

## VOTE-BUYING AND VOTERS TURN-OUT IN THE 2023 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS IN ZARIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KADUNA STATE

**Gali Abdullahi,**

Department of Political Science,  
Federal University of Education, Zaria  
[galiabdullahi83@gmail.com](mailto:galiabdullahi83@gmail.com)  
07030476048

&

**Ibrahim Magaji**

Department of Political Science,  
Federal University of Education, Zaria.  
[ibrahimmagaji80@gmail.com](mailto:ibrahimmagaji80@gmail.com)  
08032096596

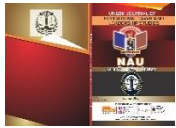
### ABSTRACT

*Nigeria's Fourth Republic, inaugurated in 1999, continues to face serious challenges from the persistent practice of vote buying, which reduces electoral participation from a civic responsibility to a market-driven transaction, thereby undermining electoral credibility and democratic accountability. This study investigates the relationship between vote buying and voter turnout in the 2023 gubernatorial election in Zaria Local Government Area of Kaduna State, adopting Rational Choice Theory to conceptualize voters as rational actors who respond to material incentives in their decision-making. Using a multi-stage sampling technique, data were obtained from 379 accredited voters drawn from eight wards through structured Likert-scale questionnaires. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools and the Improved Confrontation Index, with a benchmark mean of 3.00, via SPSS software. The findings indicate a high prevalence of vote buying, manifested mainly through the distribution of cash and material goods in close proximity to polling units. Although vote buying may stimulate short-term voter mobilization, its long-term consequences include increased political cynicism and declining trust in democratic institutions. The study concludes that the persistence of vote buying, driven largely by poverty and weak enforcement of electoral laws, artificially inflates voter turnout while eroding meaningful political participation. Consequently, the study recommends strengthened enforcement mechanisms, comprehensive poverty-reduction strategies, intensified civic education, and electoral reforms that emphasize the quality rather than the quantity of votes to enhance democratic consolidation in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Vote buying, Voter turnout, Free and Fair Election, electoral integrity and Democracy

### Introduction

Nigeria's transition to democratic governance in 1999, marking the beginning of the Fourth Republic, represented a decisive shift from prolonged military rule to civilian administration and generated renewed hopes for popular participation and accountable leadership. Since this transition, successive general elections have reaffirmed voting as the principal avenue through



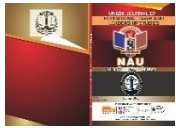
which citizens exercise political choice and bestow legitimacy on elected representatives. Despite this, the process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria has been consistently weakened by the pervasive role of money in politics, particularly through the practice of vote buying.

Empirical evidence from recent elections underscores the entrenchment of this phenomenon. During the 2016 Edo State governorship election, for example, agents of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) reportedly distributed between ₦3,000 and ₦4,000 per vote at polling units. Similar practices were observed in Ondo State, where voters allegedly received between ₦3,000 and ₦5,000 (ACCORD, accessed 1/1/2026). Likewise, the 2018 Ekiti State governorship election witnessed widespread vote inducement, with both major parties offering between ₦3,000 and ₦5,000 to voters, including a widely reported incident of a retiree who rejected ₦5,000 offered by an APC agent. Beyond general elections, vote buying has also featured prominently in party primaries. For instance, delegates during the APC and PDP primaries ahead of the 2023 elections were reportedly induced with amounts ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000, with estimates suggesting that over 8,000 delegates could cost rival camps between \$16 million and \$24 million in earlier electoral cycles such as 2015 (ACCORD, accessed 1/1/2026).

While financial resources are indispensable to democratic competition—enabling political parties and candidates to organize, mobilize supporters, and conduct campaigns—the Nigerian experience reveals a troubling distortion of this role. As argued by Nwagwu, Uwaechia, Udegbumam, and Nnamani (2022), the excessive and poorly regulated use of money has increasingly transformed political engagement from issue-based contestation to material inducement. Consequently, vote buying has become deeply embedded in Nigeria's electoral process, despite its explicit criminalization under the Electoral Act (2010, as amended). Although vote buying is not unique to Nigeria and exists in various political systems, its scale, visibility, and normalization within the Nigerian context, as observed by Schaffer and Schedler (2007) and Ovwassa (2013), pose grave threats to electoral credibility and democratic accountability.

Historically, vote buying in Nigeria became more pronounced during the Second Republic and intensified significantly throughout the Fourth Republic elections since 1999 (Nwagwu et al., 2022). Recent electoral cycles, according to Olawoyin, Ikedinma, Mudau, and Aboderin (2023), have witnessed increasingly sophisticated and widespread inducement strategies, including direct cash payments, distribution of food items, provision of transportation, and the use of branded campaign materials. These trends, as noted by Bratton (2008) and Nichter (2014), raise fundamental concerns about whether electoral outcomes genuinely reflect voters' preferences or merely transactional exchanges driven by short-term material benefits.

Although some scholars of Nigerian politics argue that vote buying may temporarily stimulate political participation and increase voter turnout, such participation comes at a significant cost. Specifically, it undermines electoral integrity and weakens accountability mechanisms, thereby creating uncertainty regarding the quality and authenticity of political participation. Supporting this argument, Schedler (2002) contends that participation motivated by material inducement



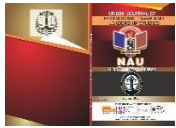
challenges the normative assumption that voting is an expression of civic responsibility and informed choice. In this sense, the prevalence of vote buying within Nigeria's electoral cycle constitutes a serious threat to voter turnout as a meaningful indicator of democratic health.

It is against this backdrop that this study examines the relationship between vote buying and voter turnout in the conduct of 2023 Kaduna State gubernatorial election with particular reference to Zaria Local Government Area. The area's socio-economic conditions and highly competitive political environment of Zaria Local Government Area provide a compelling context for exploring this contradiction, making it a suitable setting for analyzing how vote buying influences voter behaviour and turnout. Accordingly, the study seeks to address the following questions: What is the extent and nature of vote buying in Zaria Local Government Area?; To what degree did vote buying affect voter turnout in the 2023 gubernatorial election in Zaria Local Government Area?; What socio-economic factors influence vote buying and vote selling among voters in Zaria Local Government Area? What measures can be adopted to reduce vote buying and enhance electoral integrity in Nigeria? These questions guide the analysis in subsequent sections of the paper and collectively constitute its core objectives.

### **Literature Review**

Vote buying is a form of electoral manipulation in which political candidates, parties, or their agents provide material or non-material incentives to voters in exchange for electoral support. These inducements include cash, food items, clothing, transportation, social services, and promises of future benefits such as employment or political patronage. By transforming voting from a civic obligation into a transactional exchange, vote buying usher in political participation and undermines democratic norms (Oladapo, Oyewale, and Abayomi, 2020).

In Nigeria, vote buying has become an entrenched in electoral practice, facilitated by intense political competition, weak party institutionalization, and widespread socio-economic inequality. These conditions as opined by Adeleke, Lawal, and Akinyemi (2024) foster clientelism, where political loyalty is exchanged for immediate material benefits rather than ideological alignment or policy evaluation. Unlike coercion or intimidation, vote buying operates through voluntary exchanges driven by perceived personal gain, making it analytically compatible with rational choice theory, which assumes voters act as utility maximizers (Mohammed, Ibrahim & Abdullahi; 2025). Within this framework, material inducements increase the expected benefits of voting, thereby encouraging participation. Relatedly, turnout buying (where voters are incentivized simply to participate regardless of candidate choice) has also been documented in Nigeria's recent elections (Musa, Ibrahim, and Yahaya, 2024). For instance, In Edo and Ondo states' 2024 governorship races, parties like APC and PDP distributed N3,000 - N5,000 per voter at polling units to boost turnout, often via cash handouts regardless of vote direction. Observers documented polling stations turning into "marketplaces," with higher payments (up to N20, 000) in competitive areas amid economic hardship (<https://www.accord.org> accessed on 1/1/2026). Also, Kano by-election (2025) saw open cash inducements facilitated by agents, focusing on getting voters to show up. Ekiti 2018 had APC and PDP paying N3, 000 - N5, 000 post-voting proof, extending to turnout boosts (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/reflections-nigerias>, accessed on 1/1/2026)



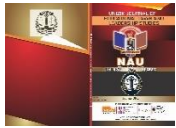
Voter turnout, defined as the proportion of eligible voters who cast ballots in an election, is a key indicator of democratic participation and electoral legitimacy (Obi, Herbert, and Uwaechia, 2025). In Nigeria, turnout is shaped by socio-economic factors such as income, education, access to information, and political interest, as well as contextual variables including election security, administrative efficiency, and perceived electoral competitiveness. When elections are viewed as credible and competitive, turnout tends to increase, conversely, perceptions of manipulation and clientelism can generate apathy and disengagement (Chibuzo, 2025).

Empirical evidence on the relationship between vote buying and voter turnout presents mixed but convergent findings. Several studies suggest that vote buying can stimulate turnout, particularly among economically disadvantaged voters. Adeleke, Lawal, and Akinyemi (2024), in a multistate study of Nigeria's 2023 elections, found that institutionalized inducement strategies were associated with increased voter turnout in competitive contexts. Similarly, Bratton et al.'s (2023) cross-national analysis of 34 African countries revealed a positive association between exposure to electoral clientelism and individual turnout, especially among lower-income groups. Subnational studies from Kebbi and Delta States further indicate that cash, goods, and transportation incentives influenced voters' decisions to participate, underscoring the mobilizing effect of material inducements (Ilaya et al., 2023).

However, other scholars emphasize the long-term democratic costs of vote buying. Ezeabasili (2025) argues that pervasive transactional politics erode trust in electoral integrity, contributing to voter apathy, particularly among educated and first-time voters. While inducements may boost turnout in the short term, their persistence undermines confidence in democratic institutions and weakens voluntary civic engagement over time. Evidence from Nigeria's 2023 elections, including observations from Zaria Local Government Area, suggests that both dynamics coexisted: inducement-driven turnout occurred alongside widespread cynicism on political integrity (Chibuzo, 2025).

Recent studies further show that vote-buying remains common in Nigeria's elections, often affecting how many people vote. For instance, the National Bureau of Statistics found vote-buying rose to 22% in the 2023 elections from 17% in 2019, with a big jump to 44% in the North-West region, including Kaduna State where Zaria is located. Study conducted by Adeleke (2024) across four states, using qualitative interviews and focus groups, identified new dimensions of inducement activities such as funding funerals or cooperatives and payments to party executives, which boosted turnout by institutionalizing vote-buying among ruling parties.

Similarly, studies like those in the Pan African Journal of Governance and Development confirm vote-buying's positive correlation with turnout in general elections but note limited impact on final voting decisions, as some recipients voted independently. Furthermore, Okeke (2021) conducted a quantitative analysis of INEC voter turnout data alongside electoral observer reports and found a statistically significant relationship between reported cases of vote buying and voter turnout. His regression analysis showed that LGAs with confirmed vote buying incidents had, on average, 5 -



8% higher voter turnout than those without. However, this turnout was not predictive of political engagement in subsequent elections, indicating the transactional and unsustainable nature of such participation.

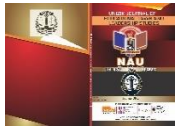
Overall, the literature reveals a paradoxical relationship between vote buying and voter turnout. Vote buying may enhance short-term participation by increasing the perceived benefits of voting, yet it simultaneously diminishes the quality of participation and long-term democratic trust. This tension provides the analytical basis for examining vote buying as both a mobilizing mechanism and a threat to sustainable democratic participation in Nigeria.

It can be deduced that, although a number of scholars have analyzed extensively on the complex correlation that exist between vote-buying and voter turnout focusing on national trends or several states, using surveys or interviews, but yet they lack detailed studies on single local government area. Thus, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there is no documented academic research that has attempted to examine the complex correlation between vote-buying and voter turnout with particular reference to 2023 Gubernatorial Election in Zaria Local Government Area of Kaduna State. Even where the studies have been conducted, they are mostly on pages of newspapers and social media platforms which cannot be considered in an academic environment Therefore, this study fills that huge academic gap, exploring specific local patterns not seen in wider reports. This therefore constituted our point of departure from the existing literatures and at the same time contribution to body of knowledge.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to provide a rational basis for explaining and interpreting the results of this research work, and also to appraise the main argument of the research work, the Downs' Rational Choice Theory of voting was employed. The theory provides a powerful theoretical lens for examining electoral behaviour, particularly in contexts where material incentives influence voter decisions. Downs (1957) posits that voters behave as rational actors who compare the expected benefits and costs of political participation before making a choice. In this model, individual voters are assumed to act to maximize utility, treating political decisions like economic ones by weighing personal gains from election outcomes against the costs of voting itself. The rational choice perspective conceptualizes voting as a calculated decision where voters choose to turn out only when expected benefits outweigh participation costs. In other words, Downs' (1957) Rational Choice Theory emphasized on the profitability or unprofitability of voting that may result in political participation in the political and electoral system.

Building on Downs' work, scholars such as Riker and Ordeshook (1968) formalized what has become known as the calculus of voting, expressed in the equation ( $R = pB - C + D$ ). Here,  $R$  represents the net rational reward from voting;  $p$  is the probability that an individual's vote will be decisive;  $B$  is the personal benefit derived from the preferred candidate winning;  $C$  is the cost of voting; and  $D$  captures expressive or civic benefits such as fulfilling a sense of civic duty. This expanded formulation addresses the so-called paradox of voting, where the probability of a vote affecting an election outcome is extremely small, yet individuals still participate.



Applying Downs' theory to the 2023 gubernatorial election in Zaria Local Government, one can interpret vote buying as a rational response to the political and socioeconomic environment. In a setting where state capacity is weak and governance dividends are uncertain, voters may rationally trade their votes for immediate, tangible benefits—such as cash, food, or material goods. Put it differently, in contexts of economic hardship, the relative attractiveness of vote buying as an utility-enhancing strategy grows stronger, particularly among poorer voters who are disproportionately targeted due to their higher marginal utility of cash or goods (Bratton et al, 2013).

From a rational choice perspective as pointed out by Shehu, Arabi and Abdulrahman (2025) that accepting inducements increases the perceived utility of voting, especially for economically marginalized populations. In this way, vote buying can artificially inflate voter turnout, not because of democratic enthusiasm, but because of transactional logic. This means that from the rational choice perspective, these inducements function to rise the *B* term in the calculus of voting the immediate material benefit of voting for a candidate to become more salient compared to intrinsic political preferences alone, thereby increasing the overall expected utility of turning out (Blais, Young and Lapp, 2000).

## **Methodology**

### **Study Area and Population**

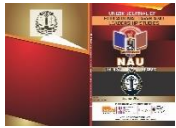
The study was conducted in Zaria Local Government Area (LGA) of Kaduna State, Nigeria, a politically competitive area with a history of intense electoral activities. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Zaria LGA recorded 326,068 registered voters during the 2023 Kaduna State gubernatorial election, out of which 136,493 voters were duly accredited and participated in the election. These accredited voters constituted the study population, as they were directly exposed to electoral processes and practices during the election.

### **Sampling Design and Procedure**

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to ensure representativeness while addressing logistical constraints associated with the large population size. In the first stage, cluster sampling was used to divide the study area into its two state constituencies: Zaria Birni (Zaria City) and Zaria Kewaye (Zaria Environ). In the second stage, each constituency was further stratified into political wards. Zaria Birni comprises six wards with a total of 67,767 accredited voters, while Zaria Kewaye consists of seven wards with 68,726 accredited voters (INEC, 2023). In the third stage, simple random sampling was employed to select four wards from each constituency. From Zaria Birni, Kaura, Kwarbai A, Kwarbai B, and Limancin-Kona wards were selected, while Dutsan-Abba, Gyellesu, Tukur-Tukur, and Tudun-Wada wards were selected from Zaria Kewaye. The total number of accredited voters in the selected wards was 88,283.

### **Sample Size Determination**

The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table, which recommends 384 respondents for large populations. Accordingly, 384 questionnaires were



administered using proportional allocation, ensuring that each ward was represented according to its share of the accredited voter population.

The proportional allocation formula applied was:

$$\text{Ward Sample Population} = \frac{\text{No. of Ward Accredited Voters}}{\text{Pop. of the Accredited Voter in the selected wards}} \times \frac{\text{Desired Sample Size}}{1}$$

Out of the administered questionnaires, 377 were correctly completed and retrieved, representing a 98.2% response rate, and were subsequently used for analysis.

### **Data Collection Instrument and Procedure**

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from *Strongly Agree (5)* to *Strongly Disagree (1)*. The instrument measured respondents' perceptions of vote buying, forms of inducement, voter turnout behavior, and perceived effects on electoral integrity. A systematic sampling technique was employed during field administration, with the INEC accredited voters' register serving as the sampling frame. Sampling intervals were calculated for each ward, and the first respondent was selected randomly, followed by subsequent selections at fixed intervals.

Secondary data were sourced from academic journals, textbooks, official reports, and credible online publications relevant to elections and democratic governance in Nigeria.

### **Validity of the Instrument**

To ensure content and face validity, the questionnaire items were developed based on extensive literature on vote buying, voter turnout, and electoral behavior. Draft copies of the instrument were reviewed by experts in political science and electoral studies, whose suggestions informed revisions to item clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives.

Additionally, the questionnaire items were carefully mapped to the research questions to ensure construct validity, particularly in measuring vote buying practices, inducement mechanisms, and voter participation behavior.

### **Reliability of the Instrument**

A pilot study was conducted among voters in a neighboring local government area outside the study location to test the reliability of the instrument. The responses were subjected to a Cronbach's Alpha reliability test using SPSS. The results produced a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating a high level of internal consistency and reliability of the instrument, as values above 0.70 are generally considered acceptable for social science research.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondents' perceptions. Inferential analysis was guided by an Improved Confrontation Index, with a benchmark mean value of 3.00, as proposed by Onwunali et al. (2023) and cited by Kaduna, Yusuf, and Yusuf (2024). Mean values equal to or above the benchmark



were considered indicative of agreement, while values below the benchmark indicated disagreement. The index is given thus:

$$VBVT\ CI = [VBVT_{SA} \times 5] + [VBVT_A \times 4] + [VBVT_U \times 3] + [VBVT_D \times 2] + [VBVT_{SD} \times 1]$$

Where:

VBVT ICI = Vote Buying and Voter Turnout confrontational index

VBVT<sub>SA</sub> = Strongly Agree

VBVT<sub>A</sub> = Agree

VBVT<sub>U</sub> = Undecided

VBVT<sub>D</sub> = Disagree

VBVT<sub>SD</sub> = Strongly Disagree

The bench mark will therefore be:  $\frac{5+4+3+2+1}{5 \text{ (points in likert scale)}} = \frac{15}{5} = 3.0$

From the above value, the bench mark of 3.0 was used to determine acceptance of the mean value.

### Data Presentation

A total of 384 questionnaires were administered to respondents, out of which 379 were duly completed and retrieved, representing a 98.7% response rate. Consequently, all analyses were based on the 379 valid questionnaires returned.

| S/N | Statements                                                                  | 5              | 4              | 3             | 2            | 1            | ( $\bar{x}$ ) | SD   | Decision |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|------|----------|
| 1   | Are voters aware of the practice of vote buying?                            | 198<br>(52.2%) | 121<br>(31.9%) | 32<br>(8.4%)  | 16<br>(4.2%) | 12<br>(3.2%) | 4.30          | 0.72 | Accepted |
| 2   | Was vote buying widespread during the 2023 elections?                       | 186<br>(49.1%) | 129<br>(34.0%) | 38<br>(10.0%) | 15<br>(4.0%) | 11<br>(2.9%) | 4.18          | 0.79 | Accepted |
| 3   | Did political parties distribute money to voters during elections?          | 201<br>(53.0%) | 112<br>(29.6%) | 31<br>(8.2%)  | 20<br>(5.3%) | 15<br>(4.0%) | 4.22          | 0.75 | Accepted |
| 4   | Were material items (cash, food, gifts) used to influence voters?           | 176<br>(46.4%) | 134<br>(35.4%) | 42<br>(11.1%) | 16<br>(4.2%) | 11<br>(2.9%) | 4.09          | 0.81 | Accepted |
| 5   | Did vote buying occur close to polling stations?                            | 169<br>(44.6%) | 138<br>(36.4%) | 44<br>(11.6%) | 18<br>(4.7%) | 10<br>(2.6%) | 4.05          | 0.83 | Accepted |
| 6   | Were voters' decisions to participate influenced by inducements?            | 154<br>(40.6%) | 141<br>(37.2%) | 49<br>(12.9%) | 21<br>(5.5%) | 14<br>(3.7%) | 3.95          | 0.88 | Accepted |
| 7   | Did vote buying increase overall voter turnout?                             | 149<br>(39.3%) | 139<br>(36.7%) | 51<br>(13.5%) | 24<br>(6.3%) | 16<br>(4.2%) | 3.88          | 0.91 | Accepted |
| 8   | Would turnout have been lower if vote buying did not occur?                 | 137<br>(36.1%) | 142<br>(37.5%) | 56<br>(14.8%) | 26<br>(6.9%) | 18<br>(4.7%) | 3.76          | 0.94 | Accepted |
| 9   | Did voters' economic situation influence their acceptance of inducements?   | 203<br>(53.6%) | 118<br>(31.1%) | 31<br>(8.2%)  | 16<br>(4.2%) | 11<br>(2.9%) | 4.22          | 0.70 | Accepted |
| 10  | Did receiving inducements influence voters' choice of candidate?            | 158<br>(41.7%) | 136<br>(35.9%) | 49<br>(12.9%) | 21<br>(5.5%) | 15<br>(4.0%) | 3.91          | 0.89 | Accepted |
| 11  | Did some voters vote against their personal preferences due to inducements? | 121<br>(31.9%) | 139<br>(36.7%) | 62<br>(16.4%) | 34<br>(9.0%) | 23<br>(6.1%) | 3.62          | 0.96 | Accepted |



| S/N | Statements                                                                | 5           | 4           | 3          | 2         | 1         | ( $\bar{x}$ ) | SD   | Decision |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|------|----------|
| 12  | Did vote buying reduce voters' consideration of policies in their choice? | 145 (38.3%) | 138 (36.4%) | 56 (14.8%) | 25 (6.6%) | 15 (4.0%) | 3.85          | 0.90 | Accepted |
| 13  | Did vote buying undermine voters' freedom to choose?                      | 172 (45.4%) | 135 (35.6%) | 41 (10.8%) | 19 (5.0%) | 12 (3.2%) | 4.07          | 0.78 | Accepted |
| 14  | Did vote buying negatively affect the credibility of elections?           | 194 (51.2%) | 122 (32.2%) | 35 (9.2%)  | 16 (4.2%) | 12 (3.2%) | 4.20          | 0.73 | Accepted |
| 15  | Does vote buying weaken democratic elections?                             | 189 (49.9%) | 125 (33.0%) | 38 (10.0%) | 15 (4.0%) | 12 (3.2%) | 4.18          | 0.76 | Accepted |
| 16  | Were electoral authorities ineffective in preventing vote buying?         | 156 (41.2%) | 141 (37.2%) | 48 (12.7%) | 21 (5.5%) | 13 (3.4%) | 3.90          | 0.85 | Accepted |
| 17  | Is vote buying perceived as a normal part of elections?                   | 134 (35.4%) | 145 (38.3%) | 58 (15.3%) | 26 (6.9%) | 16 (4.2%) | 3.70          | 0.93 | Accepted |
| 18  | Would reducing vote buying improve the quality of elections?              | 214 (56.5%) | 113 (29.8%) | 28 (7.4%)  | 14 (3.7%) | 10 (2.6%) | 4.35          | 0.65 | Accepted |

*Strongly Agree* = 5; *Agree* = 4; *Undecided*=3; *Disagree* = 2; *Strongly Disagree* = 1;  $\bar{X}$  = Mean;

*SD* = Standard deviation; CI: 
$$\frac{5+4+3+2+1}{5 \text{ (points in likert scale)}} = \frac{15}{5} = 3$$

## Data Analysis and Discussion of Finding

### Data Analysis

#### Prevalence and Forms of Vote Buying

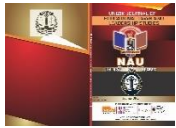
The study found that vote buying was highly prevalent during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Zaria LGA. Respondents indicated strong awareness of vote buying (Question 1:  $\bar{x}$  = 4.30, SD = 0.72), with 84.1% either strongly agreeing or agreeing. Other indicators of prevalence include perceptions of widespread vote buying (Question 2:  $\bar{x}$  = 4.18, SD = 0.79), distribution of money by parties (Question 3:  $\bar{x}$  = 4.22, SD = 0.75), and the use of material inducements (Question 4:  $\bar{x}$  = 4.09, SD = 0.81). Additionally, 44.6% strongly agreed and 36.4% agreed that inducements occurred near polling units (Question 5:  $\bar{x}$  = 4.05, SD = 0.83).

#### Impact of Vote Buying on Voter Turnout

Vote buying was reported to have a mobilizing effect. Responses indicate that participation was motivated by inducements (Question 6:  $\bar{x}$  = 3.95, SD = 0.88), and that vote buying increased turnout (Question 7:  $\bar{x}$  = 3.88, SD = 0.91). Furthermore, 73.6% of respondents agreed that turnout would have been lower without vote buying (Question 8:  $\bar{x}$  = 3.76, SD = 0.94).

#### Socio-Economic Drivers

Economic hardship was identified as a major driver of vote selling (Question 9:  $\bar{x}$  = 4.22, SD = 0.70), with 84.7% agreement among respondents. Other socio-economic indicators were not separately measured but were implied through respondents' perception of inducement-based voting behaviour.



### **Effects on Voter Choice and Democratic Quality**

Vote buying distorted voter choice and the quality of democracy. Inducements influenced vote choice (Question 10:  $\bar{x}$  = 3.91, SD = 0.89), with 68.6% acknowledging voting against personal preference (Question 11:  $\bar{x}$  = 3.62, SD = 0.96). Consideration of policy was reduced (Question 12:  $\bar{x}$  = 3.85, SD = 0.90), freedom of choice was undermined (Question 13:  $\bar{x}$  = 4.07, SD = 0.78), electoral credibility suffered (Question 14:  $\bar{x}$  = 4.20, SD = 0.73), and democratic elections were perceived as weakened (Question 15:  $\bar{x}$  = 4.18, SD = 0.76).

### **Institutional Weakness and Normalization**

Respondents highlighted electoral authorities' ineffectiveness (Question 16:  $\bar{x}$  = 3.90, SD = 0.85) and the normalization of vote buying (Question 17:  $\bar{x}$  = 3.70, SD = 0.93) as contributing factors. Support for reducing vote buying was nearly unanimous (Question 18:  $\bar{x}$  = 4.35, SD = 0.65).

### **Discussion**

#### **Magnitude and Visibility of Vote Buying**

The results indicate that vote buying is both widespread and highly visible in Zaria LGA, corroborating earlier studies (Schaffer & Schedler, 2007). The high mean scores and low standard deviations suggest strong consensus among voters regarding the scale and sophistication of inducement practices. The proximity of inducements to polling units raises concerns about electoral secrecy and monitoring, reflecting entrenched clientelistic behavior in Nigeria's elections.

#### **Mobilizing Effect on Turnout**

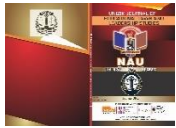
Findings support the rational choice perspective, suggesting that inducements increase the expected utility of voting, particularly for economically disadvantaged voters. The observed increase in turnout aligns with Adeleke et al. (2024) and Bratton et al. (2023), who noted that material incentives can temporarily mobilize electorates in competitive, low-income environments. Nevertheless, this participation is transactional rather than civic, highlighting the paradox of vote buying: turnout is artificially inflated while genuine political engagement may be limited.

#### **Socio-Economic Drivers**

Economic hardship emerged as the strongest driver of vote selling, with poverty increasing voters' responsiveness to material inducements. This aligns with Downs' (1957) rational choice framework and Ovwasa's (2013) observation that Nigerian elections often function as redistributive events where voters exchange electoral support for immediate survival resources.

#### **Distortion of Electoral Choice and Democratic Integrity**

While vote buying may boost turnout, it simultaneously undermines voter autonomy and democratic quality. The findings reveal that inducements influenced candidate choice, led voters to act against personal preferences, and reduced attention to policy issues. Additionally, perceptions of reduced electoral credibility and weakened democracy indicate that vote buying has profound long-term costs for institutional trust and governance.



### **Institutional Weakness and Systemic Factors**

Weak enforcement and normalization of vote buying were identified as systemic enablers. Electoral authorities' inability to curtail inducements reflects broader institutional challenges, including political capture and resource constraints (Birch, 2011; Suberu, 2015). These factors lower the cost of engaging in vote buying while increasing its prevalence and impact.

### **Policy Implications**

The near-unanimous agreement on the need to reduce vote buying highlights voters' recognition of its detrimental effects. Effective policy interventions—including robust law enforcement, poverty alleviation, civic education, and institutional reform—are essential to strengthen electoral integrity and ensure meaningful voter participation.

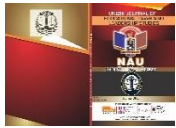
**Table 1: Mean Scores by Thematic Categories**

| Category          | No. of Items | Mean Range | Overall Mean |
|-------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Prevalence        | 5            | 4.05-4.30  | 4.19         |
| Turnout Impact    | 3            | 3.76-3.95  | 3.86         |
| Economic Drivers  | 1            | 4.22       | 4.22         |
| Choice Distortion | 6            | 3.62-4.07  | 3.88         |
| Democratic Costs  | 3            | 4.07-4.20  | 4.15         |

The above analysis reveals a clear pattern vote buying flourishes in study area's economic desperation and institutional vacuum, temporarily inflating turnout (73.6% agreement) at democracy's expense. Rational choice theory elegantly explains this paradox (voters maximize utility amid structural failures) but sustained transactional politics erodes civic duty (D term), perpetuating clientelism cycles. These subnational findings contribute significantly to understanding Nigeria's electoral malaise, demanding urgent structural interventions.

### **Conclusion**

This study systematically explored the complex interplay between vote buying and voter turnout during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Zaria Local Government Area, Kaduna State, Nigeria. Grounded in Downs' Rational Choice Theory, the empirical investigation of 379 respondents—drawn through a rigorous multi-stage sampling method from a total of 88,283 accredited voters—demonstrates that vote buying is not merely an electoral irregularity but a widespread, economically motivated mechanism that significantly shapes voter behavior. All 18 Likert-scale items recorded mean scores above the Improved Confrontation Index benchmark of 3.00, ranging from 3.62 to 4.35, indicating strong awareness and recognition of vote buying practices, including cash distributions, material inducements, and transactions near polling units (means: 4.05–4.22). The analysis further reveals that vote buying increased short-term voter turnout, as participation was motivated by expectations of material rewards (mean: 3.95) and respondents acknowledged that turnout would likely have been lower without inducements (mean: 3.76). However, these immediate gains come at a substantial cost to democratic quality. Economic hardship emerged as



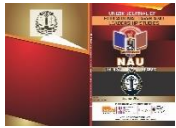
the primary driver of acceptance (mean: 4.22), leading voters to prioritize immediate personal benefits over their genuine political preferences (mean: 3.62), reducing consideration of policy issues (mean: 3.85), and undermining freedom of choice (mean: 4.07). Consequently, perceptions of electoral credibility (mean: 4.20), democratic integrity (mean: 4.18), and institutional effectiveness (mean: 3.90) were negatively affected, while the practice itself was seen as normalized (mean: 3.70).

These findings highlight a paradox in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: while vote buying artificially inflates voter turnout—often interpreted as democratic progress—it simultaneously commodifies the ballot, fosters transactional politics, and reinforces elite capture. Rational choice theory explains this phenomenon as voters maximizing utility (enhancing the  $B$  term in  $R = pB - C + D$ ) in contexts of poverty and weak institutional enforcement. Yet, the long-term consequence is diminished civic engagement and weakened accountability. In Zaria's socio-economically vulnerable context, vote buying thus functions both as a short-term mobilizing force and a significant obstacle to genuine democratic consolidation.

### **Recommendations**

It can be concluded from the foregoing analysis that addressing vote buying requires a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that targets its structural drivers rather than relying solely on punitive measures. In light of the key findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Electoral management bodies, particularly INEC, should be provided with enhanced resources, greater operational autonomy, and advanced technologies, such as real-time monitoring through BVAS and CCTV at polling units where vote buying is most prevalent. These measures will enable more effective detection and sanctioning of vote buying practices.
- ii. Ad hoc staff should be trained on rapid response protocols, and swift, exemplary penalties should be imposed on individuals and groups found engaging in vote buying or manipulating the electoral process. Such measures will serve as a deterrent across the federation.
- iii. Government should prioritize programmes aimed at reducing economic vulnerability, including conditional cash transfers, skills acquisition initiatives, and microfinance schemes for low-income communities. By addressing poverty, the marginal utility of inducements decreases, encouraging voters to make decisions based on personal choice rather than material gain.
- iv. INEC should intensify civic education campaigns highlighting the long-term consequences of transactional voting and linking individual electoral choices to governance quality and public service delivery. Such programs should leverage local languages, community and religious leaders, and digital platforms to counter the normalization of vote buying.
- v. Political parties should institutionalize internal codes prohibiting inducements, while civil society organizations and the media monitor adherence. Furthermore, amendments to the Electoral Act should explicitly criminalize "turnout buying" and empower courts to ensure expedited prosecutions, thereby reinforcing electoral accountability.

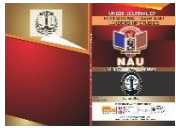


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