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The Menace of Vote Buying and Governance in Nigeria General Elections: A Study of 2023 General Elections in Ezihinitte Mbaise L.G.A., Imo State

Kelechi Charles Nwachukwu (PhD)
Department of Public Administration, Alex Ekwueme Federal University
Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo
Email: charkelvic@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This research work titled 'The menace of vote buying and governance in Nigeria general elections: A study of 2023 general elections in Ezihinitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State' was carried out to know whether vote buying unduly raises the cost of governance thereby promoting corruption in Ezinihiitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State, to determine whether vote buy undermines the integrity of the elections as the winners are often the highest bidder contestants in Ezihinitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State and to verify whether vote-buying discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics. The population of this study is 234,600 while the sample size used 399; the research design used for this research is survey design. Simple random sampling was used and questionnaire method was used for the collection of data. Political Economy theory was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. From the result of the study it was found that vote buying unduly raises the cost of governance. This was proved by the fact that the calculated chi-square value for hypothesis I is 117.14 which is greater than the critical value of 61.9; vote buying undermines the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidders contestants in Ezinihitte Mbaise. This was justified by the fact that, the calculated chi-square value for hypothesis II is 322.9, which is greater than the critical value which of 61.9; and vote buying discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics. This was also proved by the fact that the calculated chi-square value for hypothesis III is 117.14, which is greater than the critical value which of 61.9. The study recommended among others that electoral laws should be strengthened to give it solid backing so as to gain its efficiency in order to deal with electoral offenders appropriately. Mass media should consistently campaign against vote buying in Nigeria until the menace is curbed.

Keywords: Menace,Vote-buying, Governance and Elections

INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, election represents a mechanism which people are elected into offices. It is a modern and universally accepted process through which individuals are openly and methodically chosen to represent a body or community in a larger entity of government. It is still one of the cardinal features of democracy. Democracy itself is adjudged to be the best form of government all over the world but simultaneously being constantly assaulted in Nigeria due to the phenomenon of vote-buying. Indeed, vote-buying seems to have taken the centre stage in the democratization

process in Nigerian politics. Essentially, the electorate trade their votes for certain outcomes that are important to them.

In the Nigerian state, it may be out of thought that an election could be won without greasing some palms and scratching some backs. Olaito, (2018) opined that election period in Nigeria can be compared to a season of give and take with lots of commercial activities in the red light street. He further noted that vote buying does not only take place in the wee hours of the election day but starts from the fees charged by political parties for application forms for party officers from the national to the local level, to the party/caucus meetings, congresses, conventions, campaigns grounds, party primaries and then general elections.

It is obvious that since Nigeria returned to the democratization process in 1999, the conduct of elections has left much to be desired, because the election process has been characterized by electoral fraud, including vote-buying, electoral violence among other violations, undermining the legitimacy and of government. Though monetary and other material inducements have been part of the electoral process in Nigeria, the incidence of vote buying and financial inducements became so glaring in Nigeria general elections (Adigun, 2019 and Dauda, et al, 2019). In point of fact, the phenomenon of vote-buying and democratic experiment in Nigeria appears to be at variance as it vitiates the good qualities of election and to a large extent, undermine democratization process (Kwanghaga and Tarfa, 2015).

Vote buying has been an integral element of money politics in 2023 general election in Nigeria. Recent experience shows that vote buying takes place prominently during voter registration, the nomination period, political parties' primaries, campaigning and election days. It is more dominant on election days, shortly before or during vote casting. Like a typical market place, the politicians, political parties, and party agents are the vote buyers while prospective voters are the sellers (Amao, 2023). He further stated that the commodity on sale is the vote to be cast while the medium exchange could be monetary and non-monetary items. The market force that determines the value or price of a vote is the level of desperation of politicians to win in a polling unit. Vying for political post is left for rich individuals due to the huge amount of money involved in preparation for elective offices Amao, (2023).

Vanguard.ng (2022) wrote that in the last concluded primaries of both APC and PDP, the International Coalition for Democracy and Good Governance, (ICDGG) described both exercises as lacking in every essence of democracy. In his view, the Executive Director, Barrister Emmanuel Anene noted that, the exercise was glaring that the presidential primary elections of the two major parties, PDP and APC were heavily monetized and the highest bidders emerged flag bearers of the parties.

According to Onuoha & Okafor, (2020) vote-buying is a commercial process in which candidates for public offices, political parties, or their agents negotiate to purchase the voters' votes from the sellers. It is the same as exchanging products and services for agreed-upon rates in a public market. The procedure appears to be an auction sale where the voters sell to the highest bidder when there is fierce competition. Vote buying is equally described as any form of financial, material or promissory inducement or reward by a candidate, political party, agents or supporters to influence voters to cast their votes or even abstain from doing so in order to enhance the chances of a particular contestant to win an election (Oladapo, Oyewale, & Abayomi,

2022). Thus, any practice of immediate or promised reward to a person for voting or refraining from voting in a particular way can be regarded as vote buying.

The majority of vote buying, a phenomenon that possibly represents the essence of politics and elections, is at the centre of Nigeria's political process, which Onapajo et al (2015) emphasized, has "always been notorious for its chaotic nature". Amao (2023) supports this claim by emphasizing that the Nigerian electoral process has frequently been criticized for its violent, corrupt, and chaotic tendencies, which include the use of thugs and the maiming of political opponents by those attempting to gain electoral positions through electoral fraud. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that almost all elections held in Nigeria were marked by controversy, with both their processes and results suffering from a crisis of integrity, credibility, and legitimacy.

The role of money in politics and vote-buying in Nigeria, particularly Imo State political system today has paved way for the political bourgeois in the country to dominate and occupy key elective and appointive political positions in the country. These political lords and their lieutenants will then control the power of the state and in turn, authoritatively decide who gets what, when and how. Money seems to have taken a centre stage in the political process in many states in Nigeria.

It is sad to note that money now plays the increasing critical role of political and electoral process to the extent that the word 'money politics' with a pejorative conation, has crept into the country's political lexicon. The problem with this situation is that the electoral process is often compromised resulting in elections not being free and fair (Davies, 2006, Ovwasa, 2013). The only worry however, is the noticeable corrupting influence of money politics, vote buying and voting behaviour and their negative impacts on the country's political prospects.

Nigeria the giant of Africa whose democracy and elections are closely watched by the international community; as a testimony of the growth of democracy and the possibility free and fair elections in the region, is still challenged with vote buying in its elections (Baidoo, Dankwa & Eshun, 2018). Vote buying is rarely an isolated action, and it perpetuates corruption throughout the entire political system. When a candidate chooses to pay for support, rather than compete fairly for votes, they show a disregard for democratic norms and a willingness to use illegal means.

Party thugs and paid agents' took over voting activities in most parts of Imo State as INEC officials were barely seen in most of the polling units during the general election. Vote buying make it impossible to elect leaders freely and fairly, suggesting that elective positions can be bought and casting doubt on the legitimacy of government. They are also an indictment of government's ability to instill the electoral discipline that gives the electorate the right and opportunity to choose credible leaders.

Nevertheless, some factors are traced to occurrence of electoral violence in Nigeria. These include poverty, unemployment, ineffectiveness of security forces and culture of impunity by government (Otoghile 2009); illiteracy, zero-sum politics, poor handling of elections by the electoral commission, poor handling of election petitions, lack of internal party democracy, corruption among electoral officials, unresolved ethnic differences, democratic deficit, diminishing popularity of the ruling party, internal conflicts within the main rival parties and unemployment among youths (Ikpe, 2004; Dode & Edet, 2015);

selfish interest and ideological bankruptcy (Ugiagbe, 2010).

They also have challenges for the responsiveness of elected officials. Voters who engage in vote selling have, *ipso facto*, denied themselves the right to demand transparent and accountable leadership, as politicians who buy votes are under no obligation to be accountable to the electorate. Vote buying and vote selling can therefore be seen as a form of political entrepreneurship where politicians see themselves as investing in a greater political harvest, thereby encouraging the entrenchment of corruption in the polity, which erodes the very basis of democratic(good) governance.The menace of vote buying in Nigeria's elections gives room for concern about 2023general election in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State and the future of elections in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study set out to address the following research questions which guided the work:

1. Can vote buying unduly raise the cost of governance thereby promoting political corruption in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State?
2. Does vote buying undermine the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidder contestants in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State?
3. Does vote buying discourage conscientious people from participating in electoral politics?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Menace of Vote-Buying

The numerous attempts by scholars to define the concept of vote buying has produced several perspectives. This is because vote buying carries different notions in different states depending on its historical, cultural, political systems and its election laws and processes or level of democratization (Schaffer, 2007). According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), vote buying is "the use of state and public sector powers and resources by politicians or political parties to further their prospects of election"

According to Oladapo, Oyewale, & Abayomi, (2022) vote buying is equally described as any form of financial, material or promissory inducement or reward by a candidate, political party, agents or supporters to influence voters to cast their votes or even abstain from doing so in order to enhance the chances of a particular contestant to win an election. Thus, any practice of immediate or promised reward to a person for voting or refraining from voting in a particular way can be regarded as vote buying.

Etzioni-Halevy (1989) gave an often quoted definition of vote buying as "the exchange of private material benefits for political support." Etzioni-Halevy's definition stresses on gaining private material benefits by voters in return for their political support. In other words, it is about giving voters some benefits in the form of gifts or incentives for them to reciprocate with their votes by voting for the giver or the candidate. In effects, voters are given items for their private use and they are expected to return this gesture from candidates or political parties by voting for them. Etzioni-Halevy sees this act as an exchange in the sense that the materials are given to the electorates in anticipation that the electorates would consider the gift received and vote for them (Ejikeme, Onyinyeomachukwu, Kingsley & Rebecca, 2022)

Invariably, vote buying is a binding contract, or perhaps an auction in which the voter sells his or her vote to the highest bidder (Schaffer, 2002). Vote buying is defined here as any

form of financial, material or promissory inducement or reward by a candidate, political party, agent or supporter to influence a voter to cast his or her vote or even abstain from doing so in order to enhance the chances of a particular contestant to win an election. Thus, any practice of immediate or promised reward to a person for voting or refraining from voting in a particular way can be regarded as vote buying (Chukwurah, Nnamani & Nduba, 2022).

Vote Buying and Governance in Nigeria

Apparently, the INEC is saddled with the responsibility to sensitize citizens to the basic rules, principles and practices of democratic values by making the electorates understand what is required of them before, during and after elections, and also to constantly evaluate government actions and policies vis -a- vis the citizenry. This is with a view to ensuring that everybody irrespective of age, sex, location, political or ethnic affiliation is carried along.

Based on the above assertions, Okoro (2021) posits,"INEC" has the responsibility of conveying the values of political tolerance, trust in democratic governance, respect for the rule of law,and active engagement in electioneering campaigns". Chikelu (2020)noted that since one of the nagging problems confronting good governance is that of national unity and tribal coherence, the Federal Government should ensure that its development agenda and policies adequately allow for mobilization of information resources for equal access and distribution.

It is obvious when the will of the people is not expressed in the ballot papers due to the influence of benefits during elections, persons who are unqualified to fill given political positions are voted for. This spells doom for the state's affairs as these misfits are given power to rule in ways that are detrimental to the wellbeing of the citizenry. Mohammed (2020) consented to this when he stated that vote buying and selling gives an opportunity for the wrong individuals to get the job which usually leads to a series of loss, disruption of the economy and harmony of a society or state. When political candidates are elected into political offices based on the short-term benefit poor electorate receive from them, it only implies that their long-term benefits have been sacrificed at the altar of vote buying. Schaffer (2007) asserted that vote buying is just a recycling of corrupt and depraved politicians. The recycling of this kind of politicians implies that the electoral process would be void of transparency and filled with electoral malpractices. This is because they would like to sustain the system through which they got into their political offices, thereby increasing the level of corruption in the electoral system and even the society at large.

Yoon (2020) who stated that a political leader who ascended the throne of leadership via the mechanism of vote buying would lack the will power to fight corruption being that he or she got to his/her political position through political corruption. This explains one of the rationales behind the Nigerian state being one of the most corrupt political entities in the world. According to Transparency International (2022), Nigeria is ranked as the 154th most corrupt nation in the world. Chairperson of Transparency International, Delia Ferreira Rubio, decried the corrupting role "big money" in political party financing plays and the undue influence it exerts on political systems in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ojekunle, 2020). One of the significant roles this "big money" plays is in the issue of vote buying. During elections, political party agents arrive each polling unit with bags of cash so as to bribe electoral officials and buy the votes of the poor electorate.

Furthermore, vote buying encourages bad governance. This in turn makes it very difficult for the citizenry to hold their elected representatives responsible. If a politician feels that all they have to do to win is buy off voters and government officials, they will have little motivation and resources to respond to issues that are important to their constituency, such as water and sanitation, education, and unemployment (Mohammad, 2020) since they have spent a large chunk of those resources on the electoral process.

Vote buying is rarely an isolated action, and it perpetuates corruption throughout the entire political system. When a candidate chooses to pay for support, rather than compete fairly for votes, they show a disregard for democratic norms and a willingness to use illegal means. Broadly speaking, vote buying obstructs the democratic process by interfering with the rights of citizens to freely decide who will represent them and their interests. This can result in the candidates with the deepest pockets winning the election, rather than candidates who would best serve their constituents. Ideally, elections create a "social contract" between candidates and constituents who voted with the presumption that the candidates will govern along the lines of their stated policy platforms.

Causes of Political Apathy in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State

The following are the causes of political apathy in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State, Nigeria

Belief That Votes Don't Count: Many Imo state residents have doubts that their votes will be count or even matter. When following election returns, they may see that their state has been declared for a candidate and think, "Why bother?"

Dislike of Politicians: Some people don't vote because of the negative opinion they have of politicians. It is obvious that a good number of Imo indigenes believe that politicians don't care what average Nigerians think and many others say that, once elected, politicians lose touch with the voters back home. Part of this dislike comes from the number of scandals at all levels of government involving politicians of both parties. Other people believe that politicians will say anything to get elected and once in office, don't represent their interests.

Lack of Variety in Candidates: When choosing a new President, senator or representative to Congress, voters typically have to choose between candidates from two parties. Unlike in the past, when economic issues defined the parties and divided the voters, the PDP and APC parties must deal with many larger issues and don't enjoy the voter loyalty they once had. This decrease in party loyalty leads to voter apathy because, for some people, neither the PDP nor APC option reflects their beliefs.

Lack of Trust in Government: Many Imolight have lost faith in government. They don't trust the government to make the changes they feel are needed and don't see the point in voting or being involved. Laws and programs that benefit corporations and the wealthy have left citizens feeling frustrated and helpless.

Hyper-Critical Negative Media: Negative political news coverage and negative political ads create cynicism in many Nigerians, which leads to apathy. News programs do not provide substantive coverage of candidates and their views on issues, offering instead sound clips and opinions from biased panelists.

As negative political ads become more mean-spirited and distorted, some persons in

Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, get disgusted and completely disconnect from the political process.

Religious Affiliations: Religion hinders a significant portion of Nigerians from contributing to democratic governance. For instance; Jehovah's Witnesses are apolitical based on what they believe the Bible teaches. They do not lobby, vote for political parties or candidates, run for government office or participate in any action to change government. They believe Jesus Christ taught his disciples not to be part of the world, therefore they see no reason to contribute to political issues. Also, the politicization of Shari'ah further deepens women's domestication and limits their political contribution. In this past election, Muslim female politicians were quickly reminded of their religious obligations by men who controlled the religious space and are the *de facto* religious decision makers. The implementation of Shari'ah served as a tool in the hands of some politicians to discourage women's participation as candidates for public office and voters in the 2023 elections.

Factors Responsible for Vote-Buying and Voting Behaviour

So many reasons can be adduced as being responsible for the persistent and increasing level of money politics, vote-buying and voting behaviour in Nigeria. Some of these factors include ignorance on the parts of the electorates, apathy, poverty, inadequate information or lack of awareness and inadequate sensitization, willingness on the part of the voters and deceit by the politicians. There is also attitudinal problem on the side of the people involved in both buying and selling. Our attitude toward politics is not good because most politicians view it as a call to investment from which huge benefits is expected and not a call to serve humanity. Electorate on their part sees politics especially during elections as an opportunity to sell their votes to represent their own share of national cake since they do not have access to where the national cake is being shared (Ovwasa, 2013).

Other factors are identified by Davies (2006) as follow:

a. The inability of many political parties and contestants to put in place comprehensive and comprehensible manifestoes for scrutiny by voters. Instead of clear-cut manifestoes that could enable electorate to make a rational political choice, meaningless slogans, demagogic and rabblerousing speeches are made. Many voters seem to be unimpressed by all the tricks the parties and the candidates employ, hence the need to bribe them for their votes.

b. Political cynicism on the part of the voters who believe that political office holders are incurably corrupt, self-seeking and incompetent, that politics is a dirty and dishonourable enterprise, that the whole political process is a fraud and betrayal of public trust.

c. Focusing on personalities rather than on issues. By the mode of their campaigns, most candidates draw the attention of the electorate away from the political parties to themselves. The consequence of this is that, the political parties and their messages become less important to the electorate.

d. The peoples' perception greatly reinforced by obscene display of opulence by public office holders and ostentatious living of many politicians that every elected or appointed public officer is amassing wealth from the public treasury. This seems to have strengthened by the resolve of many voters to sell their votes to the highest bidder.

e. The penchant of politicians to strive to win elections, even at the primary level at all cost, makes desperate contestants to engage in all short of malpractices including offering of financial and material inducement to voters.

f. The noticeable weakness in a party whip, characteristics of party politics in presidential system, when elected members exercise considerable degree of freedom when voting on legislative proposals. Such freedom makes legislators to be more susceptible to receive gratifications from the private interest groups.
g. The absence of any legislation that put any ceiling on financial contributions to political parties and candidates by group of individual (Davies, 2006).

2023 General Elections and the Implications of Vote Buying on Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2018) avouched that in vote buying transactions in Nigeria, voters are usually offered money, commodities such as food or clothing, and jobs. In countries such as Malawi, Zimbabwe and Uganda, cash-for-vote transactions are quite limited and exchange of votes for goods and services are most common. For example, in Malawi, the governments farm input subsidy initiative has widely been observed as susceptible to political manipulation where issuing of coupons for inputs 'indirectly' translate to vote buying. The practice rests upon payoffs that are not directly and explicitly tied to reciprocity in the polling booth.

The issue of vote buying has a multiplier effects on the public. Majority of literate and illiterate fellows were susceptible to vote buying in Nigeria. The just concluded 2023 Presidential election in Imo State, Nigeria recorded massive cases of vote buying. It is assumed that the public are not much aware of the negative implications of selling votes. Moneybags politicians are just after their personal interest and not for the concern of the public. Below are the effects of 2023 general elections vote buying or selling to the public;

i. **Denying of Dividend of Democracy**: Democracy encourages social justice and inclusiveness. Therefore, it should be protected. The negative effect of selling vote or buying vote is so enormous. Majority of people are naive, they don't know that political gladiators that comes with peanuts and give to them in exchange for votes are doing that to the detriment of the electorates, and for their personal interest. Come to think of it, we have seen these moneybags politicians in the past. As soon as they gain access to power, they usually turn back at the public. Many of them are not assessable. They go there to make money for their families. Their apex priority is their loved ones. They have no public interest at hearts. Their children school abroad, while others who can't afford weighty sum of tuitions remain in Nigeria to school in our institutions that facilities are obsoletes, dilapidated, below standards and many more negative factors bedeviled our educational system. Democracy comes with bumper benefits, in a democratized milieu, people enjoy certain dividends such as, infrastructural development, scholarship, good access to basic social amenities, robust social services etc. But with the trend of vote buying and selling, these dividends are threatened, and development is drowsy.
ii. **Emergence of Wrong Candidate:** One of the greatest things that happen to the people in governance is to elect a credible candidate to represent them. But if the wrong candidate emerges, the people suffer. The recent misdemeanor of vote buying is a problem to democracy. Selling of votes facilitate the emergence of wrong candidate. We have moneybags politicians who are desperate to bag power by all cost. They are the ones that use money to buy votes. Remember that, you that sells your vote, you are denying yourself certain benefits of democracy, you are selling your right. Every citizen is entitled to all the

benefits that government is supposed to make available for its people. Representatives of every constituency are accorded some obligations to bring to their constituents developmental projects. But in most cases, these projects are not carried out, because, those fellows that represent them are not the right candidates. It could be that they manoeuvred their ways into the positions they occupy. Reminisce that, vote buying is not a new trend. It has been going on in the past, though it was miniature. It was only going on in the pipelines but not too brazen as it is today.

iii. Stagnation of Development: Development is one of the intrinsic aspects of human life. Every society crave for development, and cuts across different levels. Nigeria is undergoing development, we are classified among underdeveloped nations in the world. To achieve modernization, we need pragmatic leaders who are proactive and responsive to human needs. The issue of vote buying is lethargic to development and it is very harmful to our nineteenth years of unbroken democracy. Selling of vote entails that, the social amenities that would have been brought to you, you have sold them. The unaccessible road in the community that would have been fixed or tar, have been sold to greedy politicians who gives five to ten thousand naira to vote for them.

iv. Corruption: Vote buying is capable of bringing corrupt leaders back to the system. Etika and Ejue (2018) avouched that corruption is a societal phenomenon that has deprived citizens of most countries their right of social services because, funds meant for public use are usually misappropriated by corrupts leaders or public office holders. Corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into our marrows and it requires concerted efforts to win this fight, because the rate at which these syndromes have spread is alarming and worrisome. Corruption is mostly perceived to be embezzlement of fund or stealing, but it goes beyond looting of public funds, mere perception of stealing, looting or embezzlement.

v. Massive threat to Democracy: Democracy is government of the people by the people and for the people. The carnage of vote buying is perceived to be a hiccup for the growth of our democracy. Pundits and scholars have pointed out emphatically the multiplier effects of vote buying to Nigerian democracy. If we remember vividly, the military took over power from civilian in Nigeria because of governance impropriety and corruption. It never augured well with us, we cried and craved for democracy because of military assaults, intimidation and undue suppression. Now that we are enjoying democracy and its dividends, why can't we sustain it by refraining from acts that are capable of jeopardizing our nineteenth years of uninterrupted democracy? Why can't we “SHUN OR SAY NO” to "VOTE BUYING" for the betterment of public interest and Nigeria democracy.

vi. Negative Image: A befitting image is key for bilateral ties amongst nations. For a nation to attract neighboring counterparts and far distance leaders to create bilateral relations, such country must have a terrific image among the comity of nations. Negative image is attributed to corruption, electoral offences etc. Therefore, Nigerians should shun any act that would depict our country in a bad light.

vii. Poverty: Experts have ascribed poverty as the root cause of vote buying in Imo state elections. This act is very inimical to democracy. The rate of poverty in Nigeria is alarming. According to United Nations index of poverty in Nigeria asserted that an average Nigerian feed less than one dollar per day. This validation is true to some extent because, if you take an inventory to ascertain the level of poverty amid Nigerians, you will concur with UN position. Nigeria is blessed with arable land, human and natural resources that if judiciously harnessed, would be competing

with developed nations and our economy would be robust than we ever anticipated, the problem is that, corrupt leaders have in the past robbed Nigerians their virility of enjoying a better life. This is the time Nigerians are supposed to choose credible leaders whose concern is to ameliorate poverty by embarking on projects that have direct impacts on the populace. Leaders that will feel the cry of the masses, rather than allowing greedy politicians to lure them in disgruntle act.

viii. Dwindling life Expectancy: The truth about life is, if you have money, chances are that, you can afford basic necessities of life including good medical services. But if there is no money, you can easily die in the situation that requires emergency. Lack of proper medical attention have made a lot of people to die. Malnutrition and starvation have been a causative factor to the demise of many individuals in Nigeria and across Africa. For example the issue of youths irregular migration in Nigeria was as a results of those seeking for a better life, in which thousands died on their way for scavenging for greener pasture in foreign lands. Those who ordinarily would have enjoyed longer life expectancy have died because of one problem or the other.

ix. Electoral Malpractice: Electoral malpractice is a grievous offence according to Electoral Act 2010, article 130 which stated that " A person who – (a) corruptly by himself or by any other person at any time after the date of an election has been announced , directly or indirectly gives or provides or pays money to or for any person for the purpose of corruptly influencing that person or any other person to vote or refrain from voting at such election , or on account of such person or any other person having voted or refrained from voting at such election ; or (b) being a voter, corruptly accepts or takes money or any other inducement during any of the period stated in paragraph (a) of this section , commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of N 100, 000 or 12 months imprisonment or both. The truth is that, the implication of vote buying for 2023 general elections will be enormous. There will be likelihoods of massive malpractices and irregularities. Wrong leaders will emerge as winners of the forthcoming elections because they are going to employ coercive measures and aggressively aggravate vote buying gimmicks to ensure they win.

Vote Buying as a Crime in Nigeria

According to Electoral Act, (2010), Section 23 (1) of the Electoral Act states that any person who is in unlawful possession of any voter's card, whether issued in the name of any voter or not; sells, attempts to sell, or offers to sell any voter's card, whether issued in the name of a voter or not; or buys or offers to buy any voter's card, whether on his own behalf or on behalf of another person, commits an offence and is subject to a fine of not more than #500, 000 or a sentence of not more than two years in prison, or both.

Furthermore, section 120(1)(d) of the Electoral Act prohibits the sale of voter's card and prescribes punishment for offenders if liable on conviction. Section 123(2) and (4) provides penal sanction upon conviction for the offence of bribery by stating that a voter commits this offence where before or during an election, receives, agrees, or contracts for any money, gift, loan, or valuable consideration, office or employment, for himself or for any other person, for voting or agreeing to vote, or for refraining or agreeing to refrain from voting at any such election, directly or indirectly, himself or by any other person on his behalf.

In the same vein, section 130 (a) explicitly provides penal sanction for any person or voter who, after being corruptly announced, gives, provides, or pays money to or for any

person for the purpose of corruptly influencing that person or any other person to vote or refrain from voting in such election, or on account of such person or any other person having voted or refrained from voting in such election. Such a person or a voter under section 130(b) of the Electoral Act is liable on conviction to a fine of ₦100,000 or imprisonment for a term of 12 months or both.

The above listed laudable provisions of the Electoral Act which create penal offences for vote-buying are adequate in respect to addressing legally the issue of vote-buying in Nigeria. However, the lackadaisical manner employed in prosecuting alleged offenders when they breach these penal provisions has been a bane in the country's criminal justice system.

The major reason being that the political will on the part of government to prosecute such alleged offenders is lacking in form and substance. Probably, the prosecuting agency which is primarily the Police which would have set the judicial system in motion most times have one form of political inclination or loyalty to the ruling party or to the opposition party thereby obscuring their sense of responsibility in taking the desired action when such issues of vote-buying occur.

It is submitted that the enabling law pertaining to vote-buying is laudable but the functionality of this law is hindered or hampered by the non-cooperation of the "powers to be at the corridors of power" with the prosecuting body. An attitudinal pro-active change is desired and needed on the part of government to reverse this menacing trend of vote- buying.

Vote Buying Unduly Raises the Cost of Governance

Vote buying has been an integral element of money politics in Nigeria. Recent experiences however show that vote buying takes place at multiple stages of the electoral cycle and has been observed eminently during voter registration, the nomination period, campaigning and election day. It is more predominant during election day, shortly before or during vote casting.

The consequences of vote buying are manifold. In the first instance, it unduly raises the cost of governance thereby shutting out contestants with little finances and promoting political corruption. When victory is purchased rather than won fairly, it obviously leads to state capture. Vote trading equally has the tendency to perpetuate bad governance. It not only compromises the wellbeing of those who sold their vote for instant gratification, but also the future of those who did not sell their votes but are inevitably exposed to bad governance that results from such a fraudulent process. For every vote traded, there are many people who will suffer the unintended consequences when the traded votes make the difference between winning and losing in the election.

Like a typical market place, the politicians, political parties, and party agents are the vote buyers while prospective voters are the sellers. The commodity on sale is the vote to be cast while the medium of exchange could be monetary and non-monetary items. The market force that determines the value or price of a vote is the level of desperation of politicians to win in a locality. Although money and other valuables can be used to effectuate vote buying, political actors have adopted two main approaches to buying votes for Election Day.

The first is the *Cash for Vote* approach: It involves giving or promising the prospective voter some agreed amount of money well

before the individual casts his or her vote at the polling station. The payment is done before the actual voting, and could be within the vicinity of the polling station or farther away. The "settlement" is made secretly or in the open. Often, the vote buyers demand evidence of ownership of a voter's card and assurance that the voter will vote for their party before offering the money. In this approach, *trust* is key to the contract. It is also known as the pre-paid method of vote buying.

The second approach is the *Vote-for-Cash*: It involves giving or rewarding the voter with the agreed amount of money or material compensation after the individual has shown evidence that he or she voted for the party. There are several ways the voter can prove to the vote buyer that he or she voted for the agreed candidate. One method is where the voter shrewdly displays the ballot paper that (s) he has thumb printed in favour of a particular party, so that the party agent standing strategically nearby can confirm compliance with the unholy contract as (s) he emerges from the cubicle at the polling station.

Another method is for the voter to photograph the thumb printed ballot paper to show as evidence. Thereafter, compensation in cash and/or kind can occur either immediately or at the close of balloting, and may take place within the precinct of the polling station or at an agreed place. In this approach, *evidence* is key to the consummation of the contract. This approach is also known as the "see and buy" or the post-paid method.

There were widespread allegations of vote buying in the off-cycle general elections in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A. The 2023 general elections in Imo State, observers reported massive vote buying by the two main political parties, the APC and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The parties were accused of giving ₦500, ₦10, 000, ₦2, 000 to ₦3, 000 etc for votes in several polling units. Vote trading often takes place in the presence of security agents who appear unable, unwilling or too compromised to deter such electoral offenses. The impunity of vote-buying is becoming the norm in Nigeria's electoral politics with political parties trying to outwit each other in the amounts paid to voters.

Vote Buying undermines the Integrity of Elections as the Winners are often the Highest Bidders Contestants in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State.

Democracy is a conceptual variable. Its principles represent an ideal type. The degree to which democratic principles exist in Nigeria is far from the ideal. Democratization process in Nigeria manifests undemocratic tendencies. One of the stumbling blocks to Democratic development in Nigeria is lack of credible electoral process which revolves around the funding of election, incumbency factor, thuggery, ballot box snatching, under-aged voting, voting buying etc. In fact,
Vote buying embodies a wide range of events and activities that affect the conduct of election (Elekwa, 2018). The electoral process is, therefore, a complex process that encompasses the good intentions and undesirable outcomes of election administration, particularly in emerging democracies where general elections are often marred by culturally hued electoral malpractices.

Vote buying is another cankerworm that has eaten deep into the electoral system, a lot of people are involved in collecting gratification from the politicians thereby selling their conscience and their votes, it is due to the fact that the economic situation is not stable, there is a lot of people dying of hunger and starvation in our communities, this is common in the past election most people even go to the

extent of thumb printing on ballot papers throughout the night when official voting has not started, this is a cardinal point of rigging an election using the INEC officials to supply voting materials to top politicians in a particular area, hence a resident electoral commissioner of INEC would visit a big name (Politician) in its territory of jurisdiction as a mark of loyalty to pave way for smooth flow of their corrupt tendency perpetuated at the polls.

Vote Buying discourages Conscientious People from Participating in Electoral Politics

Citizens' participation in electoral process is a necessary for democratic sustenance. ´But, the conduct of electoral processes and governance in Nigeria do not inspire confidence. Most are discouraged and kept away by several antidemocratic norms and culture which include electoral fraud, political violence, violation of human rights, corruption, etc.

In politics, **voter apathy** is perceived apathy (lack of caring) among voters in an election. Voter apathy or lack of interest is often cited as a cause of low turnout among eligible voters in jurisdictions where voting is optional and the donkey vote where voting is compulsory. Voter fatigue describes a possible cause of voter apathy: elections that are held too frequently. Political alienation may be confused with voter apathy. Sometimes, alienated voters do care about an election, but feel "estranged or disaffected from the system or somehow left out of the political process.

Empirical Review

Onuoha and Ojo (2022) in examine *Practice and Perils of Vote Buying in Nigeria's Recent Elections*. They adopted a qualitative design in contextually analyzing data collected from secondary sources. They discovered that vote buying is not fundamentally new to Nigeria's electoral politics, nor is it only restricted to Nigeria or Africa. They further condemned the practice of vote buying, describing it as antithetical to the ethos and norms of democracy. Among many others, the study recommended that the INEC and the Economic Financial Crimes Commission should develop a strategic collaborative framework to ensure the effective monitoring of political parties' campaign funds in order to effectively curb electoral fraud, including vote buying. It also recommended that media and civil society organizations should intensify voter education campaigns to heighten public awareness regarding the negative implications of vote trading.

Nkwede & Abah (2019) in their study on *Election and Vote Buying in Nigeria: An Albatross to Democratization Process.* They argued that vote buying in Nigeria has impacted negatively the country's democratic process, as it leads to political apathy, leadership crisis, political violence, poor political culture, and insensitivity to the needs of the people. One noticeable gap between among all previous studies reviewed and the current one is the fact that none of the studies have clearly advocated for the application of political public relations in managing the problem of vote buying, which has undermined democracy and development in Nigeria.

Lucky, (2014) in his research titled *Money Politics and Vote Buying in Nigeria: The Borne of Good Governance*, adopted a qualitative design with data also collected from secondary sources and analyzed contextually. Among other factors, the author found that vote buying is caused by the inability of many political parties and contestants to implement comprehensive and comprehensible manifestoes for scrutiny by voters as well as the political cynicism on the

part of voters, who believe that political office holders are incurably corrupt, self-seeking, and incompetent; that politics is a dirty and dishonorable enterprise; and that the whole process is a fraud and a betrayal of public trust. Over the years, the people's perception that every elected or appointed public officer is amassing wealth from the public treasury was greatly reinforced by the obscene display of opulence by public office holders and the ostentatious lifestyles of many politicians. The study preached against vote buying, disclosing that money politics and vote buying have resulted in elections results having little or nothing to do with the elected politicians' performance in office.

Ugwu, (2023) in her research work on Effect of *Vote Buying on Democracy in Nigeria: A Review*. Money politics and vote-buying has made election results to have little or nothing to do with the performance in office of politicians. Precisely because performance is not a critical factor in electoral outcome, the incentive to perform is very weak. And because vote-buying is very effective in achieving electoral victory, the resort to it is very high. Consequently, elected public office holders who spent huge sums of money to secure victory at the polls would usually have a greater propensity to pursue their private business and financial interest and sometimes those of their corporate sponsors or mentors and financiers, euphemistically referred to in Nigeria as political god-fathers. In this situation, public interest takes the back seat in the calculation, thus degrading the responsibilities of the elected officials to the people. It is for this reason that this paper evaluated the impact of vote buying on good governance in Nigeria.

Another negative impact of money politics and vote-buying on good governance is that the winner in the elections when he occupies a public office that gives him access to public fund becomes more prone to corruption. Hence, the paper called for more transparent and effective screening methods to be developed by the political parties and the electoral body, to ensure the exclusion of politicians with overt or convert tendency to corrupt the electoral process and the electorate.

Onapajo, Francis & Okeke-Uzodike, (2015) in their studies entitled *Oil Corrupts Elections: The Political Economy of Vote Buying in Nigeria*revealed that the incidence of vote buying in Nigeria's contemporary elections is prevalent due to the oil wealth associated with politics and elections in the country. They found that abundant oil wealth intensifies elite competition, which then explains the use of all kinds of strategies-even nefarious ones to win elections, including vote buying. They further revealed that vote buying is facilitated by the fact that the political elite, especially the incumbent, have adequate access to oil wealth and spend it to "buy" elections and hold on power. Voters, on their part, prefer to sell their votes during elections to have a share of the "national cake," mainly due to their perception of the wealth associated with Nigerian politics and overall poor service delivery by politicians after assuming state office. Thus, they recommended ensuring effective service delivery by those occupying leaderships positions as one of the measures to be implemented in tackling vote buying in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Political Economy theory as propounded by Karl Marx in 1859 which is based on dialectical materialism. The theory is concerned with the material condition of society. In the words of Abbass (2008), dialectal materialism is premised on the issue of man's inherent motivations for economic pursuits and needs.

Man, in social relations, oftentimes demonstrates desperate quest and strenuous struggle to wrestle power, control and maintain political power at all cost which lends credence to the suitability of the theory. It has to be emphasized that the political system in any given state corresponds as well as reflects the economic phenomenon and structure in the said state. Also, the political substructure of the system determines how the state organizes and reproduces itself for the desired change. Thus, Marx argued that the main cause of conflict or violence in all known societies is economic issues. There is therefore a significant relationship between the symbiotic relations existing between people in the production process and the nature of the political struggle to win political positions so as to determine the allocation of resources in the economy.

Abbass (2008) maintained that the political economy theory to the study of electoral violence in Nigeria is most appropriate in capturing the salient issues bequeathed to us as a country by imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism through forceful integration of Nigerian economy into the mainstream of global circuit of production. He argued that the above phenomenon has among other things snowballed into the structural underdevelopment and dependency of the country and the setting up of institutions that are at variance with our value systems.

The application of the theory lies in the fact that the fierce struggle or violence to secure political power in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State, Nigeria is hinged on the fact that such power is a sure means for the allocation of national wealth. The Political Economy theory is more suitable to this study premised on the fact that it best explains the reason why politicians resort to violence so as gain to political power which in turn enable them control and allocate the resources of the state. Hence, the struggle for power is predetermined by the economic interest of the politicians.

METHODOLOGY

The design used in this study is survey design. The reason for using survey design is that, it provide a platform to identify the technical requirement of this study. Also it is only a segment of a population that will be considered since it will be a representative of the entire population. Data was collected using questionnaire, the instrument will be validated by communication experts and findings of the study will be based on the evidence provided by the result of the text of hypothesis. In this work also, sample survey was used since this work needed data from a segment of a population that is, those aged 18 years and above. The area of study is Ezinihitte Mbaise local government area is in Imo state, Southeast Nigeria, with her headquarters in Itu autonomous community, with estimated population of 234,600 inhabitants (NBS. 2022). The targeted population of the study according to the sample size is 399 respondents

Determination of Sample Size

The population size for this study is 234,600 respondents. Since the population of this study is too large and might be difficult to manage, the researcher determined the sample size of the study using Taro Yameni formular. The formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where,

n = Sample size
N = Total population
$(e)^2$ = Estimated error margin given as $(0.05)^2$
I = Constant

Substituting figures in the formular above the researcher had,

$$n = \frac{234{,}600}{1+ 234{,}600\ (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{234{,}600}{1+234{,}600\ (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{234{,}600}{1+586.5}$$

$$n = \frac{234{,}600}{587.5}$$

$$n = \frac{234{,}600}{588}$$

$$n = 398.975$$

$$n = 399 \text{ approximately}$$

Hence, the sample size of the research is 399.

The researcher used simple random sampling technique to select the respondents from the study area. The simple random sampling technique gives the respondents equal chance of being selected. The respondents were selected based on availability since it is difficult to study the entire population of the study and the respondents to be studied are enough to make generalization about the study populations. The researcher used frequency tables and simple percentage. Chi-square was used to test the hypothesis. The data collected for this study was analyzed using;

$$X^2 = \sum\left\{\frac{(fo-fe)^2}{Fe}\right\}$$

Fo = Observed frequency

Fe = Expected frequency

Where,

X^2 = Chi- square

$\sum$ = Summation sign

DATA PRESENTATION, RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This part is devoted to presentation of data collated from questionnaire administered to respondents in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State. The researcher used frequency tables, simple percentage and chi-square statistical tools in analyzing the data collected from the respondents through the use of questionnaire.

Table 1: Procedure for Questionnaire Administration

Designation Questionnaire	Number	Percentage
Questionnaire distributed	399	100
Questionnaire returned	350	87.7
Questionnaire not found	49	12.3

The table above shows that 87.7% of questionnaire representing 350 copies of questionnaire were returned while 12.3% of questionnaire representing 49 copies of questionnaire were not returned. This is out of the 399 copies of questionnaire that were distributed.

Table 2:Distribution of Respondents Based on sex

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Male	200	57.1
Female	150	42.9
Total	**350**	**100**

The table above shows that 42.9% of the respondents are female while 57.1% of the respondents are male. This shows that majority of the respondents are female.

Testing of Hypothesis

Hypothesis I

H_0: Vote buying does not unduly raise the cost of governance in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State.

Testing of Hypothesis I using table 3: Vote buying unduly raises the cost of governance, thereby shutting out contestants with little finances and promoting political corruption?

Table 3: Testing of Hypothesis using Table (I)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	160	45.7
Agree	80	22.9
Strongly disagree	20	5.7
Disagree	50	14.3

Undecided	40	11.4
Total	**350**	**100**

The table of expected frequency is given below:

Table 4: Expected Frequency (I)

O	**E**	**(O-E)**	**$(O-E)^2$**	**$(O-E)^2/E$**
160	70	-90	-8100	-115.7
80	70	10	100	1.43
20	70	-50	-2500	-35.7
50	70	-20	-100	-20
40	70	-30	-900	-30
Total	**350**			**Σ=117.14**

X^2C= 117.14
= (c-1)(r-1) = (5-1)(5-1) = 4 x 4 = 16 at 0.05 levels of significances = 61.9
X^2C= 117.14, X^2= 61.9

Decision Rule: Accept Ho, if $X^2C > X^2$
Since $X^2C > X^2$, the researcher accepted H_1 and rejected H_0 and concluded that vote buying unduly raises the cost of governance**.**This implies that vote buying unduly raises the cost of governance in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State.

Hypothesis II

H_0: Vote buying does not undermine the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidder contestants in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State.

Testing of Hypothesis II using table 5: The role of money in politics and vote buying has paved way for political bourgeois to dominate and occupy key elective positions in the country?

Table 5: Testing of Hypothesis using Table (II)

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly agree	220	62.9
Agree	80	22.9
Undecided	30	8.6
Disagree	10	2.9
Strongly disagree	10	2.9
Total	**350**	**100**

The table of expected frequency is given as:

Table 6: Expected frequency (II)

O	E	(O-E)	$(O-E)^2$	$(O-E)^2/E$
220	70	150	2250	321.42
80	70	10	100	1.43
30	70	-40	-1600	-22.9
10	70	-50	-2500	-35.7
10	70	-70	-4900	-70
Total	**350**			**Σ=322.85**

X^2C= 322.85

= (c-1)(r-1) = (5-1)(5-1) = 4 x 4 = 16 at 0.05 levels of significance = 61.9
X^2C= 322.85, X^2= 61.9

Decision Rule: Accept Ho, if $X^2C > X^2$
Since $X^2C > X^2$, the researcher accepted H_1 and rejected H_0 and concluded that vote buying undermines the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidders contestants in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State.

Hypothesis III

H_0: Vote buying does not discourage conscientious people from participating in electoral politics.

Testing of Hypothesis III using Table 7: Do you agree that vote buying discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics

Table 7: Testing of Hypothesis using Table (III)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	160	45.7
Agree	80	22.9
Undecided	40	11.4
Disagree	50	14.3
Strongly disagree	20	5.7
Total	**350**	**100**

The table of expected frequency is given as:

Table 8: Expected frequency (III)

O	E	(O-E)	$(O-E)^2$	$(O-E)^2/E$
160	70	-90	-8100	-115.7

80	70	10	100	1.43
40	70	-30	-900	-30
50	70	-20	-100	-20
20	70	-50	-2500	-35.7
Total	**350**			**Σ=117.14**

X^2C= 23.1

= (c-1)(r-1) = (5-1)(5-1) = 4 x 4 = 16 at 0.05 levels of significances = 61.9
X^2C= 211.4, X^2= 61.9

Decision Rule: Accept Ho, if $X^2C > X^2$
Since $X^2C > X^2$, the researcher accepted H_1 and rejected H_0 and then concluded that, vote buying discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics.

Discussion of Findings
At the end of the research the following findings were arrived at:

Vote buying unduly raises the cost of governance in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State.This was proved by the fact that the calculated chi-square value for hypothesis I is 117.14 which is greater than the critical value which is 61.9. Also in table 4.1.9, up to 80% of the respondents strongly agreed that vote buying discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics and causes citizens to lose faith in institution. This is why Davies, (2006) opined that the problem with this situation is that the electoral process is often compromised resulting in elections not being free and fair.

Vote buying undermines the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidders contestants in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State, Nigeria. This was justified by the fact that, the calculated chi-square value for hypothesis II is 322.9, which is greater than the critical value which is 61.9. Also in table 4.1.13, 80% of the respondents agreed that in Nigeria electoral system money now plays the increasingly critical role to the extent that the word "money politics" with a pejorative conation has crept into the country's political lexicon.Also in line with the assertion Uganden (2010) argued that "the electoral process in Nigeria, characterized by vote buying, vote rigging and outright violence, remains incapable of producing a leadership imbued with the spirit of public accountability".

Vote buying discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics. This was also proved by the fact that the calculated chi-square value for hypothesis III is 117.14 which is greater than the critical value which is 61.9. In table 4.1.16, 83% of the respondents agreed that results of election worn as a result of vote buying should be nullified. That is why Gbadamosi, (2019) said it often leads to protests and blames trading among parties and candidates after elections thereby discrediting the process. Therefore, discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics and causes citizens to lose faith in state institutions.

Summary of Findings
The study investigated "Menace of vote buying and governance in Nigeria general elections: A study of 2023 general elections in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State.The

researcher investigated the background to the study of the menace of vote buying elections in Nigeria, statement of the problem, research questions, hypothesis, and objectives of the Study. Generally, this study seeks to know whether vote buying unduly raises the cost of governance thereby promoting political corruption in Imo State, to determine whether vote buying undermines the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidders contestants in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State, Nigeria and to verify whether vote buying discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics.

The researcher reviewed conceptual framework, empirical literature, review of related theories, theoretical framework, summary of review and gap in knowledge. The researcher adopted survey research design. The sample size is 399 and questionnaires were generated and distributed to the respondents, while primary and secondary sources of data collection were employed as the sources of data. And the researcher used simple random sampling technique to select the respondents from the study area. The simple random sampling technique gives the respondents equal chance of being selected.

However, the researcher after thorough investigation and from data presented above found out that; Vote buying unduly raises the cost of governance in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State, Vote buying undermines the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidders contestants in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State, Nigeria and vote buying discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics.

CONCLUSION

The importance of money to run elections in terms of campaign, printing of party manifestoes, emblems and other services is well recognized, but the excessive use of money with the objective of purchasing votes is counterproductive to good governance. This is because once excessive use of money is employed to influence the outcome of elections; the election becomes synonymous with the gentle art of 'getting votes from the poor and campaign funds from the rich by promising to protect one from the other (Sohner, 1973).

Vote buying has gradually gained roots in the Nigeria electoral system. The poor have often being the target of political parties during vote buying. This has made vote buying more effective with the poor. Often, the effectiveness of vote buying with poor voters is interpreted as a reflection of the fact that small material goods have a greater marginal utility to poor voters.

Major items used in buying votes range from money, silver pans (basins), cloths, gas cylinders, laptops, money, outboard motors, wellington boots to party branded paraphernalia and cooking items. Party branded items tops the range of items used as incentives during vote buying followed by money. In most cases conditions are not attached to the incentives except where the person giving the incentive suspects that the receiver is not going to vote for him/her or the party. Voters are not willing to reject the items (incentives) even if conditions are attached to them.

One of the major implications of vote buying is that it can trigger corruption by politicians after they are voted into power, vote buying discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral politics and causes citizens to lose faith in state institutions. This is because they would want to get return on

money invested during election campaigns. This can lead to the abuse of state resources. Based on the findings in the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Electoral laws should be strengthened to give it solid backings so as to gain its efficiency in order to deal with electoral offenders appropriately.
2. Mass media should consistently campaign against vote buying in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State, Nigeria until the menace is curbed.
3. Civil society, organizations, activist, political analyst, societal elites, chiefs and elder statesmen should as a matter of urgency, answer their clarion call by organizing workshops, campaigns, or symposium to educate the public on the dangers of vote buying and vote selling during elections.
4. Certainly vote-buying does not happen unless some INEC officials and security agents give consent or compromised the process. INEC should arrest those involved to cushion this conundrum.
5. Voters should report any form of inducements to the appropriate agencies or authorities to ensure that they are punished, if they do so, it will go a long way to stem the plague.
6. INEC have at one time or the other stated that, they have no power to investigate and arrest violators of electoral offenders. This statement does not mean well to tackle the issue of vote buying. Therefore, government should assign the appropriate agency that prosecutes electoral offenders to work closely with INEC to ensure that whoever faulted the law will not go unpunished.

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