

# **Vote Commodification and the Paradox of Election Credibility in Nigeria: Evidence from the Edo State 2016 Governorship Election**

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## **Abstract**

Informal exchanges have constituted a clog in the wheel of progress in Nigeria electoral system. The choice of candidacy in an election should be the unfringeable right of the voter which ought to be exercised without external influence. However, elections in Nigeria have lacked the virtues of credibility due to the fact that votes are commoditized and money has constituted the lubricant that drives choices in electoral exercises. Against this backdrop, this study examines vote commodification and election credibility in Nigeria using the Edo state 2016 gubernatorial election as a springboard. The survey research method was used and data were analyzed using the simple percentage method. It was discovered that the major reason people turn out for elections in Nigeria is because of the immediate financial or material gain that they could benefit. The study concluded that electoral outcome in Nigeria is not a true reflection of the democratic process rather a pattern of social behavior that is conditioned by informal exchanges. Indeed, the winner in Nigerian elections is the candidate who was able to flex financial muscles and a case of the highest bidder not necessarily the quality of the manifestoes or the integrity of the candidate. Therefore, it is the argument of this study that elections could be free and fair, but it is not all free and fair elections that are credible which the Nigeria situation has become.

**Key Words:** Ballot Stuffing, Clientele, Credibility, Social Exchange, Vote Commodification

**Vote Commodification et le paradoxe de la crédibilité électorale au Nigeria: Témoignages de l'élection du gouverneur de l'État d'Edo 2016**

## **Abstrait**

Les échanges informels ont constitué un obstacle dans la roue du progrès du système électoral du Nigeria. Le choix de la candidature à une élection devrait être le droit inaliénable de l'électeur qui devrait être exercé sans influence extérieure. Cependant, les élections au Nigeria n'ont pas les vertus de crédibilité du fait que les votes sont banalisés et que l'argent est le lubrifiant qui motive les choix lors des exercices électoraux. Dans ce contexte, cette étude examine la marchandisation du vote et la crédibilité électorale au Nigeria en utilisant les élections au poste

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de gouverneur de l'État d'Edo 2016 comme tremplin. La méthode de recherche par sondage a été utilisée et les données ont été analysées à l'aide de la méthode du pourcentage simple. Il a été découvert que la principale raison pour laquelle les électeurs se rendent aux élections au Nigéria est le gain financier ou matériel immédiat dont ils pourraient bénéficier. L'étude a conclu que le résultat électoral au Nigéria n'est pas un reflet fidèle du processus démocratique, mais plutôt un ensemble de comportements sociaux conditionnés par des échanges informels. En effet, le vainqueur des élections nigérianes est le candidat qui a été capable de faire preuve de souplesse et le cas du plus offrant n'est pas nécessairement la qualité des manifestes ou l'intégrité du candidat. Par conséquent, l'argument de cette étude est que les élections pourraient être libres et équitables, mais ce ne sont pas toutes les élections libres et équitables crédibles qui sont devenues la situation au Nigéria.

**Mots-clés:** bourrage de bulletins de vote, clientèle, crédibilité, échange social, marchandisation du vote

## **Introduction**

Credible election is a sine qua none to democratic consolidation and sustenance in any country. This is borne out of the fact that it is an indispensable factor by which the people confer mandate on leaders or withdraw their support. The former involves the process through which legitimate leadership is installed through periodic elections while the latter occurs when an incumbent is voted out of power. As Okunade (2008) argued, credible election epitomizes choice without which voting is a callous mockery of the supremacy of the will of the people. Thus, credible elections are salient indicator of the principally institutionalized means of establishing and changing democratic leaders (Ayoade, 2008; Stokes, 2001). According to Huntington (1991), such means must be organized in an atmosphere devoid of rancor and any form of inducement. Also, the outcome must be generally acceptable to the majority of the electorates and the international community. It is this acceptability that births free and fair elections which consequently emerges from the general application of the rules and regulations that guide the conduct of an election from the pre-election to the post-election activities (Joseph, 2000).

Unfortunately, the conduct of election in Nigeria has always been problematic and lacks the virtues of credibility thus threatening democratic governance. Elections in Nigeria are manifested on the platform of greed, violence, fraud and controversies. Besides malpractices and irregularities that trail elections in Nigeria, there are obviously other numerous factors combined to invalidate the credibility of elections in the country. Political education and sensitizations that were hitherto performed by political parties are now left in the hands of Civil Society Organizations and Non-governmental Organizations. The fact that party agents and corrupt security officials jointly perpetrate dastardly acts of election irregularities laid credence to the truism that Nigeria elections are characterized by ballot box snatching, bribery, ballot stuffing, violence, malpractices, financial inducement and most recently, inconclusiveness.

## **Vote Commodification: A Conceptual Analysis**

While every election malpractice is detrimental to democratic governance and election credibility, the case of vote commodification poses greater threat to our nascent democratic setup than previously thought. In terms of meaning, vote commodification involves the offer of material inducement and the acceptance of same by party agents and the electorates respectively. It is a process whereby votes are placed on the auctioneer's table to be made away by the highest bidder. It is often regarded as an act that manifests in the form of gratuity or gift that is given for the purpose of changing the action or conduct of the recipient (Sha, 2008).

Apart from being a simple economic exchange (Kwaghga and Tarfa, 2015), it also involves the exchange of private material benefits for political support (Bryan and Baer, 2005). For Owwas (2013, p. 2), vote commodification can be defined as:

The phenomenon in the Nigeria electoral process whereby contenders for elective positions used money or money is used on their behalf as an inducement to sway their support which is not based on persuading the electorates to vote according to their wish and conviction but on the force of money that has changed hands.

This definition has become a trend in the Nigerian electoral process in the sense that people usually anticipate election not because of the desire to effect change in the administrative system but to acquire material wealth accruing from informal exchanges. A tendency exist, however, for the vote seller to vote the candidate of his/her choice even after collecting money. For analytical purpose, it is necessary to point out, that the commercial aspirations of vote buyers' may run into two barriers, namely; objective and inter-subjective barriers. On the objective side, seller compliance is uncertain, as vote buying is an illicit business and as such does not take place within a "normal" market protected by social and legal norms. This view is held in high esteem that is why in some polling units in Nigeria, people are stationed around the ballot box area in order to enforce compliance from the seller. Sometimes, the voter is made to display the ballot paper after voting to the clients who shares the cash on behalf of the patron.

On the inter-subjective side, empirical accounts of participants' perspective revealed that those electoral practices we describe as "Vote-Buying" may carry different meaning in different cultural context. Vote commodification is the transformation of polling stations into market places in which the electorates become the sellers while political parties' agents who are acting on behalf of their patrons become the buyers. In other words, vote commodification is usually economic exchange. Candidates 'buy' and citizens/electorates sell vote, as they buy and sell apples, shoes or television sets in the shops and stores (Philip, 2005). The meaning of vote commodification was succinctly captured in Bryan and Baer's (2005, p. 55) explanation when he noted that "the term involves the use of money and direct benefits to influence voters' voting decisions". This is a pragmatic representation of the Nigerian setting. Individual voter in Nigeria is seen as a rational being whose desire and aim is to maximize profit or get income from any available opportunity. The parties' representatives, who also act as agents to their political godfathers, capitalize on this obnoxious rationality of the electorates to induce them with financial and other material benefits in order to alter their choices of candidacy while exercising their franchise. The end product of this illicit action is a case of the highest bidder obtaining the highest number of patronage and whoever emerges the winner is assumed to have pulled larger financial power with his values and capability of less concern to the voter.

The problem this phenomenon has created is the weak policy formulation and poor governance. Elites who attain power through this means become inattentive and pay deaf ears to the plights of the masses. The reason is that having paid to buy the votes of the electorates, the ultimate desire of the elites is to accumulate the lost wealth and enrich themselves. The issue of accountability and responsibility is thrown to the waste basket to be picked up again when another election approaches. Also, mediocres are put in power with inept ability to foster good governance and create good development strategies. The implication is incessant crisis, poverty, increase in crime rate, prostitution, child trafficking, corruption, social unrest, marginalization, etc.

## **Literature Review**

Money politics and vote buying have become a recurrent decimal in Nigeria political terrain and related political science literatures owing to the activities of patrons and their clients during election periods. According to Abdulahi and Tunde (2013), money politics and clientele's network has been the major factor that has ridiculed democratic setting in Nigeria since the first republic. According to them, the Nigerian democracy has had a chequered history; from the Wild-wild experience of first republic that witnessed the emergence of the first military coup in the country to the protracted military interregnum and the aborted third republic to the present democratic dispensation, the country has suffered debilitating experiences of democratic unrest due to the obnoxious activities of godfathers. Their view had hitherto been echoed by Omotola (2007, p. 139) when she argued that "patrimonialism has become a scary phenomenon in Nigeria politics". The term is simply distributive and is deeply rooted in the cultural value of the Nigerian society. Its use in politics has appeared to have facilitated money politics and the criminalization of the Nigerian state.

For Vicente and Wantchekon (2009), clientelism and patrimonialism are terms often used interchangeably in political science literature. They however noted that clientelism (which is informal exchange) is widely perceived as major obstacles to economic development due to the limitations it poses on the rendition of public goods. That is why Bueno et al (2003, p. 4) argued that "a major dilemma in democratic policy-making is that bad policies can be good politics and good policies can be bad politics". For instance, broad public policies such as universal education or health care may be good for growth but may be electorally ineffective. On the other hand, (Wantchekon, 2003; Keefer, 2005; Vicente, 2007) opined that electoral financing and vote buying may generate excessive redistribution at the expense of the provision of public goods and may therefore be seen as bad for growth. Taking a closer look at this assertion, it seems a truism that this phenomenon is dominant in Africa especially as it concerns the issue of underdevelopment. According to Stokes (2005, p. 118)

This issue is of primary importance in the context of Africa, where the traditional political science literature has been pointing to clientelism and vote buying as a structural phenomenon, part of the local political culture, and even as a necessary stage in the process of political development of the continent (as opposed to emphasizing electoral motives and circumstances).

The basic thrust of this position is that politicians often time capitalize on the poverty level of the electorates by offering them unimaginable promises in order to get votes. In doing this, the power seekers go to any length to spend fortune during the election process. After the exercise is conducted and the winner emerges, the first objective will be to recoup whatever amount that was spent while service delivery suffers. This has been the trend in Nigerian elections.

In his examination of money politics and electoral violence in Nigeria, Smah (2008) concurred to the fact that finance is the oil that lubricates the successful conduct of election in any country. However, he argued that there are three basic things that are worthy of consideration as far as the issue of political finance is concerned: the amount of money, the source of the money and the specific purpose the money is meant to serve. Therefore, conflict is a natural feature of democracy in Nigerian democratic set up. This assertion corroborates Vicente and Wantchekon's (2009) argument that election in African countries is seen as investment opportunities which the returns must be acquired before the masses can be considered (which is hardly ever the case). Indeed, the major dilemma in democratic governance is that bad policies can be good politics and good policies can be bad politics.

Also, Ovwasa (2013) observed that money politics and vote buying have taken the center stage in Nigeria's political terrain. The reason being that political parties and their flag bearers have shown, by their conducts during political campaigns, that quality party manifestoes and the integrity of the political office seekers no longer guarantee electoral

success. However, he did not unravel it from the perspective of election credibility but on its implication for good governance. He therefore concluded that the use of money in an election does not inherently possess corruptive intended because money is needed to carry out electoral activities such as mobilization political campaigns and rallies, printing of posters and manifestoes, production of party symbols, etc. The only worry therefore is the negative manner money is put to use by obnoxious politicians, who will leave no stone unturned to attain power, on the rendition of good governance.

From the above, it is noticeable that the contending issue in Nigerian elections has been given minor considerations. Non among the writers have been able to provide answers to questions as to why do electorates really vote in Nigerian elections? What are the motivating factors that determine voters' behavior in an election in Nigeria particularly the Edo state governorship election? Why is election in Nigeria free and fair but lacks the attributes of credibility? Why do voters resort to selling their votes? Also, did financial inducement influence the choice of candidate in Edo state election? Against this backdrop, the onus of this research is to investigate the degree of financial inducement in the Edo state 2016 governorship election and to determine whether the outcome of the election was occasioned by financial inducement. Also, the research aims to find out whether vote buying was one sided as claimed by some party officials who stated that their parties did not resort to any material manipulation of electorates. Furthermore, the study has as its objectives why voters resorted to accepting cash offers in order to vote and whether their choice of candidate actually changed as a result of financial inducement.

### **Theoretical Discourse**

Numerous theoretical strands have been employed to attempt a lucid explanation of money politics. For example, systems theory, structural functionalism, economic war model, rational choice theory, etc. provide veritable analytical tools for the understanding of clientele's network in Nigerian political system. However, the phenomenon of vote commodification is hinged on the theoretical foundation of 'social exchange theory. According to Emerson (1981, p. 32), one of the simplest definitions of social exchange is that "it involves two persons, each of whom provides benefits to the other and contingent upon benefits from the other".

The social exchange theory emerged within the family sciences in the latter part of the twentieth century particularly in 1960s. It arose out of the philosophical traditions of utilitarianism, behaviorism, and neoclassical economics. Early social exchange theory applications in family science arose out of the work of sociologists (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) who focused on the rational assessment of self-interest in human social relationships. At its most basic form, social exchange theory may be viewed as providing an economic metaphor to social relationships. The theory's fundamental principle is that humans in social situations choose behaviors that maximize their likelihood of meeting self-interests in those situations. Taking its perception from mainly human social interactions, proponents of the theory discussed some key assumptions that facilitate the application of it to reality. First among them is that social exchange theory operates on the assumption that individuals are generally rational and engage in calculations of costs and benefits in social exchanges. In this regard, the theory sees humans as rational actors who endeavor to maximize relations through exchange.

Secondly, social exchange theory builds on the assumption that exchanges between or among two or more individuals are efforts by participants to fulfill basic needs. Needs in this aspect involves ambitions and interests of the parties involved in the relationship. Thirdly, the social exchange theory assumes that exchange processes that produce payoffs or rewards for individuals lead to patterning of social interactions. As (Homans, 1958, p. 68) pointed out, "These patterns of social interaction not only serve individuals' needs but also constrain

individuals on how they may ultimately seek to meet those needs". Individuals seek interactions that promote their needs and desires but are also beneficiaries of others' behaviours that also maximize their own goal. The last assumption of the theory is hinged on the fact that individuals are goal-oriented in a freely competitive political system. The political system in modern democratic dispensation is highly competitive that it fulfills basically the doctrine of survival of the fittest. Due to its competitiveness, exchange processes lead to differentiation of power and privilege in social groups to the extent that power in social exchanges lies with those individuals who possess greater resources that provide an advantage in the social exchange. As Blau (1964) noted, those with more resources hold more power and ultimately, are in better position to benefit from the exchange.

This research adopts the first and the last assumptions whose thrust can be summarized as reciprocity in human relations- an idea that when individual or a group of individuals receive favour from another individual or groups, tendency exists for a state of discomfort to set in as a result of perceived level of indebtedness. When such happens, the person or persons involved will feel undue pressure to reciprocate such act in any manner whatsoever so as to restore equilibrium in the relationship (Chadwick-Jones, 1976; Roloff, 1987).

This has been the trend in Nigerian elections from time immemorial whether in the local government, state or national elections. During campaign periods, politicians are usually seen giving gift items to communities. Some even go to the extent of providing empowerment services including scholarships to some impoverished community members and sometimes, the communities of the opposition party's candidate. The whole idea is to condition the mindsets of the populace towards giving their votes with the notion that the philanthropist acts will continue after election. When the election finally arrives, the Philippine's "*utang na Maloob*" (that is the debt of gratitude) become the order of the day.

Those who have benefited from the goodwill actions of the candidates therefore feel indebted to repay in kind by offering their votes. Although, recent realities debunk this position because some people, even after receiving material gifts, still end up voting the candidates of their choice. In some other situations, the party candidates allocate certain amounts to their clients who help to mobilize support at various polling units. They do this by going about and offering prospective voter certain amount in order for them to vote for their candidates.

## **Methodology**

The research, being a quantitative research design is hinged on the survey research method of social inquiry. The population involves all the accredited voters from the three selected local government areas of the state that actually cast their votes during the course of the election. The choice of this population size was occasioned by the fact that voting were carried out simultaneously with accreditation. Thus, the population of the study is put at 134,229 (INEC, 2016). It is obvious that majority of the registered voters in the state did not actually make themselves available for accreditation and voting. Therefore, with the participant nature of this research, it is pertinent to limit the population to the actual people who actively participated in the election.

## **Sample size**

The sample size for this study will be drawn from three local government areas across the three senatorial districts within the state. The local governments are Oredo, Esan North-East and Estako East Local governments. The choice of these selected local governments emanates from the fact that they represent the largest in terms of accredited voters within their various Senatorial Districts. By this, it means that Oredo is the largest in Edo South, Esan North-East the largest in Edo Central while Estako East represents the largest in Edo North Senatorial District. The Yamane Taro formula for deriving sample size was used to determine the sample

size whereas the proportional method is used to determine the sample size of each stratum. The table below gives a distribution of the sample size.

Table 1: Sample Size Distribution

Senatorial District	Selected Local Government	Number of Accredited Voters	Sample Size
Edo South Senatorial District	Oredo	74,076	221
Edo Central Senatorial District	Esan North-East	27, 121	81
Edo North Senatorial District	Estako East	33, 032	98
<b>Total</b>		<b>134,229</b>	<b>400</b>

Yamane Taro formula is given as:  $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$

Where:

n = the sample size,

N= the total population,

e = the percentage error, which is put at 5 per cent.

### Instrumentation

Data for this research were sourced using the survey technique which was carried out with the use of a structured questionnaire that were be distributed to respondents in order to elicit information in line with the objectives of the study. The questionnaire carried closed ended questions structured into two parts viz: part A and part B. the Part A provides demographic questions while the part B conveyed the closed ended questions in line with the research questions that were formulated in the earlier part of the study. The reliability of this method cannot be over stated in the sense that it provides firsthand information from the direct participants in the election exercise who were directly or indirectly affected. The data that were gathered were analyzed using the percentage method.

In administering the questionnaire, four hundred (400) questionnaires were administered to respondents. Being a post-election research, the researcher confirmed from every individual whether he or she participated in the exercise before giving out the questionnaire. Of the total, three hundred and eighty two (382) were retrieved. Thus, this retrieved questionnaires formed the basis of the analysis upon which generalization was drawn.

### Presentation and Analysis of Data

The data collected was presented using frequency table. From table 2, it is obvious from item one (1) that the actual number of retrieved questionnaires represents the total number of respondents, thus a 100 percent response. Item two (2) on the table indicates that about 244 respondents answered positive to the question of offering financial or material inducement to vote which represents 63 percent as against 146 who said no representing 36.1%. The data in item three (3) of the table being show the frequency of respondents whose choice of voting was determined by material inducement. The data show that 61.8% of the respondents voted for a particular candidate as a result of the reward that was given to him. In this light, just about 38.2% did not change their voting pattern even though there was influx of financial inducement. As a follow up to that, it is obvious in item four (4) of the table that just 149 respondents voted for a particular candidate on their own volition representing just 39% of the sampled population. This is arguably a sharp deviation from the 233 number of respondents

who did not vote on their own volition which is represented by 61%. This means that a large number of people came to the polling units just to collect financial rewards without actually having any candidate in mind.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents (N= 382)

S/N	Statement (Dependent Variables)	Response (%)	
		Yes	No
1	Did you vote in the 2016 governorship election in Edo State?	382 (100)	-- --
2	If yes to the question above, were you offered any material goods or finance to cast your vote for any political party?	244 (63.9)	138 (33.1)
3	If you were given something, was your choice of candidacy determined by the reward offered to you?	236 (61.8)	146 (38.2)
4	Did you vote for any candidate on your own volition?	149 (39.0)	233 (61.0)
5	Do you think voters resort to money collection due to distrust in government?	296 (77.5)	86 (22.5)
6	Do you think the winner of the election emerged as a result of vote buying?	244 (63.9)	138 (36.1)
7	Did the security operatives help to prevent sharing of money in your ward or units?	274 (71.7)	108 (28.3)
8	Was it only one political party's agents that attempted to induce candidates financially?	89 (23.3)	293 (76.7)
9	Was there any resistance to financial inducement in your unit or ward?	98 (25.7)	284 (74.3)
10	Was there any form of monitoring those who collected money to vote in order to enforce compliance?	237 (62.0)	145 (38.0)

**Source:** Field Survey (2017)

As shown in item five (5), majority of the respondents (296 or 77.5%), consented to the argument that people resort to collecting money from clients because of the distrust in government as against 86 respondents, representing 22.5% of the sampled population who said the alternative. This view was even orchestrated by one of the respondents who verbally said that:

Once they enter now, we will not know them and they will not know whether we exist anymore.

As shown in item six (6), majority of the respondents concurred that the outcome of the election under study was a reflection of the informal activities that took place during the election. Thus, 244 respondents, representing 63.9% responded affirmative to the question of whether the winner emerged due to vote buying against 138 respondents, representing 36.1%, who said no. In item seven (7) as the table indicates, the security operatives did their best to restore normalcy in the polling units. This is evident from the fact that about 274 respondents, which make up about 71.7%, attested that security operatives made efforts to prevent the sharing of material gifts and money in the polling units. Only 108, representing a meager of 28.3%, attested otherwise. This means that majority of the exchanges that took place were done in clandestine.

As item eight (8) on the table shows, 293 which represents 76.7% of the respondents concurred that different political parties' agents were involved in the clandestine sharing of money and material gifts in order to influence voters' behaviours. In that regard, just 89 respondents, representing 23.3% of the sampled population noted that attempt to induce voters financially was perpetrated by one major political party. As one respondent verbally noted



while filling that part of the questionnaire, with pidgin “na who give me better money I go vote for na” meaning I can only vote for the candidate with the highest offer. This is a confirmation of the fact that there were numerous party agents that shared money to prospective voters. Item nine (9) shows that apart from attempts by the security operatives to prevent open financial inducement by party agents, there was no major resistance from the voters. This is known because 98 respondents attested that there was resistance while 284 respondents noted that there was no further resistance. The percentage is represented by 25.7% and 74.3% of the respondents respectively.

In item Ten (10) above, 237 respondents answered that the agents ensured that mechanisms were put in place in order to ensure compliance by the voter who had collected money. Also, 145 respondents noted that there was no much monitoring mechanism put in place to enforce compliance in their ward. Just 38% of the sampled population attested to this against 62% who noted that there were mechanisms. The researcher observed on the Election Day that some people were stationed within the area of the ballot box to monitor compliance. The voter, having collected reward, stylishly display the thumb printed ballot paper to the agents stationed around as agreed.

Table 3: Respondents’ opinions how to Curb Vote Commodification in Nigeria.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Political Education	202	52.9
Capital punishment for offenders	42	11.0
Putting financial constraints on electoral spending	138	36.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey (2017)

From table 3 above, respondents were asked to give their views about the ways to curbing the menace of vote commodification. Of the sampled population, 202 respondents representing 52.9% suggested that political education is the major way to reduce vote commodification. Also, Forty-two (42) respondents representing 11% suggested capital punishment for offenders while 138 respondents representing 36.1% suggested that putting financial constraints on electoral spending will help the efforts to curb the dastardly effect of vote commodification

## Discussion

Taking a critical look at the above interpretation, it is glaring that a lot of Nigerians cast their votes with reference to the immediate and material goods or financial gain they have to immerse at that particular moment. This assertion was justified with the survey carried out by the researcher where it was observed that, of the 382 sampled respondents, 63.9% were offered material or financial incentive to shape their voting behaviour and 36.1% were of the opinion that they were not offered incentives of any sort (see, table 2 item 2). This view was corroborated by Ojo (2008, p. 111) when he noted that:

In most African countries, the incumbents certainly enjoyed enormous advantage by virtue of their control of the financial purse strings. This enabled them to offer voters certain material inducements in return for their compliance on polling day.

The winning side is always engaging in straight forward vote buying. The concomitant effect of vote buying in electoral contests in the mindset of a politician is that elections are not for the poor. It is an extremely expensive enterprise very expensive (Smah, 2008).

In recent times, election outcomes in Nigeria has been determined by numerous factors ranging from vote buying, rigging, election violence, card reader manipulations etc. These

challenges have formed the trend in electioneering in contemporary period in Nigeria and Edo state has not been left out in this democratic menace. According to this study's statistics, it was seen that, voters' behaviours were extremely altered based on monetary or financial motivational packages which were made available by political aspirants vying for political positions. This is true from the study in which 61.8% respondents confirmed that their choice of candidacy was determined by the reward offered to them. While 38.2% total disagreed that their choice of candidacy was not determined by the reward offered to them by politicians or their agents.

Nigeria, since the experience of independence in 1960 till date, has yet to grab the full dividend of credible democratic election owing to the unwholesome military interregnum and the concomitant obnoxious politicians (majority of who were formal military dictators) who perpetrate corrupt acts in order to retain power. But some analysts will argue that the 1993 elections under the then Head of State, Gen Ibrahim Babangida was near perfect in all of Nigeria's democratic history. Looking at today's democratic events, especially the Edo state 2016 gubernatorial election, a lot of quarters saw the election which brought the present executive governor of Edo state Mr. Godwin Obaseki as free and fair. But the big question put forward by this study is that, was the election process credible?

As the study depicts, even though election violence was at the minimum, it was pointed out that in some polling units, security operatives gave blind eyes to the activities of politicians and their agents in the process of discrediting the genuineness of the Edo state 2016 gubernatorial election. And it was also discovered that, there were no form of resistance to the process of financial inducement in some polling units in Edo state. That is not to say there was no attempt in some units that the security operatives did not make attempt to resist the obnoxious acts of the agents. Up to 72.7% of the population attested to the fact that security operatives made attempt to resist.

The hopes and dreams of all Nigerians is to experience the democratic environment as it is being enjoyed in developed nations of the world. Democratically elected representatives in Nigeria's political system over the years have proven to be self – seeking in their political agendas and as such resulting in underdevelopment in all areas of the nation's political and socio – economic growth. The issue of distrust of government has resulted in most cases to Nigerians selling their votes to immediate financial gains and gratifications. Majority of the people believe that their only chance of gaining any benefit from an aspiring governorship candidate is to collect whatever they could during the election process with the belief that their plights will not be heard after the candidate has assumed position. It was observed from the study that majority of voters' in the 2016 Edo state gubernatorial election resort to money collection due to government distrust in keeping to their campaign agendas. This is obvious from the 77.5% of respondents who concurred to the question of distrust being the reason why people resort to gift collection from aspirants as against the 22.5% who did not agree.

Financial inducement of voters' has been a major challenge to the development of democracy in Nigeria. The inflow of illegal use of money to shape political participation and voters' behaviour has been a continuous trend in the political space of Nigeria (Adeji, 2008). It was discovered during the field survey that, the winners in Nigeria's elections are placed in office owing to financial inducement and influence in voter's choice of candidacy. It is a truism that commodification of vote in the Nigeria politics has constituted a bane to election credibility in the country. While it is obvious from the study that distrust of government and the desire of the electorates to get quick share of the 'national cake' which they think cannot be accessed in post-election, have contributed immensely to the accentuation of clientele network, ignorance of the part of the voters also have a major role to play. Voters in Nigeria, educated or not, have the same level of attitudinal problems towards elections. In advanced democracies, citizens possess a high degree of awareness that will not permit them to be bamboozled by obnoxious

power seekers. Therefore, candidates are judged and perceived based on the manifesto they can articulate.

Many Nigerians are ignorant of this and as such submit themselves to the deceptive and demagogic speeches of politicians who based their campaign on the amount of money they can spend on the field. Also, political cynicism is another issue in Nigeria politics as observed from the study of Edo state gubernatorial election. The voters have come to the belief that politicians are undoubtedly corrupt, self-seeking and incompetent. Also, that politics is a dirty and dishonorable enterprise, particularly in this part of the world, and that the whole political process is a fraud and a betrayal of the public trust. This is further exacerbated by the influx of unfulfilled promises by previous or incumbent political office holders.

## **Conclusion**

The study has revealed that elections in Nigeria, with particular reference to the Edo State governorship election in 2016, lack the virtues of election credibility. As such, candidates who emerged winners in Nigerian elections do not constitute the actual choices of the electorates. They emerge winner based on interplay of external pressure and financial manipulations. It is a truism that any state where voters are not completely insulated from outside pressures, most especially money, they cannot choose freely. Also, if power and money determines electoral choices, constitutional guarantees of democratic freedom and equality turn into dead letters and mere rhetoric. This is true from the perspective that citizens want their share of the so called 'national cake' which they think can only be accessed at the point of voting through money and other gift items. The basic question demanding an answer is the fact that can we ever get out of the wool?

This question is self-tasking because the pathway to growth and development does not depend on the outside but how it is been proposed in the heart. The Edo state governorship election was totally marred with all forms of vote commodification and from the study, it is glaring that the emergent winner did not actually reflect the true state of the election if voters were to vote without external pressure of muscular display of financial power and according to the presented manifestoes. This is a true reflection of the Nigerian situation because the perception remains the same and can be used on the basis of making generalization. That notwithstanding, the bottom line is that election could be adjudged as being free and fair, but it is not all free and fair elections that are credible.

## **Recommendations**

The menace of vote commodification and its consequent implications can be reduced to the lowest ebb if not totally eradicated in Nigeria. The sole method to achieve this long term goal is for all parties involved (both the candidate for election and the electorates) to be properly educated and be aware of the law dealing with vote buying and informal exchanges in Nigeria. Among other electoral law provisions in Nigeria, section 131(1) of the 2006 Electoral Act and section 124 of the 2010 Electoral Act (As amended) state all forms of electoral offences which can facilitate the process of attaining credibility in our electoral system

Also, Section 131 (2) of the same 2006 Act and section 124 (2) of the 2010 Act (as amended) also stated that a voter commits an offence of bribery where before or during an election directly or indirectly himself or by any other person on his behalf, receives, agrees or contracts for any money, gift, loan, or valuable consideration, office, place or employment, for himself or for any other person, for voting or agreeing to vote or for refraining or agreeing to refrain from voting at any such election. Complete awareness of this law, through political education and citizenship enlightenment, will go a long way in curbing the activities of patron-client network in Nigeria.

Furthermore, virile institutional framework is required to achieve an effective and efficient functioning implementation of the rules. Law enforcement agencies should be made virile to ensure that there is strict adherence to the rules and also ensure that offenders are treated accordingly without fear or favour. Not a situation whereby the law enforcement agencies will pay ill attention to the activities of vagabonds and even go to the extent of facilitating the debacle by providing coverage for the deviants. The bedrock of an effective political system is the capacity and ability of the institutions. Without strong and independent institutions to ensure maintenance of law, the laws that are made will only exist on papers as it is today in Nigeria.

Also, electoral bodies and other relevant agencies need to be properly empowered and given absolute autonomy to deal with cases of malpractices ranging from vote buying and other informal exchanges.

Lastly, the human factor of greed cannot be eliminated from this electoral misdemeanor. As revealed from the study, greed constitutes one of the major greases that lubricate the wheel of vote buying in Nigeria. The desire to make quick wealth by having a share from the national cake creates laziness and breeds a sense of irresponsibility for the common man. By implication, they see election as the only means to get access to wealth and also from the politicians.

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