

**INFORMATION GAP IN INEC COMMUNICATIONS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON
VOTE BUYING OUTCOME IN 2023 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN DELTA
STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The hallmark of democracy is regular elections. The education of voters before elections must be effective and efficient. This study on the knowledge gap in elections identifies potential ineffective voter education strategies that result in the success of vote-buying, a hotly debated and viral topic in today's conversation on the conduct of elections in Nigeria. The research method employed for the study was survey. Copies of the questionnaire were utilized to collect information, which was then analyzed using basic descriptive statistical techniques. The study, which is based on theories of the State and Clientelism, aims to ascertain the degree to which INEC, NGOs, and other Government agencies educated the electorates before the 2023 elections as well as the level, if any, of vote-buying in the Delta state governorship elections. The results demonstrate that there is a lack of effective and efficient voters' education, and this has a detrimental influence on citizens' trust and confidence in Nigeria's electoral system, resulting in a variety of electoral manipulations. Before elections, the report suggested voter education to inform the people.

Keywords: *INEC, Information Gap, Electoral System.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In every electoral process, there is the aim to hold free, fair, and credible elections in which the candidate receiving the most votes wins in an impartial manner. Anyaele (2003) defined a free and fair election as one that was held in accordance with constitutional norms and was free from coercion, intimidation, and other forms of coercion intended to sway the will of the electorate. The requirement to conduct voter education is one of the fundamental components of election processes.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), along with other Government Agencies, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), traditionally would drive to inform voters of their voting rights and other civic obligations with regard to voting in an election. Voter education is to make sure that voters are capable, eager, and prepared to take part in electoral politics (Akintayo, 2010). The goal of voter education is to ensure citizens know their rights and the purpose of elections.

Concerns over the methods used for voter education have been widespread in Nigeria. According to the Electoral Reform Network (2005), civic and voter education for elections is typically conducted too close to the elections, which prevents voters' education from fully reaping its benefits and renders the process unproductive. There were several obstacles with

this emergency approach to voter education. One of these is the incapacity of voters to recognize or comprehend the growing phenomena of vote buying, which is becoming accepted as a standard electoral procedure.

Vote buying is an infringement of the electoral process that takes place in many nations, compromising the legitimacy of elections and the impartiality of democratic electoral processes. Vote buying, as described by Oliver and Vaschanka (2022), is the practice of candidates or political parties offering material or monetary incentives to citizens in return for their support during the electioneering campaign and/or on Election Day.

Direct payments to voters are one way that vote buying occurs (Guardado and Wantchekon, 2014). Vote buying is mistakenly believed to be a component of political campaigning. However, in a perfect democracy, a voting campaign should be a cordial and transparent dialogue about ideas. In an ideal world, candidates would fight for the public's support by outlining a well-thought-out plan of action and making persuasive cases for why they should be elected to government.

Giving the populace the chance to take part in all electoral procedures in order to choose their leaders is the fundamental purpose of elections. Thus, election seasons offer plenty of opportunities to assess how well governments are performing with regard to their policies and programmes (at all levels). These should be focused on how well their campaign pledges regarding public health, education, public safety, agriculture, and property security are being fulfilled, as well as the standard of living and infrastructure. (Nwagwu, Uwaechia, Udegbunam, and Nnamani, 2022).

Therefore, the study will look at the significance of the information gap in INEC communications, its impact on the outcome of vote buying in a legitimate election, and the problems and obstacles that arise in relation to the 2023 Delta State gubernatorial election.

Statement of the Problem

In every democracy, elections—more precisely, voting—are crucial processes for choosing leaders for public office. However, because of issues like electoral violence, collusion between politicians and electoral officials to obstruct the electoral process, intimidation by opposing groups, and multiple voting, the quality of elections still varies greatly in some developing nations, such as Nigeria. Particularly concerning, though, is vote buying. Massive vote-buying,

which is the exchange of ballot paper for cash and other material benefits between politicians and the people and occasionally involving electoral authorities, has lately started to occur throughout the Nigerian election process.

In Nigeria, vote buying eventually leads to poor governance, incompetent leadership, a frail institutional structure, a persistent development gap, and conflicts (Essien and Oghuvbu, 2021). This is the consequence of the Nigerian electoral system's insufficient and ineffective voter education programmes. The implications of vote buying are not adequately communicated to voters by INEC, NGOs, and other government organizations.

Given the widespread occurrence of this phenomena, it is unknown whether vote purchasing genuinely increases the number of votes cast for the distributing candidate or party or whether there is a connection between vote buying and voter decisions. It is essential to note that Nigerian academics are gradually becoming more interested in political education with reference to vote buying. The claim made by Ovwasa (2014), which is closely related to the previous one, is that vote-buying and money politics in Nigeria have drawn the attention of academics due to the phenomenon's detrimental effects on the nation's political system

Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine how much voter sensitization was done prior to the general elections of 2023 by INEC, NGOs, and other government organizations, determine whether vote buying affected voters' choices of candidates for governor of Delta State in 2023. As explained in Oji (2022), the study tends to avoid delving into the use of social media to alter election results through misinformation, disinformation, fake news, conspiracy theories, and propaganda.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study are to determine:

1. the extent to which INEC, NGOs and other government agencies sensitised the electorates before 2023 general elections
2. that votes were purchased in Delta State's 2023 gubernatorial election?
3. the range of incentives used in the 2023 Gubernatorial election of Delta state,
4. the impact of vote buying on voters' choice of candidates, and

Research Questions

To direct the investigation, the following research questions were developed.

1. To what extent was vote buying established in the 2023 gubernatorial election of Delta State?
2. To what extent did INEC, NGOs and other government agencies sensitized electorates on vote buying in Delta State?
3. In what range are the incentives offered in the 2023 Gubernatorial election of Delta state?
4. To what extent did vote buying influence the outcome of the 2023 gubernatorial election of Delta State?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vote buying, as it is widely understood, is the act of candidates (or political parties) offering money, property, or services to voters in exchange for their support. There are a few key differences within this broad idea. The first has to do with when inducements for vote-buying are made. In this primer, inducements given on election day or during the voting session are referred to as "vote buying." Before an election, candidates canvass the night before or early on election day in an attempt to gain an electoral edge. (Schaffer 2007; Muhtadi 2019).

Vote buying is a kind of election corruption that is illegal in the majority of nations. Election procedures are compromised, however it is infamously hard to prove. Vote buying is further removed from legal and regulatory monitoring as a kind of political corruption that is typically carried out through personal relationships and acquaintances due to the difficulties of discovering and demonstrating illicit activities. Voters' willingness to participate in the transaction can be influenced by one or more factors, but it always takes two to tango. Voters will rationally decide whether or not to engage in vote buying in order to either receive an exchange that satisfies a cultural or social standard or what they believe to be a financial benefit larger than the value of their vote. Voters must therefore possess a solid education.

Voters' education refers to educating voters about voting procedures, electoral processes, and other civic responsibilities and duties. It also includes pertinent electoral guidelines, rules, and regulations, as well as constitutional provisions and acts that guide electoral practices against election malpractices like vote-buying, multiple thumb-printing, electoral violence, hooliganism, and ballot box snuffing and snatching. The goal of voters' education is to make sure that voters are capable, eager, and prepared to engage in electoral politics (Akintayo, 2010).

The electoral process, according to Essien and Oghuvbu (2021), is the culmination of all the actions involved in holding an election. The importance of voter education as a component of the electoral process cannot be overstated. It has been shown that a large number of voters are not aware of the voting procedures outlined in the Electoral Act. Voter education seeks to equip prospective voters for election participation since a lack of knowledge about the electoral process may have an impact on representation. Voter education, in the words of Waheed (2011), is an endeavor to guarantee that voters are prepared to engage in the democratic process and are aware of the best option regardless of their political, ethnic, or other affiliations. It is the duty of the INEC, non-governmental organizations, and other government agencies to inform the electorate about widespread vote-buying and how it affects Nigerian democracy.

It is extremely depressing that, in Nigeria, we still have not created the framework required for efficient and effective voter education, which would inform and inspire voters about the country's electoral processes and help us achieve credible elections for a democracy that will last. To keep Nigerian democracy alive, the electorate must have a favourable view of and the correct orientation toward the fundamental roles required of them. The capacity to hold free and fair elections is the real litmus test for democracy. It is crucial to note that the growing practice of buying and selling votes in Nigerian elections puts Nigerian democracy in grave danger. Vote buying is the practice of providing voters with gifts or other inducements in exchange for their voting for the candidate or giver.

All candidates running for elective office are entitled to a legal and lawful election campaign, which is intended to raise public awareness of their party's platform, educate voters about it, and most importantly, persuade them to trust them with their votes (Beyer, Knutsen, and Rasch, 2014). A democratic campaign should be an amicable and calm exchange of ideas. Candidates engage in a variety of persuasive discourses as they compete for the votes of the electorate by putting forth arguments for why they should be elected. On the other hand, the electorate sorts

through the arguments that will become policies and chooses the candidate whose policies most closely align with their own beliefs, expectations, or preferences (Bratton, 2008). Accordingly, any conduct that tampers with the electoral process is deemed to be electoral malpractice or fraud and a hindrance to free and fair elections (Oji and Okonkwo, 2009).

However, it appears that in most nations, including Nigeria, money has taken center stage in the political process. The term "money politics" has even made its way into Nigerian politics, suggesting that it is so pervasive in the electoral process. It is now a crucial factor to consider when evaluating the degree of political corruption present in the nation. The fact that political parties and candidates are not the only source of the issue is extremely concerning. As they are unable to access the location where the national cake is being shared, electorates view politics, particularly during elections, as a chance to sell their vote in order to receive their own piece of the cake. Ovwasa (2013) provided support for this claim. Voters ask political parties and candidates for both financial and non-financial favours before and during elections.

Vote buying appears to be a common practice in a political system where politicians' ability, competence, and character are not taken into consideration when evaluating them. Instead, money and other tangible goods are used as inducements to win over voters. Vote buying is not only prohibited under Nigerian electoral laws, but it also tends to make corruption in public office worse.

Certain elements have been found as determining vote buying in Nigeria, as proposed by Jensen and Justesen (2014), Carreras and Irepoglu (2013), and Bratton (2008). They discovered that a sizable portion of voters are uneducated, underprivileged, and reside below the poverty line. One cannot overstate the role that poverty plays in determining vote buying. People won't think twice to sell their votes in order to meet their immediate needs when they are denied access to fundamental essentials like food, clothing, and shelter (Oji, 2011). Awareness of interpersonal and mediated poverty alleviation communications in the Niger Delta. *Journal of Global Communication*, 4(2), 95-112.). As a result, candidates examine this reality while concentrating their vote-buying tactics on underprivileged voters. It is clear from the above that political parties and candidates use political machinery with the intention of allocating their resources as effectively as possible to the underprivileged people who are most likely to respond favorably to efforts at vote buying.

According to Bratton (2008), another reason for vote buying is the absence of a democratic dividend. People who believe that democracy will not benefit them or who believe that the government is untrustworthy would prefer to buy votes in order to get their piece of the national pie during election campaigns. Regarding the provisions of the Nigeria Electoral Act, which serves as a blueprint for legitimate, free, and fair elections, the electorate is either ill-informed or completely unaware of politics. Given that the majority of voters in Nigeria are ignorant of the repercussions of vote buying and selling, this is another element that encourages vote buying in the country. For a penny, they therefore trade their future (Oguntola, 2018).

Vote buying affects democracy and elections in a number of ways. Both the electorate and the candidates for office are impacted by vote buying. On the electorate side, the majority of individuals become apolitical when they think that vote buying has already tainted the election. According to Carreras and Irepoglu (2013), voters who receive gifts or cash during the campaign are more inclined to cast a ballot, whereas those who disagree with the idea of selling their vote have no incentive to do so.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is based on the Theory of the State and Clientelism Theory because of its empirical nature and research goal.

The two main proponents of the Theory of the State are Frederick Engels (1820–1895) and Karl Marx (1818–1883). Although the idea is approached from multiple angles, the instrumentalist's standpoint will be the primary focus of this investigation.

According to Karl Marx's instrumentalist interpretation of the state, there is a ruling class in every society that the other classes are subservient to. It elucidates how this dominating class uses the state as an instrument to further their own goals. According to the communist manifesto written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, political authority legitimately designated means basically the coordinated authority held by one social strata for controlling others.

Using Karl Marx's theory of revolution as support, Draper (2019) claims that the state is an institution or complex of institutions that rely on the availability of forcible coercion by special social agencies in order to uphold the dominance of a ruling class, protect the current property relations from fundamental change, and subjugate all other classes. According to Marx, the

dominant class gains the ability to control the economy and politics, enabling it to rule over the other classes in all areas of society (Ojukwu, 2009).

Here, the Nigerian state is analyzed using the instrumentalist paradigm, which views all of its institutions as tools in the hands of the ruling political class. The court, which supervises election petition tribunals, the security agencies, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) are all state agents that support vote-buying in one way or another for the benefit of the ruling class. The institutions entrusted with the constitutional duty to ensure free and fair elections are manipulated and used as instruments by the ruling class to achieve their own objectives. This is a clear recipe for violence (Oji, 2006). According to Alapiki (2015), the Nigerian state's lack of autonomy, susceptibility to abuse, and lack of protection from it are what make it particularly unfavorable. This phenomena has always had a negative impact on those who have been purposefully forced to live in substandard conditions; as a result, when an offer is made to them for their votes during an election, they are forced to accept it in exchange for a pitiful amount. Herein lies the clientelism concept.

The system of broker-client ties and networks that function within the politics and governments of various civilizations is explained by the clientelism hypothesis (Piattoni, 2001). The theory, which analyzes the exchanges between politicians and voters in which material incentives are provided in exchange for political support in elections, has its roots in economics and political science. The theory's development progressed during the French and English revolutions and industrialization, when the patron-client relationship was viewed as a personal, direct exchange in which the patron, on the one hand, used resources that he owned or controlled on behalf of his clients (Parisi and Pasquino 1979).

While the clientage was obedient, providing the services that are due to the patron in exchange for his protection and progress, this comprised helping, defending, and safeguarding his clients by providing them with material rewards and a chance for career promotion (Katz 1986). Social scientists including Lande, Brown, Schmidt, Eisenstadt, and Roniger all contributed to the expansion of the clientelism thesis. They noted that the process of clientelism is also influenced by shifting social and political institutions. According to Eisenstadt and Roniger, the clientelism process is influenced by various systems and is heavily reliant on the social context. Let just sum up the changes that occurred in society: organized political parties with a formalized party structure took the role of landlords as patrons, and the clients became electorates who expected better and more immediate monetary advantages in return for their

votes. Political parties and politicians were forced to "buy" votes in the shift that gave rise to modern clientelism by giving material incentives to individual or group voters (Katz, 1986).

In order to understand vote buying and elections in Nigeria, clientelism is a good fit. The argument holds that organized political parties with structures under the authority of candidates and the political elite comprise Nigeria as a modern democracy. In elections, political parties and candidates depend on the votes of the people. However, in some cases, political parties and candidates are too far away from the electorate, necessitating the use of an intermediary who speaks on behalf of the brokers and persuades the customers to vote for their patrons. The theory further clarifies that voters do not have to stay faithful to the parties or politicians they are persuaded to support as long as the party provides the benefits they anticipate; if not, they are free to switch to a different party or candidate.

4. METHODOLOGY

In the same manner as Kefe and Oji (2023), the survey approach was utilized in this study. The rationale for adopting this method is that it is suitable for eliciting the response of the electorates on information gap in INEC communications and its influence on vote buying outcome in 2023 gubernatorial election in Delta State, Nigeria. Considering the fact that this study examined the link between Voters' Education and prevalence of Vote Buying, Voter Buying and Voters' choice of candidates, as such, the choice of survey method is adopted (Oji and Bebenimibo, 2021; Bello, 2015).

The area of the study is Delta State from where the samples of residents were randomly selected. To ensure equity and reliability of the findings, the population of the study was taken from the three senatorial districts in Delta State – Delta North, Delta Central and Delta South for administration of questionnaire.

Delta State has total population of 5,663,362 people (2016 population projection, National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The researchers used Cochran's sample size recommendation for sample size determination to arrive at 384 as sample size out of 5,663.363 people living in Delta State (National Population Commission, 2016 projection).

The researchers collected data for the study using a validated questionnaire. The questionnaire is in two parts. The first part is on demographic variables and the second part which is the psychographic consists of different sections which deal with issues on information gap. This

sought to determine the awareness level of the electorates on the electoral act and vote buying by Delta State residents. The third section of psychographic part consisted of Likert Scale items which sought to determine the relationship between vote buying and choice of candidates in elections. The last part seeks to determine the effects of vote buying on the Nigerian democracy.

A total of 384 copies of the questionnaire were distributed. 128 copies of questionnaire were distributed for each of the senatorial districts.

Data in this study were analysed through descriptive statistics. With the use of SPSS version 22, Pearson correlation test at 0.05 significant levels was used to answer research questions. Again, data collected in this research were analysed using simple percentage, frequency counts, tables and graphs

5. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Data Presentation

Table 1: Voters' Card

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	287	88.0
No	39	12.0
Total	326	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 1 above clearly shows that 287 (88.0%) of the respondents have voters' card while 39 representing 12.0% do not have voters' card.

Table 2: Did You Vote?

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	254	77.9
No	72	22.1
Total	326	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

In table 2 above, 254 (77.9%) of the respondents indicated to have voted in the Delta State Gubernatorial Elections of 2023 while 72 (22.1%) did not vote.

Table 3: Voters' Motivation

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Party Membership	66	20.2
Family Member	124	38.0
Sensitization Messages	71	21.8
Voters' were paid	65	19.9
Total	326	100.0

Table 3 above show that 124 (38.0%) voted as a result of persuasion from family members, 71 (21.8%) were motivated by sensitization messages from INEC and NGOs, 66

(20.2%) were persuaded by party members to vote while 65 representing 19.9% were paid to vote.

Table 4: Reasons for not voting

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Lack of Information	33	10.1
Insecurity	74	22.7
Vote Buying	57	17.5
Lack of Interest	84	25.8
Lost of Confidence in Leadership	78	23.9
Total	326	100.0

From table 4, 84 (25.8%) did not vote due lack of interest, 78 (23.9%) did vote because of lost of confidence in leadership of the country, 74 (22.7%) did not vote due to insecurity, 57 (17.5%) did not vote due to instances of vote buying in the electoral system while 33 (10.1%) did not vote due to lack of information about voting.

Table 5: Opinions on whether or not there was vote buying

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	209	64.1
No	43	13.2
Neutral	74	22.7
Total	326	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 5 above shows that 209 representing 64.1% of the respondents affirmed that there was vote buying during the Delta State Gubernatorial Elections of 2023, while 43 (13.2%) opined that there was no vote buying and 74 (22.7%) claimed to be unaware.

Table 6: Manifestation of vote buying

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Sharing of Money	99	30.4
Sharing of Clothes Materials	49	15.0
Sharing of Foodstuff	65	19.9
Free Transportation	50	15.3
Provision of Refreshment	63	19.3
Total	326	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

In table 6 above, 99 (30.4%) of the respondents indicated that vote buying manifested by sharing of money, 65 (19.9%) noted that vote buying manifested by sharing of foodstuffs, 63 (19.3%) stated that vote buying manifested through the provision of refreshment to voters, while 49 (15.0%) are of the opinion that vote buying was manifested through sharing of clothes materials.

Table 7: Did vote buying influenced vote outcome?

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	200	61.3
No	61	18.7
Neutral	65	19.9
Total	326	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 7 above shows that 200 representing 61.3% of the respondents stated that there vote buying during the Delta State Gubernatorial Elections of 2023 influenced the outcome, while 61 (18.7%) indicated that vote buying did not influence the outcome of the election, and 65 (19.9%) were ambivalent

Table 8: Does vote outcome a representative of voters' intention?

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	62	19.0
No	206	63.2
Neutral	58	17.8
Total	326	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 8 above shows that 206 representing 63.2% of the respondents affirmed that vote outcome of the Delta State Gubernatorial Elections of 2023 does not represent voters' intention while 62 (19.0%) opined that the outcome of the elections represent voters' intention and 58 (17.8%) claimed to be unaware.

Table 9: Implications of Vote Buying

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Corruption	141	43.3
Hardship	88	27.0
Improved performances	44	13.5
Gross Incompetence	53	16.3
Total	326	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 9 above show that 141 (43.3%) are of the opinion that vote buying will increase the level of corruption in the State, 88 (27.0%) stated that vote buying will elongate hardship in the State, 53 (16.3%) are of the view that vote buying brings about gross incompetence of the in-coming government while 44 representing 13.5% opined that vote buying will improve the performances of the government.

Table 10: Does Information Gap in INEC Communication impede voting outcome?

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	105	32.2
Agree	90	27.6
Disagree	85	26.1
Strongly Disagree	46	14.1
Total	326	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

From table 10 above, 105 representing 32.2% of the respondents strongly agreed that information gap in INEC Communications impede positive vote outcome, 90 (27.6%) agreed that there was negative outcome owing to information gap in INEC Communications, 85 (26.1%) disagreed that information gap in INEC Communications impede positive vote outcome while 46 representing 14.1% of the respondents are of the opinion that information gap in INEC Communications does not impede positive vote outcome at all.

Table 11: Does information gap in INEC communications negatively impact citizens 'confidence in the electoral system?

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	98	30.1
Agree	89	27.3
Disagree	86	26.4
Strongly Disagree	53	16.3
Total	326	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

It is shown in table 11 above that 98 representing 30.1% of the respondents strongly agree that information gap in INEC Communications negatively impact on citizens’ trust and confidence on the electoral system, 89 (27.3%) agreed that information gap in INEC Communications negatively impact on citizens’ trust and confidence on the electoral system, 86 (26.4%) disagree that information gap in INEC Communications negatively impact on citizens’ trust and confidence on the electoral system while 53 representing 16.3% of the respondents strongly disagree that information gap in INEC Communications negatively impact on citizens’ trust and confidence on the electoral system.

Table 15: Contributions of Information Gap in INEC Communications to the Overall Decrease in Voters’ Turnout

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	65	19.9
Agree	82	25.2
Disagree	117	35.9
Strongly Disagree	62	19.0
Total	326	100.0

It is indicated in table 15 above that 117 representing 35.9% of the respondents disagree that information gap in INEC Communications directly contributed to an overall decrease in voters’ turnout, 82 (25.2%) disagree that information gap in INEC Communications directly contributed to an overall decrease in voters’ turnout, 65 (19.9%) strongly agree that information gap in INEC Communications directly contributed to an overall decrease in voters’ turnout, while 62 representing 19.0% of the respondents strongly disagree that information gap in INEC Communications directly contributed to an overall decrease in voters’ turnout.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of this study showed that 287 (88.0%) out of 326 respondents have Voter’s Card. It is pertinent to state that acquisition of Voter’s Card does not necessitate voting. The study further revealed that 254 (77.9%) voted in the Delta State Gubernatorial Elections of 2023. This implies that majority of Delta State citizens have Voter’s Card and they also voted amass.

It is important to note that people do not do things for no reasons; the study established that 124 (38.0%) of the respondents were motivated to vote owing to financial incentives given to voters by political parties and candidates through their representatives. Meanwhile, respondents claimed that some people did not vote due to loss of trust and confidence on the leadership of the state.

From the findings of this study, 209 (61.1%) of the respondents affirmed that there was vote buying in the Delta State Gubernatorial Elections of 2023. To buttress the above results, among the indices of vote buying as found in this study which are Sharing of Money, Sharing of Clothes/Materials, Sharing of Foodstuff, Free Transportation and Provision of Refreshment, sharing of money, was prominent with 99 (30.4%). It can be deduced from the results that political parties and candidates used money more than other indices as incentive to voters and so influenced them to vote in their favour.

It can be stated that vote buying influenced the outcome of the Delta State Gubernatorial Elections of 2023 as 200 (61.3%) of the respondents affirmed that vote buying influenced the election outcome and it imperative to state that among the methods employed by political parties, candidates and their allies in enforcing compliance of voters to their favour, coercion is prominent. This implies that parties, candidates and their representatives such as thugs used force to ensure voters' compliance.

The study revealed that 141 (43.3%) of the respondents are of the opinion that vote buying increases the level of corruption in governance. This finding is in tandem with the findings of Uwa and Emeka(2022) who stated that besides being illegal as explicitly stated in Nigeria's electoral laws, vote buying also has a tendency to aggravate corruption in public offices as those who hold public mandates are made to seek corrupt means of enriching themselves. The danger is that politicians would first of all recoup all the money invested during nomination of candidates, party-primary election and campaigns. This ugly development will definitely result in looting of state treasury. Vote-buying attached to materials or cash incentives, apart from increasing financial burden on politicians, has its consequences on good governance in Nigeria. According to Waheed (2011), it is quite unfortunate that in Nigeria, we are yet to establish the necessary conditions for effective and efficient Voters' Education to prepare or motivate Voters on election procedures of the nation with the aim of achieving credible elections for sustainable democracy. In the same line, this study discovered that information gap in INEC communications impeded the outcome of the Delta State Gubernatorial Elections of 2023. It is

important to state that voters' education is a requisite for effective and efficient elections which fosters democracy world over. While information gap in INEC communications impeded voting outcome, the gap according to the findings of this study does not contribute to the increase in vote buying.

This study revealed that 98 (30.1%) strongly agree that information gap in INEC communications negatively impact citizens' confidence in the electoral system and 121 (37.1%) agree that information gap in INEC communications hinders effective Voters' Education Campaigns in fighting Vote Buying, whereas 117 (35.9%) disagree that information gap in INEC communications causes overall decrease in Voters' Turnout. Voters need to have positive perception and right orientation about the inalienable roles expected of them if democracy in Nigeria is to stabilise. This task can only be best achieved through thorough and apt Voters' Education.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Nigeria's democracy is under threat due to the growing trend of vote buying and selling in elections. The findings of this study revealed that vote buying has significant effect on voters' choice of candidates during election which has become most prominent as an electoral strategy among political parties and candidates in Nigeria. Capacity, competence and character are not parameters for assessing electoral candidates. Cash-for-votes is emerging as the major determinant of electoral

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