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# Commodification of Votes and Its Impact on Democratic Processes and Consolidation in Nigeria

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## Abstract
This essential focus of this paper is to examine the commodification of votes in Nigeria, where electoral participation has increasingly become transactional, with votes being bought and sold. The objective of the study is to analyse the causes and consequences of this phenomenon on Nigeria's democratic processes and consolidation. Anchored in the Social Exchange Theory (SET), the study explores how voters and political elites engage in vote trading as a cost-benefit transaction, driven by material rewards and power dynamics. The study adopts a descriptive-qualitative methodology, relying on secondary data from academic literature, civil society reports, and online sources. The findings reveal that factors such as poverty, unemployment, weak electoral institutions, and the perception of politics as an investment fuel the commodification of votes. This practice undermines electoral integrity, perpetuates poor governance, and weakens democratic institutions, as politicians who purchase votes prioritise personal gains over accountability to the electorate. The study recommends strengthening the enforcement powers of electoral bodies like INEC, intensifying voter education on the dangers of vote trading, reducing the financial privileges of political offices, and enforcing strict accountability measures to curb corruption. Addressing these issues is crucial for safeguarding Nigeria's democratic future and ensuring fair and transparent elections.

**Keywords:** Commodification of votes, democratic consolidation and governance.

## 1. Introduction

Commodification is a concept used to refers to the transformation of things such as goods, services, ideas, or information, into articles of trade or commodities (Maloney, 2020). Following the return of Nigeria to democratic rule in 1999, politicians and political parties embarked on turning the political affairs of the country into business venture entailing the activities of buying and selling of votes, candidates, crowds and parties' endorsements through monetary and non-monetary exchanges alike (Dennis, 2023). This development soon found expression throughout the country with the peak of it experienced between 2019 and date. During electioneering periods, candidates make alignments and realignments, negotiations and renegotiations with political gladiators, political merchants and the electorates which the acclaimed political powers and mandates belongs to, to merchandise their interests and political aspirations through political merchandisers like political parties, parties delegates, party leadership, opinion leaders, and traditional leaders (Aliyu, 2023), and now by extension religious leaders from both Christianity and Islamic faiths, who some are now engaged in hawking candidates of a given political party over the other parties who social exchange has not been established with them or are not satisfy with the perceived benefits that will emanate from them.

The commodification of votes represents a significant challenge to the integrity of democratic processes, particularly in emerging democracies like Nigeria. It refers to the transactional nature of electoral participation, where votes are bought and sold – otherwise referred to as vote buying and selling, undermining the very principles of democracy. In Nigeria, this phenomenon has intensified, particularly in recent elections, with political elites manipulating vulnerable segments of the population, often due to poverty and unemployment, to secure electoral victories through financial inducements or material gifts (Adejoh, 2021; Aina, 2022).

Despite growing attention to electoral malpractice in Nigeria, the phenomenon of commodification of votes where votes and political participation are treated as tradable commodities remains underexplored in scholarly and policy literature. While most existing studies focus narrowly on vote buying as a transactional act between voters and politicians, few have addressed the systemic commodification of the entire electoral process. This includes the monetization of party primaries, endorsements by traditional and religious leaders, and the manipulation of voters through both monetary and non-monetary inducements. The failure to interrogate the multi-layered and institutionalized nature of electoral commodification creates a gap in understanding the true extent of the challenge to Nigeria's democracy. This study is therefore needed at this time to fill these identified gaps. It seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of how vote commodification affects democratic processes and threatens democratic consolidation in Nigeria. In an era where electoral legitimacy is increasingly questioned and citizens are disillusioned with political leadership, this study offers timely insight into one of the most pressing threats to Nigeria’s democratic future. The findings will be critical for electoral reform, civic education, and policy intervention aimed at restoring democratic integrity and building resilient democratic institutions. This practice erodes the very foundation of fair representation, as electoral outcomes become a reflection of monetary power rather than the genuine will of the people (Obiora, et al., 2023).

The commodification of votes has been observed to perpetuates a cycle of poor governance and weak democratic institutions, as politicians who purchase votes are less accountable to the electorate. Instead, they prioritise recouping their financial investments post-election (Eze, 2024). This trend threatens the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria by weakening the legitimacy of electoral processes, fostering cynicism among citizens, and impeding efforts towards genuine democratic reforms. The implications for democratic consolidation are profound, as trust in the electoral system diminishes, political participation declines, and the prospects for sustainable development become increasingly tenuous (Onyeka, 2020). Consequently, addressing this issue is critical for safeguarding the future of Nigeria’s democracy.

Sequel to the above, this paper is justified by the pressing need to address the pervasive issue of vote commodification in Nigeria, which undermines democratic integrity and threatens long-term democratic consolidation. By exploring how the transactional nature of voting compromises electoral outcomes and governance, the paper aims to shed light on the systemic causes of this phenomenon. The objective is to critically assess the impact of vote commodification on the quality of democracy, electoral accountability, and citizen participation, ultimately contributing to broader discussions on strengthening democratic institutions in Nigeria.

## 2. Literature Review

The commodification of votes is the act of treating votes as commodities that can be bought or sold, where voters exchange their electoral choice for money, favours, or material benefits, undermining the fairness and integrity of the democratic process. The development of the practice in Nigeria has garnered increasing scholarly attention, particularly in the context of its implications for democratic processes and consolidation.

Recent studies highlight the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon. For instance, Adeyeye and Omodunbi (2024) argue that the buying and selling of votes undermines electoral integrity, resulting in a cycle of political corruption that erodes public trust in democratic institutions. Using qualitative interviews and surveys, the study finds that this practice not only diminishes voter agency but also perpetuates a culture of dependency among the electorate.

In contrast, Aliyu (2023) suggests that while vote-buying is detrimental, it may also serve as a pragmatic adaptation by marginalized voters seeking immediate benefits in an environment rife with economic hardship. This view challenges the traditional narrative that positions vote commodification solely as a corruption issue. Aliyu employs a mixed-methods approach, revealing how some voters perceive these transactions as necessary for survival, thus complicating the discourse around electoral ethics.

Similarly, Bello (2022) discusses the systemic roots of vote commodification, asserting that the practice is a symptom of broader socio-economic disparities. He presents a statistical analysis that correlates high levels of poverty with increased instances of vote trading, reinforcing the notion that economic vulnerability drives citizens towards accepting monetary incentives during elections. This aligns with the findings of Ibeanu (2020), who affirms that the commodification of votes is directly associated with weakened democratic consolidation, as it hampers the development of accountable governance.

Moreover, Onuoha (2024) questions the effectiveness of anti-vote-buying measures implemented by the Independent National Electoral Commission, arguing that these efforts often fail due to the entrenched nature of the practice within the political culture. This perspective contrasts with earlier assertions by Musa (2021), who suggested that stricter regulations could potentially deter vote commodification. Musa's quantitative analysis provides evidence of a decline in vote-buying incidents in areas with rigorous enforcement, although he acknowledges that such measures alone are insufficient without addressing the underlying socio-economic factors.

While the commodification of votes poses significant challenges to Nigeria's democratic processes, the scholarly debate reveals a deeper understanding of its implications. Scholars like Adeyeye and Omodunbi, and Bello emphasize the corrosive effects on electoral integrity, while Aliyu and Onuoha illuminate the complexities surrounding voter motivations and regulatory effectiveness. This interplay of perspectives enriches the discourse, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies that address both the ethical dimensions of voting and the socio- economic realities faced by voters in Nigeria.

**The Nature and Extent of Commodification of Votes African Countries: A Comparative Perspective with Nigeria**

The commodification of votes where electoral support is traded for money, material items, or personal favors is not a phenomenon peculiar to Nigeria. It is a widespread and deep-rooted challenge across many African democracies. While the manifestations and intensity may differ across regions, the underlying implications remain fundamentally the same: erosion of democratic integrity, weakening of electoral institutions, and the entrenchment of corrupt political elites. This section examines the nature and extent of vote commodification in selected African countries and compares the Nigerian experience, thereby underscoring the pressing nature of the problem in Nigeria. For instance, Ghana, is often lauded for its relatively stable democratic transitions since 1992, also grapples with vote commodification, albeit in slightly subtler forms compared to Nigeria. According to Lindberg (2010), vote buying in Ghana often takes the form of gift-giving, distribution of items like cloths, rice, and mobile phones, or offering employment promises before elections. Like Nigeria, these acts are deeply entrenched in the patron-client political culture that dominates the West African sub-region. While Gyampo (2015) notes that in Ghana, political parties are known to set aside significant campaign budgets specifically for voter inducement. Electoral contests, particularly at the parliamentary level, have become commercial ventures where both aspirants and voters are engaged in a transactional relationship. However, unlike Nigeria, the commodification process in Ghana is largely confined to campaign seasons and is not as deeply institutionalized within traditional and religious institutions. In contrast, the Nigerian vote market extends beyond campaign periods and elections to party primaries, delegate selection, endorsement negotiations with religious and traditional rulers, and even vote auctioning at the grassroots. The widespread use of “see-and-buy” strategies during elections, as documented by observers like the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023), has turned the electoral process into a political marketplace, with Nigerian voters acting more as customers than citizens.

In Kenya, the commodification of votes often intersects with ethnic mobilization, making the phenomenon even more complex. Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis (2016) argue that vote buying in Kenya is less about individual voter transactions and more about buying the loyalty of entire ethnic constituencies through elite bargains. Political elites offer patronage, development projects, and government appointments in exchange for ethnic bloc votes. A study by Kramon (2013) found that Kenyan voters often expect material incentives as part of the electoral process and consider them legitimate, especially in areas plagued by poverty. Political aspirants openly distribute money, pay for voters’ transport to polling stations, or fund community projects shortly before elections to curry favor. While these forms of inducement are similar to those in Nigeria, Kenya’s vote commodification is often cloaked in developmental promises rather than outright cash-for-vote exchanges seen on election day in Nigeria. What makes the Nigerian scenario more-direr is the institutional failure to regulate and penalize such behavior. In Kenya, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) has recorded some successes in prosecuting electoral offenders, while in Nigeria, INEC and security agencies largely lack the political will or autonomy to hold vote buyers accountable. This difference reflects how institutional strength influences the extent and normalization of commodified politics.

**3. Zimbabwe: State Capture and Electoral Commodification**

In the case of Zimbabwe presents another vivid example of vote commodification, where the state apparatus itself is weaponized to buy votes. Under the long rule of Robert Mugabe and even after his exit, the ruling ZANU-PF party has used food aid, agricultural inputs, and other state resources to induce voters, particularly in rural areas. As noted by Bratton (2008), the electoral process in Zimbabwe has often been reduced to a "patronage-based campaign," where access to state benefits is made contingent on political loyalty. Food distribution campaigns during election periods are accompanied by threats of exclusion for opposition supporters. This approach goes beyond transactional vote buying and veers into coercive commodification of democratic rights. This in comparison to Nigeria's political elites which do exploit public funds for campaign purposes and induce votes using government patronage, the level of coercive control seen in Zimbabwe is less pronounced. Nigeria’s commodification is largely voluntary but driven by poverty, hunger, and systemic desperation, rather than outright state intimidation. However, Nigeria's breadth of actors involved from politicians to religious leaders, market leaders, and even youth groups makes the phenomenon broader in scope, even if not as authoritarian in nature. Finally, is the scenario between South Africa, where vote commodification operates differently. Due to a strong institutional framework and active civil society, outright vote buying is less visible. However, scholars such as Booysen (2012) and Southall (2014) argue that indirect commodification persists through patronage appointments, housing allocations, and government tenders granted along party loyalty lines particularly within the ruling African National Congress (ANC). South Africa’s commodification model is thus elite-centered, relying on state patronage and loyalty networks rather than grassroots voter inducement. Although this model differs from Nigeria's mass cash-based vote buying, the result is similar: elections become less about policy and performance, and more about access to state resources. And Nigeria who suffers a double burden both elite-level patronage and grassroots monetized participation. The extent of vote commodification is broader in Nigeria, touching all rungs of society, and involving not just candidates and voters but also institutions that should serve as neutral arbiters of democratic integrity

**2.1 Theoretical framework**

This paper is anchored on the Social Exchange Theory (SET). The Social Exchange Theory was developed by sociologists George Homans and Peter Blau. George Homans is credited with introducing the theory in his 1958 work "Social Behavior as Exchange," while Peter Blau expanded on these ideas, particularly in his 1964 book “Exchange and Power in Social Life.” Homans laid the foundation by focusing on individual-level interactions, whereas Blau extended the theory to broader social structures, emphasising the role of power and dependency in social exchanges.

The SET provides a valuable framework for analysing the commodification of votes in Nigeria's democratic process and its ramifications for democratic consolidation. Developed by sociologists such as George Homans and Peter Blau, SET argues that human interactions are underpinned by a cost-benefit analysis, where individuals participate in relationships that offer greater rewards than costs. These rewards and costs are not exclusively material but may also include psychological, social, or political elements (Blau, 2017).

In the context of the commodification of votes, SET suggests that voters and political actors enter into transactional relationships aimed at maximising their respective benefits. Voters, often constrained by economic hardship, see voting as an opportunity to secure immediate financial or material gains in exchange for their political support. On the other hand, political elites offer financial inducements to acquire votes, treating elections as a means to secure political power, which can later be leveraged for personal or group advantage (Okafor, 2022). Some of the key components of SET in the context of commodification of votes are explicitly explained as follows;

Thus, the application of SET to the commodification of votes in Nigeria exposes a transactional and exploitative relationship between voters and political elites, driven by immediate rewards rather than democratic principles. This process undermines the democratic fabric by converting elections into a marketplace of votes, where political power is secured through financial inducements rather than through merit or policy-driven engagement. For Nigeria’s democracy to consolidate, this cycle of commodification must be broken. Electoral participation needs to be grounded in principles of equality, fairness, and accountability, ensuring that elections serve their true purpose - the selection of leaders based on public interest rather than material exchanges (Ikpe, 2015).

## 3. Methodology

This paper adopts a descriptive-qualitative approach, utilising secondary sources of data to analyse the commodification of votes and its impacts on democratic processes and consolidation in Nigeria. A comprehensive literature review was conducted, focusing majorly on academic publications and newspaper publications and the internet resources. The sources included peer- reviewed journal articles and reports from civil society organisations, providing a well-rounded understanding of the issue. Qualitative secondary data was used.

The study employed a non-experimental, cross-sectional design grounded in interpretivist epistemology. This design allows for the in-depth understanding of political behaviours and attitudes by engaging with rich, context-specific secondary data. Given that the study investigates trends across multiple electoral cycles (2015, 2019, and 2023), a comparative-descriptive lens was also employed to track changes and continuities in vote commodification practices over time. The research is documentary in nature and rests on retrospective analysis of electoral outcomes, campaign patterns, and political narratives across Nigeria’s North-Central geopolitical zone and other parts of the country as context demands.

Data were sourced exclusively from secondary materials, focusing on reputable and peer-reviewed academic journals, electoral observation reports, books, credible newspaper articles, government publications (especially INEC and NOA), and reports by civil society organisations such as Yiaga Africa, Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), and International Republican Institute (IRI). In addition, archival documents and political manifestos were reviewed to understand the exchange mechanisms embedded in campaign rhetoric and candidate-voter interactions. The key online academic databases used include: Google Scholar, JSTOR, Science Direct and African Journals Online (AJOL) this is to ensure comprehensive data gathering, relevant keywords such as vote buying, commodification of votes in Nigeria, electoral fraud, vote trading, democratic consolidation, and political clientelism in Nigeria were employed in systematic search queries. A literature matrix was developed to organise and categorise the retrieved materials according to themes such as causes, manifestations, consequences, and policy responses to vote commodification. The study employed thematic content analysis as its principal method of data analysis. This involved identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the collected texts. Thematic coding was done manually, based on recurring concepts like "vote buying", "voter dependency", "economic inducement", "political accountability", and "electoral legitimacy". Finally, to enhance credibility, validity, and trustworthiness, the following strategies; First, the triangulation of sources, here data were cross-verified across multiple sources (academic, governmental, media, and civil society) to reduce the risk of bias and misinformation. Where emphasis was placed on peer-reviewed and institutionally recognised documents, while media sources were subjected to credibility checks. The analyst triangulation was also adopted to make available, findings from different researchers and electoral observers compared to avoid over-reliance on a single perspective. Though the Social Exchange Theory serves as the core theoretical lens, insights from political economy and behavioural theories were occasionally referenced to enrich the interpretation of complex phenomena. Every claim or observation was substantiated with verifiable evidence or scholarly opinion. Assumptions not backed by data were deliberately avoided.

## 4. Discussion of Findings

The findings from the reviewed literature and secondary sources reveal a persistent pattern of vote commodification in Nigeria, particularly from 2015 to 2023. These findings strongly validate the Social Exchange Theory (SET) as an appropriate analytical framework. SET argues that human interactions including political engagement are often based on cost-benefit analyses and reciprocal exchanges. Within Nigeria's electoral environment, both voters and political actors operate within this logic of exchange. a. Voters' Cost-Benefit Calculus, Nigerian voters, particularly in economically marginalized communities, often consider the immediate financial or material gain from political candidates as outweighing the abstract, long-term benefits of good governance or democratic accountability. For example, a civil society report by YIAGA Africa (2023) shows that in several constituencies across North-Central Nigeria, voters openly admitted accepting between ₦1,000 to ₦10,000, food items, or clothing in exchange for their votes. When asked why they accepted inducements, a respondent in Benue State stated: "We don't know what they'll do after they win. But if I get ₦5,000 now, at least I can feed my children today." This mindset aligns with SET's emphasis on immediate rewards over long-term investments in intangible outcomes like accountability, justice, or policy change. b. Politicians' Investment Calculus On the other hand, political actors evaluate the financial cost of securing votes as a worthwhile investment for gaining political office. From this perspective, the vote is not a civic duty but a transactional item. According to CLEEN Foundation (2022), aspirants in the 2023 elections reportedly spent tens of millions of naira during party primaries and general elections to "buy" loyalty from delegates and voters. A former candidate interviewed by Premium Times noted: "Politics is business in Nigeria. You spend money now and recover when you win through contracts, appointments, or patronage." This reinforces SET's exchange logic, where political power becomes a commodity purchased and traded for future rewards, diminishing the role of merit or policy. c. Reciprocity and Power Dynamics A key finding is the expectation of reciprocity embedded in the voting transaction. Beneficiaries of political largesse feel obligated to return the favour through votes. As one local chief in Nasarawa State noted in a 2023 Situation Report by CDD, some traditional leaders were induced with ₦500,000 and bags of rice to mobilise votes for specific parties. This quid-pro-quo relationship, as explained by SET, distorts political agency. Moreover, the power imbalance between wealthy political elites and impoverished voters creates dependency, where voters rely on periodic electoral gifts rather than demanding structural improvements or sustainable policies. d. Democratic Implications Findings show that this transactional behavior undermines the legitimacy of electoral outcomes, breeds political apathy, and weakens democratic consolidation. SET explains this as a breakdown of social trust—when the only perceived political value is material, the long-term sustainability of democratic institutions becomes precarious.

### Comparative Analysis: Nigeria and Other Democracies

Nigeria and Philippines, as obtainable in Nigeria, the Philippines experiences widespread vote buying, especially in rural regions. However, the scale and sophistication differ. In the Philippines, vote buying has evolved into a more organised strategy involving multiple intermediaries (e.g., barangay leaders), who distribute cash and ensure compliance. A study by David & Atienza (2019) found that Filipino voters received between \$5–\$50, often with promises of public works projects if the candidate wins. In both countries, poverty and institutional weakness fuel vote commodification. However, while Nigeria often uses religious and traditional leaders for distribution, the Philippines heavily involves grassroots political operatives and uses vote-buying "insurance" i.e., taking photos or oaths to guarantee votes, which is less common in Nigeria. Another instance is Nigeria and India, India's electoral landscape also shows evidence of commodified votes, particularly in poor and rural areas. However, the Election Commission of India has adopted advanced enforcement tools, such as seizure of cash and surveillance drones, leading to hundreds of arrests before elections. According to The Hindu (2024), over ₹500 crores (approx. ₦45 billion) in cash and goods were seized before the 2024 general elections. In contrast, Nigeria's INEC lacks strong investigative and enforcement capabilities, and vote buying is often conducted openly at polling units. In India, candidates sometimes offer long-term inducements like education subsidies, while in Nigeria, gifts are usually short-term and consumable (e.g., rice, indomie, cash). Furthermore, Nigeria and Ghana, Ghana's democratic system is often praised for relative electoral transparency. While vote buying exists, its scale and societal tolerance are lower compared to Nigeria. The CDD-Ghana (2022) survey found that only 9% of voters admitted to accepting gifts in the last election, compared to 36% in Nigeria (NOI Polls, 2023). The difference stems from stronger civic education, media exposure, and higher levels of trust in the electoral commission. Moreover, Ghana's legal framework punishes vote buying more strictly. In Nigeria, enforcement is weak, and political actors are rarely prosecuted, further embedding the practice into the political culture.

### 1.1 Impact of commodification of votes on democratic process

The commodification of votes has become a pressing issue in Nigeria, as evident during the 2019 general elections, where widespread instances of vote buying were reported (Magaji & Musa, 2022). In the study by Uwa and Emeka (2022), they highlighted how political candidates systematically purchased votes, offering cash or goods to sway electoral outcomes during the 2019 and 2023 general elections. This practice fundamentally undermines the principles of free and fair elections, as shown in reports by the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room, which documented the pervasive nature of vote buying across multiple states (NCSRS, 2021). Such instances clearly illustrate how electoral integrity is compromised when financial transactions replace genuine democratic choices.

The erosion of electoral integrity necessitated by commodification of votes carries profound implications for public trust in democratic institutions. A recent survey by Nwagwu, et al. (2022) revealed that 68% of respondents believed vote buying significantly undermines the legitimacy of election outcomes. This growing lack of trust breeds apathy among the electorate, as citizens increasingly feel their votes do not matter when decisions hinge on financial incentives rather than democratic principles (Nwagwu, et al., 2022). Moreover, the continuous cycle of corruption diminishes faith in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which many perceive as incapable of effectively combatting electoral malpractices, further deepening disillusionment with the democratic process (Ayeni, 2019).

In addition to the foregoing, Bassey, et al. (2023) note that vote trading also profoundly influences voter agency and participation as it reduces voting and participation in elections to mere economic transactions, shifting the focus from civic duty to immediate financial gain. In corroboration, Igbinovia (2020) notes that many voters, especially in economically disadvantaged areas, see vote selling as a rational choice in light of their financial hardships. This transactional view alters voters' perceptions of their roles within the electoral system, often relegating them to passive participants rather than active agents of change, as illustrated by Adeyeye and Omodunbi (2024) study.

Going forward, it is observed that the effects of vote commodification extend to voter turnout and engagement as well. Usman, et al. (2023) assert that when individuals with genuine desire to vote a responsible government regime perceive their votes as commodities, a sense of apathy can set in, leading to decreased participation in elections. The study found that areas with high instances of vote buying experienced notable declines in voter turnout as those who see it as undemocratic stay away from participating in voting on the ground that whether or not they vote, the majority who are always set to trade their votes will never allow for the emergence of genuine government regime. This result suggests a direct correlation between vote commodification and overall electoral participation. This disengagement poses a long-term threat to the democratic process, fostering a cycle of disenfranchisement where citizens feel increasingly disconnected from political engagement thinking that their votes no longer count (Chukwu & Nnubia, 2022). Going by these, it is apparent that the commodification of votes in Nigeria significantly erodes electoral integrity and adversely affects voter agency and participation. As recent studies have documented, these impacts create a challenging landscape for democratic consolidation, highlighting the urgent need for reforms to restore trust and enhance engagement within the electoral process.

### 1.1.1 Consequence of commodification of votes on democratic consolidation

The idea of commodification of votes in the Nigeria evidently has adverse effect on the political landscape and democratic consolidation in the country leading the what Ogbamosa (2022) referred to as continuous depreciation in governance. Some of the consequences of vote commodification on democratic consolidation in Nigeria as identified across various studies are discussed to include among others the following;

**Politics for Propertied Class and Promotion of Corruption**

The commodification of votes in Nigeria has result in a situation where only the rich or money- bags take over political processes and elective offices. Those who have ideas and are capable of delivering the results but do not have money are no longer qualified as they cannot afford to buy votes (Ogbamosa, 2022). The phenomenon of vote commodification raises the question on how many Nigerians with legitimate means of livelihood can afford to contest for elective offices? This, Onah and Nwali (2018) notes, is another indicator that the phenomenon encourages more corruption in the polity and excludes majority from vying for political offices in Nigeria.

According to Falola (2019), corruption is deeply ingrained in Nigeria's political system, with electorate often accepting bribes or other forms of financial incentives in exchange for support or votes. In the position of Ogbamosa (2022), if those who are capable but have no means are excluded, what will happen is that the offices will be available to those who are not likely to have acquired their resources through legitimate means. On the other hands are also those who are usually sponsored into office and will have to pay back their sponsors when in office. Either to refill their private purses emptied in the cause of campaigns and electioneering or to repay their sponsors who bankrolled them into office, political office holders usually indulge in misappropriation and embezzling of state resources earmarked for initiating and executing projects and programmes that will bring the people to enjoying the dividends of democracy. This in part, explains the state-of-the-art corruption common amongst political elective office holders in Nigeria. In view of these eventualities, it is observed that the phenomenon of commodification of votes has led to what can best be described as "the government of the people by the elite and for the elites."

**Perception of politics as a commercial venture and investment**

Substantiating Social Exchange Theory with Ferguson's Incentive Theory of Party Competition maintains that politics in a money-driven system like Nigeria's is perceived by the key players as a form of investment where they invest their resources to appropriate profits. This, Onah and Nwali (2018) notes approximates politics to business venture. The common ground here is that politicians and candidates are often ready to spend fortunes to win elections assuming that as they get elected into office, they enjoy unrestricted access to wealth and riches. This is in most instance is the motivating factor why political parties and their candidates are always willing to engage in elaborate vote buying to secure the mandate of the electorate by every means. This, Ogbamosa (2022) notes, is why politics in Nigeria is regarded as a commercial venture where the investors recoup their investments. To satisfy this end, Ovwasa (2014) advances, all manner of tactics including, bribery and thuggery are employed further compounding the abnormalities that characterise democratic processes in Nigeria, and accounts for the popular notion that politics is a "dirty game." In the view of Ogbamosa (2022), the monetisation of politics with respect to commodification of votes is why occupants of elective offices are reluctant in being loyal to the people. Their loyalty is to themselves and their sponsors, who are sometimes called godfathers.

**Erosion of public trust on democratic institutions**

When money plays such significant role in politics as determining who wins in elections, it erodes public trust in the democratic processes as the sanctity of the electoral process and integrity of the ballot box and electoral umpire are put to question. According to Akanbi (2019), many citizens in Nigeria feel that their voices are not being heard and that the political system is rigged in favour of the wealthy and powerful. This in some studies, has been identified to lead to cynicism and apathy among voters, which undermines the legitimacy of the political system.

**Raising poverty level**

The irony of commodification of votes is that it enriches the electorate temporarily and them impoverish them for several years that follows. As aptly noted by Uwa and Emeka (2022), the trend of vote buying has over the years increased the level of poverty in Nigeria as evidenced by the worsening incidence of poverty in the country due to the insensitivity of the government to the needs and aspirations of the people they presumably govern in their interests. For instance, the National Bureau of Statistics notes that about 83 million Nigerians were living in poverty by the year 2020, a figure which is expected to have risen to 90 million by 2021 (Ogbamosa, 2022).

**Epileptic governance and insecurity**

Other detriments of commodification of votes in the Nigerian democratic system is the underserving government regimes and rising challenges of insecurity in the country. Instead of governance, Nigerians have been disillusioned into celebrating construction of few kilometers of roads, painting of school blocks and payment the school fees of a few disabled pupils in secondary school as significant achievements. The political actors have mastered the craft of using these to siphon resources meant for the people. According to Babatunde, et al. (2019), the current crop of leaders produced by the instituted system of commodification of votes are highly irresponsible in the art of governance. It is observed that the reason why the electorates cannot hold those leaders to account is not far from the fact that they were paid for the votes they cast in favour of the leaders during the elections. Having paid the price through the commodified votes they bought to pave their ways into office, the leaders find no sense in being responsible and accountable to the people or the constitution. This, in the account of some scholars, accounts for the height of corruption, unemployment, poverty, insecurity and the underperformance in governance ravaging the country in recent times (Ogbamosa, 2022; Babatunde, et al., 2019; and Bassey, et al., 2023).

**Erosion of politics of ideology**

Similarly, it has been observed that commodification of votes has made the party politics system in Nigeria to shift from politics of ideas to politics of money. What this means is that the integrity and policy choices of a candidate is no longer considered as a criterion for their election. Instead, how much they can afford to dole out throughout the electoral process is what matters. Another adverse impact of this is the disadvantages it creates for smaller political parties. According to Bassey, et al. (2023), wealthy donors tend to support established political parties with a track record of winning elections, making it difficult for smaller parties to compete. This can lead to a lack of diversity in political representation, as only a few parties are able to dominate the political scene. Until the nation embraces politics of ideas instead of politics of vote buying and selling, the incidences of poverty, insecurity, political instability and under-development in the country will not only worsen but also there will be the continued neglect of the primary purpose of government as enshrined in Section 14(b) of Chapter 2 of the 1999 Constitution which is the security and welfare of the people. The prevailing condition in the country today stands antithetical to the ideals of democracy.

In addition to the above consequences of commodified voting system, writing on the impact of money politics on governance, Olabode (2021) observed that where a leader emerges through a flawed electoral process, there may be prevalence of social injustice and inequality when the leader is not able to give proper control or proper judgment in the society. A leader who emerges through vote buying and selling may neither be able to proclaim social justice nor bring about community development. These are the types of leaders that use the resources of the society to enrich their family. In this type of system of government, the wishes of the masses are sometimes in conflict with the wishes of the leaders, thereby leading to bad governance (Olabode, 2021). Bad governance involves the abuse of human rights, corruption and lack of accountability. Bad governance is the inability of a public institution to manage public affairs and public resources; failure of the government to meet the needs of the society. To Nwagwu, et al. (2022), this form of governance is characterised by corruption, crime, absence of freedom of expression, among others.

**Study Limitations**

This study is constrained by its reliance on secondary sources, which may introduce biases inherent in existing reports and scholarship, such as observer framing or political partiality. The qualitative, cross-sectional design limits causal inference and overlooks real-time voter behavior dynamics. Moreover, the focus on published literature and advocacy group reports may omit unpublished local perspectives, especially in underdocumented rural communities. Regional emphasis on the North-Central zone may reduce broader national generalizability. Finally, temporal scope (2015–2023) excludes longer historical trends; future research using primary data surveys and interviews would help validate and enrich these findings.

## 2. Conclusion

The prevalence of the incidence of commodification of votes in Nigeria indicates the intersectionality of variegated factors such as poor economic condition leading to heightened incidence of poverty, absence of strong and competent institutions for elections management, and flawed perception of politics as an investment for returns. The intersection of these factors leads to the continuous determination of candidates and political parties to negotiate for buying of votes, and the willingness of electorates to sell their votes in most instances to cater for their survival, while the incapacitated electoral umpire – lacking the will power to enforce the provisions of the electoral Act that forbids such electoral transactions ratifies and boost the confidence of the candidates and electorates to engage in and intensify efforts at vote buying and selling – hence commodification of votes. The study identified that these phenomenon holds adverse implications for governance, democratic process and consolidation in Nigeria, hence, it undermines legitimacy and participation of the generate of the country.

## 3. Recommendations

Following the findings of the paper, the following recommendations are advanced;

i. The paper emphasise the need to further empower the INEC with the capability to sanction electoral offenders – particularly those guilty of vote buying and selling.

ii. The study also echoes the need for reinforced sensitisation of the electorates on the implication of trading their votes and the consequences on governance and democratisation processes.

iii. It has also been observed that there is the need to cutdown the privileges inherent in political offices to discourage aspirants and candidates from vying for the purpose of financial gains.

iv. In addition to the above, the political system must also develop mechanisms for checking public expenditures through perhaps, open-budgeting system and accountability with stringent laws and punishments pronounced for those involved in corrupt practices and fraud in public offices.

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