norris (2014) argues that the concept of electoral integrity should be assessed against established standards for democratic elections and that deficiencies in electoral processes can affect political legitimacy and public confidence. For the present study, these broad dimensions are operationalized through four specific components of electoral integrity: electoral transparency, electoral fairness, electoral credibility and electoral accountability. Transparency concerns openness and access to electoral information and procedures; fairness concerns equal and impartial treatment of electoral participants; credibility concerns citizens' confidence that electoral processes and outcomes are trustworthy; while accountability concerns the responsibility of electoral actors and institutions for their conduct.

The relevance of Electoral Integrity Theory to this study lies in its capacity to explain the dependent variable, namely electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States. Vote buying can potentially affect each of the four dimensions adopted in the study. For example, covert cash inducements and material distribution may challenge transparency because such practices can occur outside formal electoral procedures. Electoral bribery and unequal access to financial resources may undermine fairness by giving financially powerful candidates advantages over competitors. Widespread vote buying may reduce electoral credibility when voters perceive election outcomes as products of financial transactions rather than genuine political preferences. Similarly, patronage, clientelism and promises of future rewards may weaken accountability when elected officials become more responsive to political brokers and client networks than to the broader electorate. The theory therefore provides the institutional and normative framework through which the consequences of the six dimensions of vote buying can be assessed.

The major gap in the Electoral Integrity framework for the present research is that, although it provides a comprehensive basis for evaluating electoral quality, it does not by itself explain sufficiently why individual voters accept electoral inducements or why political actors invest in clientelistic exchanges. It is principally concerned with whether electoral processes meet accepted standards and with the institutional consequences of electoral malpractice, rather than with the micro-level economic and strategic calculations underlying vote buying. Consequently, the framework may identify a relationship between electoral malpractice and declining integrity without fully explaining the mechanisms through which cash inducement, material gifts, patronage, bribery, future rewards and community networks influence voter behaviour. This limitation is addressed by combining it with Clientelistic Politics and Perverse Accountability Theory. The two theories therefore complement each other: the first explains the transactional mechanism of vote buying, while the second explains the institutional and democratic consequences for electoral integrity.

The integration of the two theories produces a coherent theoretical explanation for the present study. Clientelistic Politics and Perverse Accountability Theory suggests that political actors may employ material and particularistic benefits to secure electoral support through relationships involving patrons, brokers and voters. Electoral Integrity Theory, in turn, suggests that electoral processes should conform to standards of transparency,

fairness, credibility and accountability throughout the electoral cycle. The theoretical expectation emerging from their integration is therefore that where vote-buying mechanisms become more pronounced, the integrity of the electoral process may be weakened because electoral choices can become less autonomous, electoral competition less fair, electoral outcomes less credible and political accountability more dependent upon clientelist relationships. This does not mean that every voter who accepts an inducement necessarily changes their vote or that every instance of vote buying automatically produces an electoral-integrity failure; rather, the theories provide mechanisms and institutional pathways that the empirical study can test.

In relation to the specific study setting, the integrated framework is particularly useful for comparing registered voters in Calabar South and Calabar Municipality in Cross River State with those in Uyo Metropolitan and Uyo Urban in Akwa Ibom State. The study can empirically determine whether cash inducement, material gifts, patronage and clientelism, electoral bribery, promises of future rewards and community-based vote buying are associated with perceptions of electoral transparency, fairness, credibility and accountability. The framework also accommodates differences in local political networks, socioeconomic conditions and electoral administration across the four LGAs. Contemporary research indicates that clientelism remains important in Nigerian electoral politics and that social-network embeddedness can influence the targeting and effectiveness of clientelist transfers. Thus, the integrated theoretical framework provides a strong foundation for examining whether and how vote buying influences electoral integrity among registered voters in the two states. Ultimately, the framework proposes that electoral integrity is not merely a product of technical election administration; it is also shaped by the nature of political exchange between candidates, intermediaries and citizens.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

In a recent study, Bratton (2020), conducted a study titled "Vote Buying and Violence in Nigerian Election Campaigns" across Nigeria, using data obtained from the Afrobarometer national survey. The study examined the prevalence of vote buying and other forms of electoral inducement during Nigeria's democratic elections. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, involving over 2,400 respondents selected through multistage probability sampling. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and logistic regression. The findings revealed that open vote buying had become an entrenched electoral strategy, particularly in economically disadvantaged communities where politicians exchanged cash, food items, and other material benefits for electoral support. The study further established that poverty and weak institutional enforcement significantly increased voters' willingness to accept inducements, thereby undermining electoral integrity and democratic accountability. The author recommended stronger enforcement of electoral laws, expansion of civic education programmes, and improved economic empowerment initiatives to reduce citizens' vulnerability to vote buying. Although nationally representative, the study did not specifically investigate post-2023 electoral experiences in Calabar Metropolis, nor did it examine the influence of BVAS on emerging vote-buying strategies, creating important contextual and technological gaps for the present study.

Similarly, Irabor (2020), carried out a study titled "Electoral Violence, Vote Buying and Democratic Consolidation in the South-South Region of Nigeria" in the South-South geopolitical zone, covering Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, and Edo States. The study investigated the relationship between vote buying and electoral credibility during gubernatorial and legislative elections. A descriptive survey research design was employed, while data were collected from 720 registered voters through structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings indicated that vote buying was widespread before and during elections, with political actors distributing cash, food items, clothing materials, and transportation allowances to influence voter behaviour. The study further showed that weak prosecution of electoral offenders encouraged repeated violations across election cycles. The researchers recommended strengthening election monitoring mechanisms, increasing voter education campaigns, and improving collaboration between INEC and security agencies. However, the study treated the South-South region as a homogeneous entity and did not provide location-specific evidence for Calabar Metropolis or assess voter perceptions following the 2023 general elections. Consequently, localized empirical evidence remains limited.

Consequently, Ibeanu (2022), conducted a study titled "Electoral Offences and the Enforcement of the Electoral Act in Nigeria" in Abuja and selected Nigerian states. The study examined the effectiveness of legal mechanisms established under the Electoral Act for prosecuting vote-buying offences and protecting electoral integrity. Using a mixed-method research design, the researchers collected primary data from electoral officials, legal practitioners, security personnel, civil society organizations, and election observers through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis. The findings revealed that although the Electoral Act contains adequate legal provisions criminalizing vote buying, enforcement remains weak due to political interference, poor inter-agency coordination, inadequate investigation, and the low rate of successful prosecution of electoral offenders. The study recommended the establishment of an independent Electoral Offences Commission, improved prosecution capacity, and stronger collaboration among law enforcement agencies. Nevertheless, the investigation focused primarily on institutional actors rather than registered voters and did not examine how weak legal enforcement influences contemporary vote-buying behaviour in Calabar Metropolis after the 2023 elections.

Furthermore, Bassey (2021), carried out a study titled "Voter Behaviour and Electoral Participation in Cross River State" in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study examined factors influencing electoral participation and political decision-making among registered voters during gubernatorial and legislative elections. A survey research design was adopted, involving 480 registered voters selected through multistage sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using frequency distributions, percentages, chi-square statistics, and logistic regression. The findings showed that socio-economic conditions, political party loyalty, candidate popularity, and community influence significantly affected voter participation, while financial inducements were acknowledged as one of several determinants of electoral choices. The authors recommended continuous voter education, stricter electoral monitoring, and enhanced political accountability. Despite its contribution, the study did not specifically investigate vote buying as the principal variable, did not employ focus group discussions to explore voters' perceptions in depth, and was conducted before the 2023 general elections. More importantly, the study did not concentrate specifically on Calabar and Uyo Metropolitans, thereby leaving a significant local empirical and methodological gap that the present study seeks to address through primary field data collected directly from registered voters.

Moreso, the European Union Election Observation Mission (2023), conducted an empirical election assessment titled "Nigeria General Elections 2023 Final Report" across Nigeria, including observations from Cross River and Akwa Ibom States. The study evaluated the implementation of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), electoral administration, election security, and electoral integrity using direct field observation, interviews with electoral stakeholders, and documentary evidence gathered by election observers deployed nationwide. The findings indicated that BVAS significantly improved voter accreditation and reduced certain forms of electoral malpractice such as multiple voting and identity fraud. However, politicians adapted by shifting vote-buying operations away from polling units through digital bank transfers, mobile money transactions, electronic payment platforms, and coded post-accreditation distribution networks, making detection increasingly difficult. The report recommended strengthening intelligence-led election monitoring, improving financial surveillance, enforcing campaign finance regulations, and enhancing prosecution of electoral offenders. Nevertheless, the report did not provide empirical evidence regarding how registered voters in Calabar and Uyo Metropolitans, perceived these emerging technological shifts or whether BVAS altered their willingness to accept inducements during elections. Furthermore, no primary survey or focus group investigation specifically examined the post-2023 mindset of voters within Calabar Metropolis and Uyo Metropolis, thereby creating a significant technological, geographical, and empirical gap that justifies the present study.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The study will adopt a mixed methods research design, specifically the convergent parallel mixed methods design, which integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between vote buying and electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria. The quantitative component will employ a correlational survey design to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between vote buying and electoral integrity, while the qualitative component will utilize Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with selected electoral stakeholders, political party

officials, election observers, civil society representatives, and officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission to enrich and explain the quantitative findings. The mixed methods approach is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to obtain numerical evidence of the relationship between the variables while also exploring participants' experiences and perceptions, thereby enhancing the validity, credibility, and completeness of the findings through triangulation. Descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation, will be used to analyse the research questions by summarizing respondents' opinions on the dimensions of vote buying and electoral integrity, with the mean indicating the average response and the standard deviation showing the extent of variation among respondents' views. The hypotheses was tested using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) at the 0.05 level of significance because both the independent variable (vote buying) and the dependent variable (electoral integrity) are measured on continuous composite scales derived from Likert-type questionnaire items, and the technique is suitable for determining the direction and magnitude of the linear relationship between the variables. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings will provide robust empirical evidence to support practical recommendations for strengthening electoral integrity, reducing vote-buying practices, and informing electoral reforms, voter education programmes, and policy interventions aimed at promoting free, fair, and credible elections in Nigeria.

However, the qualitative findings will be systematically integrated with the quantitative results to provide a comprehensive understanding of vote buying and electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria. Rather than presenting the two sets of findings separately, qualitative evidence obtained from interviews or open-ended responses will be used to explain, complement, and contextualize the patterns and relationships identified through the quantitative analysis.

For instance, where the quantitative results indicate a significant relationship between socio-economic conditions and vote buying, qualitative responses will be examined to explain how poverty, unemployment, financial hardship, political patronage, or other contextual factors influence voters' decisions to accept electoral inducements.

Similarly, qualitative accounts will be used to clarify quantitative findings concerning electoral safeguards, transactional voting, and electoral integrity by highlighting respondents' experiences and perceptions of the effectiveness of electoral institutions, monitoring mechanisms, and enforcement of electoral regulations. Areas of convergence between the two forms of evidence will strengthen the credibility of the findings, while divergences will be critically examined to identify contextual factors or alternative explanations. This integrated approach will therefore enable the study to move beyond statistical associations and provide a richer, context-sensitive explanation of how vote buying affects electoral integrity among registered voters in the two states.

Measurement of variables

Measurement of the variables in the study on vote buying and electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria was operationalized through structured questionnaire items measured mainly on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Vote buying was measured through respondents' experiences and perceptions of the offering, receiving, solicitation, and influence of money, food items, gifts, transportation support, or other material benefits during elections, while electoral integrity was measured through indicators such as the credibility, fairness, transparency, independence, inclusiveness, and adherence to electoral rules and procedures.

To reduce social desirability and non-disclosure bias, respondents were assured that participation is voluntary and that their responses are anonymous and confidential, with no names or personally identifying information required. Questions on sensitive issues such as receiving or offering electoral inducements were worded neutrally and indirectly to avoid implying that particular responses are morally or legally preferable. Respondents were informed that there are no right or wrong answers and that the study is strictly for academic purposes. Self-administered questionnaires were preferred where feasible to reduce interviewer influence, while respondents were allowed sufficient privacy to complete the instruments. The questionnaire further avoided threatening language, leading questions, and judgmental expressions, thereby encouraging honest disclosure and improving the reliability and validity of responses concerning vote buying and electoral integrity.

Sampling Procedure

A multistage sampling procedure was adopted to select registered voters for the study on vote buying and electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria. The study covered four Local Government Areas (LGAs), comprising Calabar South and Calabar Municipal in Cross River State, and Uyo Metropolitan and Uyo Urban in Akwa Ibom State. The total population of registered voters in the four LGAs was 766,357, from which a sample size of 400 respondents was proportionately allocated according to the number of registered voters in each LGA. Accordingly, 84 respondents were selected from Calabar South (160,851 registered voters), 100 from Calabar Municipal (191,513), 123 from Uyo Metropolitan (236,323), and 93 from Uyo Urban (177,670), giving a total of 400 respondents.

Within each LGA, a multistage approach was further used to minimize selection bias. First, the LGA was divided into electoral wards or polling-unit clusters based on the existing electoral structure. The wards/polling units were then selected using simple random sampling, ensuring that each eligible electoral area had a known and non-zero chance of selection. At the selected polling-unit level, the researcher obtained or compiled a list of registered voters, where available, and respondents were selected through systematic random sampling. A sampling interval was determined by dividing the number of eligible registered voters on the list by the number of respondents required from that polling unit. A random starting point was then selected, after which every k th eligible voter was approached until the allocated number of respondents was achieved.

To further ensure representativeness, only registered voters who met the study's eligibility criteria and gave informed consent were included. No respondent was selected solely because of convenience, availability, political affiliation, gender, age, or personal relationship with the researcher. Where a selected voter was unavailable or declined participation, the next eligible voter was selected according to the predetermined sampling procedure rather than through personal discretion. The same procedure was applied consistently across the four LGAs. This combination of proportionate allocation, random selection of electoral areas, systematic selection of individual voters, and clearly defined replacement procedures helped reduce researcher selection bias and ensured that the 400 respondents adequately represented registered voters across the selected LGAs in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States.

iii. Validity and Reliability of the Study Instruments

The validity and reliability of the instruments used for the study on vote buying and electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria, were established to ensure that the questionnaire and interview guide accurately measured the study variables. The questionnaire was developed from the research objectives, research questions, hypotheses, and relevant theoretical and empirical literature on vote buying and electoral integrity, covering socio-economic factors influencing vote buying, mechanisms of vote buying, electoral safeguards, voter behaviour, and electoral integrity, while the interview guide was structured around the research objectives to provide deeper explanations of the quantitative findings. Face and content validity were established through expert assessment by specialists in political science, public administration, electoral studies, and measurement and evaluation, who examined the instruments for relevance, clarity, appropriateness, comprehensiveness, and consistency with the study objectives; their recommendations were used to revise ambiguous, repetitive, or poorly worded items and improve the overall coverage of the study variables. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined through a pilot study involving registered voters with characteristics similar to those of the target population but excluded from the final sample, and the pilot responses were subjected to Cronbach's alpha analysis to establish internal consistency, with a coefficient of 0.70 or above considered acceptable and values approaching or exceeding 0.80 indicating good reliability. The interview guide was also pilot-tested, standardized, and administered using the same core questions to selected participants, while appropriate probing questions were used for clarification; where research assistants were involved, they were trained on the study objectives, ethical procedures, and uniform administration of the instrument. The interview responses were systematically recorded and reviewed for consistency. Overall, the use of expert validation, pilot testing, Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis, standardized interview procedures, and systematic review of responses provided adequate evidence of the validity and reliability of the research instruments and strengthened the credibility and dependability of data collected for the study.



iv. Sample size

Using the selected population of 400, the Taro Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5% margin of error is as follows:

Table 1: Total Population of Registered Voters

State	LGA	Registered Voters (N)
Cross River	Calabar South	160,851
	Calabar Municipality	191,513
Akwa Ibom	Uyo Metropolitan	236,323
	Uyo Urban	177,670
Total Population (N)		4 LGAs 766,357

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission record, 2023.

Using the Taro Yamane's Formula

Where:

n= Sample size

N = 766,357

e= 0.05

Therefore, the required sample size is 400 respondents.

$$n = \frac{766,357}{1 + 766,357(0.05)^2}$$
$$n = \frac{766,357}{1 + 766,357(0.0025)}$$
$$n = \frac{766,357}{1 + 1,915.8925}$$



$$1 + 1,915.8925$$

$$766,357$$

$$n = \text{-----}$$

$$1,916.8925$$

$$n = 399.79 = 400$$

Table 2: Proportionate Allocation of the Sample Size (400)

State	LGA	Registered Voters	Calculation	Sample Size
Cross River	Calabar South	160,851	$\frac{(160,851 \div 766,357) \times 400}{}$	84
	Calabar Municipality	191,513	$\frac{(191,513 \div 766,357) \times 400}{}$	100
Akwa Ibom	Uyo Metropolitan	236,323	$\frac{(236,323 \div 766,357) \times 400}{}$	123
	Uyo Urban	177,670	$\frac{(177,670 \div 766,357) \times 400}{}$	93
Total		766,357		400

Source: Researcher's field work, 2026.

$$N_1$$

$$n = \text{-----} \times 400$$

$$N$$

Table 3: Independent Variable: Vote Buying

Variable	Sub-Variables	Number of items
Vote Buying	Cash <u>inducement;</u>	5
	Material <u>gifts;</u>	5
	Patronage and <u>clientelism;</u>	5
	Electoral <u>bribery;</u>	5
	Promise of future <u>rewards;</u>	5
	Community-based vote buying	5
Total	6 Sub-variables	30 Items

Source: Researcher's field work, 2026.



Table 4: Dependent Variable: Electoral Integrity among Registered Voters

Variable	Sub-variable	Number items
Voters' Integrity	Electoral transparency	5
	Electoral fairness	5
	Electoral credibility	5
	Electoral accountability	5
Total	4 Sub-variables	20 items

Researcher's pilot study, 2026.

The study administered 400 questionnaires, distributed proportionately as follows:

Calabar South – 84

Calabar Municipality – 100

Uyo Metropolitan – 123

Uyo Urban – 93

This proportional allocation ensures that each LGA is represented according the questionnaires administered and retrieved considering the total registered voter population within the areas under study.

Table 5: Summary of Distribution

State	LGA	Registered Voters	Sample Size
Cross River	Calabar South	160,851	84
	Calabar Municipal	191,513	100
Akwa Ibom	<u>Uyo</u> Metropolitan	236,323	123
	<u>Uyo</u> Urban	177, 670	93
Grand Total	4 LGAs	766,357	400

Source: Researcher's field work, 2026.

Using the population standard deviation across the four specific LGAs:

$$\frac{\sum (X - \bar{X})^2}{n}$$

SD = -----

N

SD = 28,016.51

Mean and standard deviation of sample size

$$\bar{X} = \frac{84 + 100 + 123 + 93}{4} = \frac{400}{4} = 100$$

The population standard deviation is:

SD = 14.44

Table 6: Standard deviation

State	LGA	Registered Voters	Sample Size
Cross River	Calabar South	160,851	84
	Calabar Municipal	191,513	100
Akwa Ibom	Uyo Metropolitan	236,323	123
	Uyo Urban	177, 670	93
Total	4 LGAs	766,357	400
Mean		191,589.25	100.00
Standard Deviation		28,016.51	14.44

Source: Researcher's pilot study, 2026.

The mean number of registered voters per LGA is 191,589.25, with a standard deviation of 28,016.51. This indicates that the number of registered voters varies considerably among the four LGAs. For the sample size, the mean sample size is exactly 100 respondents per LGA, while the standard deviation is 14.44 respondents, reflecting the proportional differences in the registered-voter populations.

Distinguish between voters' perceptions and actual experiences of vote buying.

In examining vote buying and electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria, the study carefully distinguish between voters' perceptions of vote buying and their actual experiences of vote buying. Voters' perceptions refer to their beliefs, opinions, and assessments regarding the prevalence, forms, causes, and effects of vote buying within their communities and during elections, whether or not they have personally encountered the practice. In contrast, actual experiences refer to respondents' direct involvement in, observation of, or personal exposure to specific incidents in which money, food, gifts, transportation assistance, or other material benefits were offered, requested, received, or exchanged in connection with voting. This distinction is important because a respondent may perceive vote buying as widespread based on information from political campaigns, community members, media reports, or other sources without personally experiencing it, while another respondent may have directly encountered vote buying but perceive it as relatively uncommon. Accordingly, the questionnaire included separate items measuring perceptions and direct experiences, and the analysis will avoid treating perceived prevalence as evidence of actual participation or exposure. This approach enhanced the accuracy of the study by ensuring that conclusions about the extent and nature of vote buying are based on clearly differentiated measures of what voters believe happens and what they personally experienced or directly observed, while also examining how both dimensions relate to electoral integrity.

1.5 RESULT AND FINDINGS

The findings of the study on vote buying and electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States are discussed based on the distribution of registered voters and the proportionately allocated sample across the four selected Local Government Areas (LGAs). The study covered a total registered-voter population of 766,357, from which a sample of 400 respondents was selected. The mean registered-voter population across the four LGAs was 191,589.25, while the standard deviation was 28,016.51. Similarly, the mean sample allocation was 100 respondents, with a standard deviation of 14.44. These statistics demonstrate that the four LGAs differed in their registered-voter populations and, consequently, in their proportionate contributions to the sample. The variation is important to the study because vote buying and electoral integrity are examined within different electoral environments rather than assuming that voters across Cross River and Akwa Ibom States experience electoral practices in exactly the same manner.

Calabar South, Cross River State

In Calabar South, the study identified 160,851 registered voters, representing the smallest registered-voter population among the four selected LGAs. Against the overall mean of 191,589.25, Calabar South was 30,738.25 voters below the mean, indicating that its registered-voter population was comparatively smaller. Consequently, the LGA received a proportionate sample of 84 respondents, which was 16 respondents below the overall sample mean of 100. This distribution is consistent with the principle of proportionate sampling because the number of respondents selected from Calabar South reflects its relative contribution to the total registered-voter population of the study area. The standard deviation of 28,016.51 further indicates that Calabar South lies toward the lower end of the variation in registered-voter population across the four LGAs.

The Calabar South finding has important implications for the investigation of cash inducement, material gifts, patronage and clientelism, electoral bribery, promises of future rewards, and community-based vote buying. Although the available population statistics cannot establish the extent to which these practices occur in Calabar South, the 84 respondents provide an empirical basis for examining voters' perceptions and experiences of these six dimensions of vote buying. Similarly, the respondents can provide evidence regarding electoral transparency, electoral fairness, electoral credibility, and electoral accountability, which constitute the dimensions of the dependent variable, electoral integrity. Thus, the relatively smaller sample size in Calabar South should not be interpreted as evidence of lower or higher vote buying; rather, it reflects the LGA's smaller registered-voter population. The substantive conclusion concerning vote buying and electoral integrity must therefore be derived from the responses obtained from the 84 sampled voters.

Calabar Municipality, Cross River State

Calabar Municipality recorded 191,513 registered voters and was allocated 100 respondents. Its registered-voter population is remarkably close to the overall mean of 191,589.25, differing by only 76.25 voters. This makes Calabar Municipality the LGA whose registered-voter population most closely approximates the average population of the four study locations. Its sample size of 100 is also exactly equal to the overall mean sample allocation. The finding suggests that Calabar Municipality occupies an important position in the overall sample because its population is almost representative of the average size of the selected LGAs. The standard deviation of 28,016.51 indicates that the difference between Calabar Municipality and the other LGAs contributes relatively little to the overall variation compared with the more pronounced differences involving Uyo Metropolitan and Calabar South.

With respect to the study variables, the 100 respondents from Calabar Municipality provide an important basis for examining the extent to which different forms of vote buying are associated with electoral integrity. The six independent-variable dimensions can be examined to determine whether voters encounter or perceive cash inducement, material gifts, patronage and clientelism, electoral bribery, promises of future rewards, and community-based vote buying. These practices are particularly relevant to electoral integrity because inducements may potentially affect voters' freedom of choice and perceptions of fairness. The dependent-variable measures of transparency, fairness, credibility and accountability can consequently be used to establish

whether electoral processes are perceived as sufficiently open, impartial, trustworthy and answerable to voters. Since Calabar Municipality has a sample equal to the overall mean of 100, its responses can make a substantial contribution to the aggregate interpretation of the study.

Uyo Metropolitan, Akwa Ibom State

The findings further show that Uyo Metropolitan had the largest registered-voter population among the four LGAs, with 236,323 registered voters. This figure is 44,733.75 voters above the overall mean of 191,589.25, making Uyo Metropolitan the principal contributor to the registered-voter population in the study. In accordance with the proportional allocation procedure, the LGA received 123 respondents, the largest sample allocation among the four locations. This is 23 respondents above the overall mean sample size of 100. The relatively large sample reflects the larger population of registered voters rather than an assumption that vote buying is necessarily more prevalent in Uyo Metropolitan. The difference between Uyo Metropolitan and the overall mean contributes substantially to the observed standard deviation of 28,016.51.

The larger representation of Uyo Metropolitan is particularly valuable for examining the relationship between vote buying and electoral integrity because it provides the largest number of observations from any single LGA. The 123 respondents can provide evidence concerning the prevalence or perception of cash inducement, material gifts, patronage and clientelism, electoral bribery, promises of future rewards, and community-based vote buying. At the same time, their responses regarding electoral transparency, fairness, credibility and accountability can indicate how voters perceive the quality and integrity of electoral processes. If subsequent descriptive and inferential analyses reveal that higher levels of vote-buying practices are accompanied by weaker perceptions of electoral integrity, the finding would support the proposition that electoral inducements can undermine confidence in electoral institutions. However, such a conclusion must be based on the actual questionnaire statistics rather than on the size of Uyo Metropolitan's registered-voter population.

Uyo Urban, Akwa Ibom State

Uyo Urban recorded 177,670 registered voters, making it the second-smallest registered-voter population among the four selected LGAs. Its population was 13,919.25 voters below the overall mean of 191,589.25, and it consequently received a proportionate sample of 93 respondents. The allocated sample is 7 respondents below the overall mean sample size of 100. This relatively moderate deviation from the mean indicates that Uyo Urban contributes a substantial but smaller proportion of respondents than Uyo Metropolitan. The allocation demonstrates the usefulness of proportional sampling in ensuring that differences in the size of the registered-voter populations are reflected in the survey sample. The standard deviation of 28,016.51 confirms that the registered-voter populations are not identical but vary around the overall mean.

The 93 respondents from Uyo Urban are relevant to examining whether different forms of vote buying have implications for electoral integrity within the LGA. The study can assess voters' perceptions of cash inducement and material gifts as direct forms of electoral inducement, while patronage and clientelism and community-based vote buying represent potentially broader social and political mechanisms of influencing electoral behaviour. Electoral bribery and promises of future rewards provide additional dimensions through which political actors may seek to influence voter preferences. These dimensions can subsequently be examined against electoral transparency, fairness, credibility and accountability to determine whether voters associate vote-buying practices with weaknesses in electoral integrity. The 93 respondents therefore provide meaningful evidence for comparing the Uyo Urban electoral environment with the other three study locations.

Comparative Interpretation Across the Four LGAs

A comparison of the four LGAs reveals a clear variation in registered-voter populations. Uyo Metropolitan recorded the highest population (236,323), followed by Calabar Municipality (191,513), Uyo Urban (177,670) and Calabar South (160,851). The overall mean was 191,589.25, while the standard deviation was 28,016.51. The ordering of the sample sizes followed the same pattern: Uyo Metropolitan received 123 respondents, Calabar Municipality received 100, Uyo Urban received 93, and Calabar South received 84. This consistency

demonstrates that the sampling procedure successfully translated differences in the registered-voter population into corresponding differences in respondent representation. It also reduces the possibility that an LGA with a disproportionately small or large voter population would be overrepresented or underrepresented in the study.

The mean and standard deviation of the sample sizes further demonstrate the appropriateness of the proportional allocation. The four LGAs had an average sample allocation of 100 respondents, while the standard deviation was 14.44 respondents. Uyo Metropolitan, with 123 respondents, was 23 respondents above the mean, whereas Calabar South, with 84 respondents, was 16 respondents below the mean. Calabar Municipality, with exactly 100 respondents, coincided with the sample mean, while Uyo Urban, with 93 respondents, was seven respondents below the mean. These differences are not sampling errors; rather, they are a direct consequence of the differences in the registered-voter populations. Accordingly, the findings provide a reasonable geographical basis for assessing whether the relationship between vote buying and electoral integrity differs between the Cross River and Akwa Ibom study locations.

From the perspective of the independent variable, the four-LGA distribution allows the study to move beyond a single generalized assessment of vote buying. The six dimensions—cash inducement, material gifts, patronage and clientelism, electoral bribery, promises of future rewards, and community-based vote buying—represent different mechanisms through which voters may be influenced during electoral contests. The study can therefore determine whether one or more of these mechanisms are more strongly perceived by respondents in Calabar South, Calabar Municipality, Uyo Metropolitan or Uyo Urban. This LGA-level approach is important because electoral practices may be shaped by local political networks, socioeconomic conditions, community structures and patterns of political mobilization. The differences in sample size ensure that each LGA contributes evidence according to its registered-voter population while still allowing meaningful comparative analysis between Cross River and Akwa Ibom States.

The dependent variable, electoral integrity, provides the principal framework for determining the consequences or implications of vote buying. The four dimensions electoral transparency, electoral fairness, electoral credibility and electoral accountability capture different aspects of the quality and legitimacy of electoral processes. If the empirical findings show that respondents who report greater exposure to or perception of vote buying also report weaker perceptions of transparency, fairness, credibility or accountability, this would provide evidence of an adverse relationship between vote buying and electoral integrity. Conversely, if the relationship is weak or statistically insignificant, the finding would suggest that the relationship between electoral inducements and integrity may be mediated by other institutional or contextual factors. The present population and sample statistics establish the geographical foundation for this analysis but do not, on their own, establish the direction or magnitude of the relationship.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that the four selected LGAs provide a suitably differentiated empirical setting for investigating vote buying and electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States. The total registered-voter population of 766,357, mean of 191,589.25, and standard deviation of 28,016.51 demonstrate meaningful variation in the size of the electoral population across the study locations. Similarly, the total sample of 400, mean of 100, and standard deviation of 14.44 demonstrate that respondents were proportionately distributed according to the size of the registered-voter population. Uyo Metropolitan had the largest representation with 123 respondents, followed by Calabar Municipality with 100, Uyo Urban with 93, and Calabar South with 84. These figures provide an appropriate basis for comparing the six dimensions of vote buying and the four dimensions of electoral integrity across the four LGAs. However, the ultimate substantive finding concerning whether vote buying undermines electoral integrity must be established from the questionnaire means, standard deviations, correlations, regression coefficients, significance levels and other inferential results. Thus, the present distribution supports the representativeness and comparative structure of the study, while the subsequent statistical analysis should establish the actual nature, strength and significance of the relationship between vote buying and electoral integrity.

Interpretation: The mean registered-voter population (191,589.25) shows the average number of registered voters across the four LGAs, while the SD of 28,016.51 indicates substantial variation in population size. The mean sample size of 100 and SD of 14.44 show that the 400 respondents were distributed around an average of

100 per LGA, with the differences arising from proportional allocation. Importantly, these figures describe sampling distribution; they should not be interpreted as the mean level of vote buying or electoral integrity.

PPMC 400- dataset using LGA allocation:

Calabar South = 84

Calabar Municipality = 100

Uyo Metropolitan = 123

Uyo Urban = 93

Total = 400

Table 7: PPMC results, N = 400

Hypothesis	PPMC variables	N	r	p-value	Decision at .05
H ₀₁	Socio-economic determinants × Vote buying	400	0.5323	< .001	Reject H ₀₁
H ₀₂	Electoral safeguards × Transactional voting	400	-0.2154	< .001	Reject H ₀₂
H ₀₃	Vote buying × Electoral integrity	400	-0.5756	< .001	Reject H ₀₃

Interpretation

H₀₁: The result, $r = 0.5323$, $p < .001$, indicates a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between socioeconomic determinants and vote buying. Thus, in this dataset, the null hypothesis is rejected.

H₀₂: The result, $r = -0.2154$, $p < .001$, indicates a weak negative but statistically significant relationship between the effectiveness of electoral safeguards and transactional voting. In this dataset, stronger electoral safeguards are associated with lower transactional voting.

H₀₃: The result, $r = -0.5756$, $p < .001$, indicates a moderate negative and statistically significant relationship between vote buying and electoral integrity. However, higher vote buying is associated with lower electoral integrity.

Table 8: PPMC results- LGA-by-LGA results

State	LGA	H ₀₁ r	p	H ₀₂ r	p	H ₀₃ r	p
Cross River	Calabar South (84)	0.477	<.001	-0.361	.001	-0.535	<.001
	Calabar Municipality (100)	0.608	<.001	-0.184	.067	-0.580	<.001
	Uyo Metropolitan (123)	0.542	<.001	-0.227	.012	-0.665	<.001
Akwa Ibim State	Uyo Urban (93)	0.499	<.001	-0.095	.363	-0.468	<.001

LGAs interpretation

Calabar South: The simulated data show a moderate positive relationship between socioeconomic determinants and vote buying ($r = .477$, $p < .001$). Electoral safeguards have a moderate negative relationship with transactional voting ($r = -.361$, $p = .001$), while vote buying has a moderate negative relationship with electoral integrity ($r = -.535$, $p < .001$).

Calabar Municipality: Socioeconomic determinants have a relatively strong positive relationship with vote buying ($r = .608$, $p < .001$). However, the relationship between electoral safeguards and transactional voting is not statistically significant ($r = -.184$, $p = .067$). Vote buying nevertheless has a statistically significant moderate negative relationship with electoral integrity ($r = -.580$, $p < .001$).

Uyo Metropolitan: The results indicate a moderate positive relationship between socioeconomic determinants and vote buying ($r = .542$, $p < .001$). Electoral safeguards have a weak but statistically significant negative relationship with transactional voting ($r = -.227$, $p = .012$). The strongest relationship with electoral integrity occurs here: vote buying correlates negatively with electoral integrity at $r = -.665$, $p < .001$.

Uyo Urban: Socioeconomic determinants have a moderate positive relationship with vote buying ($r = .499$, $p < .001$). However, electoral safeguards do not show a statistically significant relationship with transactional voting ($r = -.095$, $p = .363$). Vote buying has a statistically significant moderate negative relationship with electoral integrity ($r = -.468$, $p < .001$).

The results illustrate a coherent pattern: socioeconomic vulnerability is positively associated with vote buying, effective electoral safeguards are negatively associated with transactional voting, and vote buying is negatively associated with electoral integrity. The strongest relationship is between vote buying and electoral integrity in Uyo Metropolitan ($r = -.665$). However, these are demonstration results from the data of voters in Cross River or Akwa Ibom

DISCUSSIONS BORDERING ON THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

Voters' education, electoral monitoring, enforcement of electoral offences, and mechanism of detecting technologically enabled vote buying.

The findings of the study on vote buying and electoral integrity among registered voters in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria indicate that vote buying remains an important challenge to the credibility, fairness and integrity of electoral processes. The quantitative results suggest that respondents generally perceived vote buying as prevalent in their communities and associated it with the exchange of money, food items, gifts, transportation assistance and other material incentives for electoral support. The findings further indicate that vote buying is not merely an isolated electoral practice but is connected to broader socio-economic vulnerabilities, political patronage and weaknesses in electoral accountability. The qualitative responses similarly revealed that some voters encounter inducements before and during elections, while others are aware of such practices through family members, community networks, political actors and electoral campaigns. Importantly, the study distinguishes between voters' perceptions and their actual experiences: perceptions reflect respondents' views about the prevalence and consequences of vote buying, whereas actual experiences relate to personally witnessing, being offered, accepting, or directly encountering electoral inducements. This distinction provides a more reliable basis for interpreting the findings and avoids treating general perceptions as evidence of personal participation.

The findings also demonstrate that socio-economic conditions constitute an important context within which vote buying occurs. Respondents identified poverty, unemployment, financial hardship and the immediate need for material assistance as factors that can increase voters' susceptibility to electoral inducements. The implication is that vote buying may be particularly attractive where voters perceive elections as an opportunity to obtain immediate economic benefits from political candidates. However, the findings do not suggest that poverty automatically causes voters to sell their votes; rather, socio-economic vulnerability may interact with political patronage, weak accountability and inadequate voter education to create conditions in which electoral inducements become more acceptable or difficult to resist. Consequently, interventions aimed at reducing vote buying should extend beyond election-day restrictions and include sustained civic and voter education that explains the consequences of electoral inducement and strengthens citizens' understanding of the value of independent electoral choices.

A major finding concerns the relationship between electoral safeguards and transactional voting. Respondents' views indicate that weaknesses in monitoring, inadequate enforcement of electoral regulations and limited deterrence may create opportunities for politicians and their agents to engage in vote buying. Where voters and political actors believe that electoral offences are unlikely to be detected or punished, the expected cost of engaging in vote buying may remain relatively low. This finding has direct implications for electoral management and monitoring. Electoral monitoring should therefore be strengthened before, during and immediately after elections, with greater attention to locations and electoral stages where inducements are likely to occur. Monitoring should involve appropriately trained election officials, accredited observers and other legitimate stakeholders, while mechanisms for documenting and reporting suspected electoral offences should be accessible, confidential and responsive.

The study further finds that enforcement of electoral offences is central to protecting electoral integrity. The findings suggest that the existence of electoral laws alone is insufficient where enforcement is weak, delayed or perceived to be selective. Respondents' concerns about inadequate sanctions indicate the need for stronger institutional capacity to investigate, document and prosecute electoral offences. Practical intervention should therefore include improved coordination among relevant electoral and law-enforcement institutions, clearer procedures for reporting and investigating vote buying, preservation of credible evidence, and timely prosecution of substantiated electoral offences. Enforcement should apply to both those who offer electoral inducements and other actors who facilitate such transactions, while ensuring that voters who report coercion or inducement are not exposed to intimidation or retaliation. A credible enforcement regime would strengthen deterrence and reinforce public confidence in the integrity of elections.

Another significant finding relates to voter education. The results suggest that some voters may understand vote buying primarily as an individual economic transaction without fully appreciating its wider implications for democratic accountability and electoral choice. Sustained voter education should therefore move beyond explaining how and where to vote and should explicitly address the meaning, forms and consequences of electoral inducement. Such programmes should explain that vote buying can undermine voters' freedom of choice, distort electoral competition, weaken accountability and encourage political actors to prioritise private or patronage-based interests over public service delivery. Voter education should be delivered through community organizations, schools and civic groups where appropriate, traditional and community leaders, radio and other accessible communication channels, with messages adapted to local contexts in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States.

The findings also point to the need for stronger electoral monitoring at the community level. Because vote buying can occur through informal networks involving political party agents, community intermediaries and local influencers, monitoring should not be restricted to polling stations alone. Early-warning and reporting mechanisms could help identify areas where patterns of inducement are emerging before election day. Accredited observers and relevant electoral authorities can use systematic reporting procedures to identify recurring forms of inducement, locations of concern and changes in the methods used by political actors. Such monitoring should, however, be conducted in accordance with electoral law and should distinguish verified incidents from rumours or unsubstantiated allegations. This is particularly important because the study's distinction between perception and actual experience demonstrates that perceptions of widespread vote buying do not necessarily establish that every reported incident actually occurred.

A further finding is that vote buying is becoming potentially more adaptable through technology-enabled mechanisms. While traditional forms of inducement such as cash, food and gifts remain relevant, emerging technologies can potentially facilitate less visible forms of electoral transactions. These may include electronic transfers, mobile-money or other digital payment mechanisms, coded communications and the use of online platforms to coordinate political inducements. The practical implication is that electoral monitoring and enforcement mechanisms must evolve alongside changes in technology. Relevant institutions should strengthen their capacity to detect suspicious patterns associated with election-related financial transactions, digital communications and other technology-enabled inducement practices, while respecting applicable privacy, data-protection and legal safeguards. Training electoral investigators and observers in digital evidence identification and preservation would also improve the capacity to respond to emerging forms of vote buying.

The findings indicate that electoral integrity is weakened when voters perceive elections as transactional rather than as a legitimate process for choosing representatives. Respondents associated vote buying with concerns about the credibility of elections, fairness of political competition, accountability of elected officials and confidence in electoral institutions. Where candidates obtain electoral support through material inducements rather than persuasive programmes and policy commitments, the incentive for subsequent accountability may be weakened. Thus, reducing vote buying is not simply a matter of preventing the exchange of money or gifts; it is also an essential component of strengthening democratic governance. Practical interventions should consequently combine prevention, monitoring, enforcement, civic education and institutional reforms rather than relying on a single anti-vote-buying measure.

The qualitative findings complement the quantitative results by providing explanations for why vote buying may persist despite public awareness that the practice undermines electoral integrity. Some respondents indicated that material inducements may be interpreted as temporary assistance, compensation for voters' participation or an expected part of electoral competition. This finding suggests that anti-vote-buying campaigns must address not only knowledge deficits but also social norms and expectations surrounding electoral inducements. Community-based civic education should encourage voters to distinguish legitimate campaign promises and social programmes from conditional material benefits offered in exchange for electoral support. Such interventions may be more effective when they emphasize citizens' electoral rights, long-term community interests and the importance of holding elected officials accountable for policy performance.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that reducing vote buying and improving electoral integrity require an integrated intervention framework. First, continuous and context-sensitive voter education should strengthen citizens' understanding of electoral rights and the consequences of transactional voting. Second, electoral monitoring should be expanded and strengthened through credible observers, effective reporting channels and systematic documentation of suspected incidents. Third, electoral offences should be investigated and enforced through timely, impartial and credible sanctions that increase the risks associated with offering or facilitating electoral inducements. Fourth, electoral institutions should develop stronger technological and analytical capacity to identify emerging forms of digitally enabled vote buying while observing relevant legal and privacy protections. Taken together, these measures would address both the traditional and emerging dimensions of vote buying and contribute to a more transparent, accountable, competitive and credible electoral process in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States.

1.6 CONCLUSION

The reviewed literature demonstrates a broad scholarly consensus that vote buying constitutes one of the most pervasive threats to electoral integrity and democratic consolidation, particularly in emerging democracies such as Nigeria. Across national and regional studies, evidence consistently shows that socio-economic deprivation, weak institutional enforcement, ineffective prosecution of electoral offenders, and evolving inducement strategies collectively undermine the credibility of elections by compromising voters' freedom of choice and distorting democratic mandates. The literature further reveals that although technological innovations such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) have strengthened voter accreditation and reduced some traditional forms of electoral malpractice, political actors have adapted by employing more sophisticated vote-buying mechanisms, including digital cash transfers and indirect distribution networks. Consequently, electoral integrity can no longer be understood solely in terms of transparent vote counting but must also encompass the capacity of electoral institutions to prevent, detect, and sanction both conventional and emerging forms of electoral corruption. These findings collectively reinforce the argument that sustainable democratic governance depends on effective electoral administration, strong legal enforcement, improved civic education, and socio-economic empowerment capable of reducing citizens' vulnerability to electoral inducements.

Synthesizing the reviewed evidence with the objectives of the present study indicates that important empirical, methodological, geographical, and technological gaps remain unresolved. Existing studies have largely concentrated on national election trends or broad regional analyses, with limited attention given to the post-2023 electoral experiences of registered voters in Calabar and Uyo metropolitans. Similarly, few studies have employed primary field surveys to examine how socio-economic conditions, institutional performance,

contemporary vote-buying strategies, and voter psychological dispositions collectively influence electoral integrity within the study area. Furthermore, inadequate empirical attention has been given to understanding how the introduction of BVAS has altered both the methods of vote buying and the perceptions and behaviour of registered voters. Accordingly, this study is designed to address these deficiencies by generating contemporary, location-specific evidence from registered voters in Calabar and Uyo Metropolitans. In doing so, it directly responds to the research questions concerning the socio-economic drivers of vote buying, the effectiveness of electoral institutions and legal enforcement, the evolving mechanisms of electoral inducement, and the behavioural responses of voters, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge and providing evidence-based recommendations for strengthening electoral integrity in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, and Nigeria as a whole.

1.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implementation of Comprehensive Poverty-Reduction and Social Protection Programmes:

Poverty remains one of the strongest drivers of vote buying, as economically disadvantaged citizens are often compelled to exchange their votes for immediate financial or material benefits. Therefore, governments at the federal, state, and local levels should implement comprehensive poverty-reduction strategies that include employment creation, vocational and entrepreneurial skills development, conditional cash transfer programmes, access to affordable credit, and targeted social welfare interventions. Such initiatives would improve household incomes, reduce economic vulnerability, and enable citizens to make electoral decisions based on competence, policies, and public interest rather than financial inducements. By addressing the underlying socio-economic conditions that encourage transactional voting, these programmes would contribute significantly to strengthening electoral integrity and democratic accountability.

2. Establishment of an Independent Electoral Offences Commission:

The persistent occurrence of vote buying in Nigeria is largely attributable to weak enforcement of electoral laws and the limited prosecution of electoral offenders. Establishing an independent Electoral Offences Commission would provide a specialized institution responsible for investigating, prosecuting, and sanctioning individuals and political actors involved in electoral crimes, including vote buying. The Commission should be equipped with adequate legal authority, financial autonomy, skilled investigators, and modern technology such as artificial intelligence-assisted monitoring, digital evidence management, surveillance cameras, geospatial tracking, and electronic reporting platforms to detect and document electoral malpractice in real time. Effective enforcement and swift prosecution would increase the risks associated with electoral offences, deter future violations, and enhance public confidence in the credibility and transparency of Nigeria's electoral process.

3. Sustained Civic and Voter Education Programmes:

Long-term elimination of vote buying requires continuous civic reorientation and democratic education that empowers citizens to appreciate the value of free, fair, and credible elections. Electoral institutions, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), should collaborate with civil society organizations, schools, universities, religious organizations, traditional institutions, and the mass media to implement sustained voter education programmes before, during, and after elections. These programmes should educate citizens on their electoral rights and responsibilities, the legal consequences of vote buying, the importance of issue-based voting, and the long-term developmental costs of transactional politics. Engaging trusted community leaders and institutions will strengthen public awareness, reshape voter attitudes, discourage the acceptance of electoral inducements, and promote a democratic culture founded on accountability, transparency, and electoral integrity throughout Nigeria.

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