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Political Public Relations as a Tool for Combating Vote buying in Nigeria for Development Purposes

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Abstract The main aim of the study is to identify political public relations approaches that can be applied by the government and other bodies responsible for conducting elections in Nigeria to mitigate and eliminate vote buying. The study adopted a qualitative approach in the contextual analysis of data collected specifically from secondary sources. The results revealed that vote buying has become synonymous with elections in Nigeria. After reviewing some related empirical studies, several factors responsible for vote buying in Nigeria have been identified, including poverty, lack of education, high cost of buying forms to contest elections, and many others. Moreover, where votes are purchased by political parties and candidates, the essence of elections as a credible leadership selection process is often put on the line. Another disadvantage associated with vote buying is that the practice can produce leaders who have questionable characters and are not the actual choice of the masses. Where this practice is condoned, this can lead to bad governance and, ultimately, underdevelopment. Therefore, the study recommends good governance and enough sensitization campaigns as political public relations strategies of combating vote buying in Nigeria.

Keywords: election; development; Government; Public relations; Vote buying.

1. Introduction

Development is much sought after by nations, especially developing nations like Nigeria. However, this cannot be attained when the democratic process of leadership selection is faulty. This submission is premised on the fact that the development of any nation rests on the kind of leadership it has. In other words, leadership is the foundation upon which the success of any nation depends. Therefore, this explains why the selection of people into leadership positions in any society is expected to follow established procedures so that the process will be free from any kind of fraudulent practice. The main reason for this is to ensure that the right people are elected to manage the affairs of such a nation. This is the reason why democracy has been

adopted throughout the world, including Nigeria, as the right practice of determining those who will exercise leadership authority over their nations.

Democracy, in this regard, is the best practice of leadership selection, because it requires the participation of every citizen (Farrell & Suiter, 2019). Lioba and Abdulahi (2005) democracy is “a system of government that allows citizens of a country to choose freely their leaders”. Odionye (2016) defines democracy as:

“...any system of government that is rooted in the notion that ultimate authority in the government of the people rightly belongs to the people, that everyone is entitled to an equitable participation and share in the equal rights and equitable social and economic justice as the birthright of everyone in the society. The basic characteristics of democracy include the existence of the mechanisms for political and economic choice, balanced political structure and stable political system ...”

According to the definition above, when people are actively involved in the selection of those that can lead them in a society, it results in the stability of the political system. This implies the absence of instability, which may ignite a crisis, and where there is crisis, there will be no development. In line with this position, Chiakaan and Tsafa (2021) argue that development cannot take place in a rancorous environment. Unfortunately, this is what Nigeria is currently experiencing as a developing society.

Incidentally, democracy does not only bring stability, but it also brings responsible leaders into a government. Those in the government must be responsible in serving the electorate, because the same electorate that voted them into government also have the power to remove them. Indeed, the power of the people to determine who represents them in government is what makes democracy the best system of government (Jev & Dzoho, 2014). Certainly, people exercise this ultimate power democratically through elections, which is why elections are the hallmark of a democracy.

Koirala et al. (2021) considers democracy as a system of government with representatives who are elected under the rule of law. Similarly, Nwankwo (2002) defines democracy as “a system that gives periodic opportunities for the masses to choose their leaders... a system of government in which the will of the people prevails.” Nwankwo further defines democracy as “a majority government; a government elected by the majority of the electorates who are qualified adult citizens.”

Based on the foregoing discourse, if elections comprise the very core of a democracy cherished globally, it implies that they must be conducted in a credible manner. Credible elections are those that are conducted based on the guidelines stipulated not only by the

electoral body but also by law so that only people who are deemed credible by the electorate are selected to run the government.

The world body, according to [Gastil & Wright \(2018\)](#) defines inclusiveness as a situation wherein elections provide equal opportunities for all eligible citizens to participate as free voters in selecting their representatives and to serve as candidates for elections to government. Meanwhile, “transparency” is the principle linked to the fundamental right of citizens to seek, receive, and impact information ([Meijer et al., 2015](#)). The principle of competitiveness offers all citizens reasonable and equal opportunities to compete for elected positions in the government. Political competition shows that elections are naturally competitive, implying that the former is a central component of elections that reflects the will of the people.

As mentioned previously, and as preached by experts of political science and other bodies concerned with the conduct of elections and other bodies, such as the UN, which are concerned with responsible government, peace, and development of nations globally, if this should be the case, then various elections conducted in Nigeria, especially the recent ones conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 2019 up to 2020, are far below the expected standard.

In fact, even though elections in Nigeria are far from being democratic due to various forces, the most destructive force for Nigerian elections would be the practice of vote buying. In their work against this undemocratic practice, [Nkwede and Abah \(2019\)](#) explain that:

“... Across the globe, election represents a mechanism which people are elected to offices. It is a modern and universally accepted process through which individuals are openly and methodically chosen to represent a body or community in a large entity of government. It is still one of the cardinal features of democracy. Democracy itself is adjudged to be the best form of government all over the world but simultaneously being constantly assaulted in Nigeria due to the phenomenon of vote buying. Indeed, vote buying seems to have the centre stage in the democratization process in Nigerian politics. Essentially, the electorates trade their votes for certain outcomes that are important to them ...”

However, [Nkwede and Abah \(2019\)](#) are not alone in their study regarding the commercialization of votes during elections in Nigeria. In fact, there are other similar studies carried out by [Bratton \(2008\)](#), [Ologbenla and Adiza \(2012\)](#), to name a few. According to [Olaito \(2018\)](#), the election period in Nigeria can be compared to a season of give and take with many commercial activities in the red-light district. Moreover, vote buying does not only take place in the wee hours of the election day but actually starts much earlier: from the fees charged by political parties for application forms for party officers from the national to the local levels, the party caucus meetings, congresses, conventions, campaign grounds, party primaries all the way

up to the general elections. Vote buying is as undemocratic as it is a giant stumbling block to the principles of credible elections.

1.1. Theoretical framework

This work is anchored on the system theory which came into existence in the 19th century as propounded by George Hegel. The system, by classification, according to [Littlejohn \(1996\)](#), is a set of things that relate to one another and form a whole. [Scott \(2005\)](#) sees a system as one which studies “parts in aggregates and movement of individuals with the environment of the system, interactions among individuals in the systems (and the) general growth and stability of a system.”

By way of simplification and clarification, the system theory preaches the fact that the society is made up of different parts which must all function, although independently, for the overall wellbeing of the society. This implies that for a society or any organization to succeed in achieving its goals, the various parts in that society or organization must not only be engaged but must be seen functioning effectively; if one part is neglected or is not functioning well, it will definitely affect the other parts and the entire society or organization. This is the reason why the importance of the system theory to this study cannot be overemphasized. Political public relations exist in order to contribute its quota for the advancement and sustainable development of democratic governance in Nigeria, neglecting it, in this regard, portends danger.

It's the desire of the citizens in every community that dividend of democracy should be availed by the elected representatives in government. But, suffice it to be said that vote buying negates this believe as it's an impediment to socio-economic development, encourages political destabilization and enthronement of unpopular candidates.

Vote buying must not be condoned, because it gives some people, who are not the choice of the masses, opportunities to secure government positions. Such people see government operations as their personal business and thus run it for their selfish interest instead of considering what is best for the masses and the entire society. The risks associated with this obnoxious practice can be mitigated using different approaches. After all, in the rendezvous of victory, all hands must be on deck. On this noted, it becomes exigent for political public relations—a branch of public relations profession essentially concerned with peace and harmony between the governed and governors—to raise its voice toward combating this undemocratic practice of vote buying in Nigeria. Thus, the current paper is concerned with how political public relations can be applied in the fight against vote buying in Nigeria.

1.2. Statement of problem

Vote buying has become a common practice associated with elections in Nigeria. Apart from reports from the media and different organizations that observed elections in Nigeria in 2015 and 2019 and the governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States in 2020, studies carried out by several scholars, such as [Chile and Habu \(2020\)](#), [Davies \(2016\)](#), [Nkwede and Abah \(2019\)](#), [Iornumbe et al. \(2020\)](#), and [Oyewole and Omotola \(2020\)](#), have attested to this anti-democratic practice in Nigerian elections. Unfortunately, vote buying has no positive benefit as far as credible elections are concerned. It does not only mar the credibility of elections, it also destroys the credibility of INEC and the image of Nigeria as a country in the committee of nations. Currently, such practice has produced leaders who have questionable characters and are not actually elected by the people to represent them.

This kind of practice does not guarantee stability in government and society leading to underdevelopment. The drawbacks associated with vote buying imply that a collective effort by all institutions and professions is required in the fight against it. Political public relations is one of the instruments that, if properly applied by the government, can significantly contribute to eliminating vote buying in the Nigerian politics for developmental purposes. Thus, the present study unravels political public relations approaches in tackling vote buying in Nigeria.

2. Methods

The paper employed a qualitative approach and specifically focuses on Nigeria. As it is not quantitatively inclined, the study did not adopt a survey design but adopted a qualitative design, using data collected through secondary sources, including textbooks, newspapers, magazines, journal articles, and corporate websites. The data qualitatively provided details about the subject matter of vote buying and political public relations; they also provided evidence about the existence of vote buying in Nigeria and the associated dangers in the context of a developing democracy like Nigeria's. The analysis of the data collected was contextually done with conclusions made inferentially.

3. Results and discussion

This section contains details of discussions originating from the data collected. Specifically, the section reviews the concepts of political public relations and vote buying; the extant literature related to the study, including the dangers associated with vote buying; political

public relations approaches in curbing vote buying in Nigeria; previous empirical studies that are related to vote buying; and the theory upon which the study is anchored.

3.1. Concept of political public relations

Political public relations are not different from the common concept of public relations. The difference between the two may be perceived in terms of the fact that the former is a unique form of the latter and is inclined to politics and governance. It is the democratic aspect of public relations that seeks to achieve a sound, healthy, and symbiotic interaction between the government and the masses. Political public relations, according to [Nwosu \(1996\)](#), [Keghku \(2005\)](#), and [Froehlich and Rüdiger \(2006\)](#) is different from educational, financial, community, media, and other aspects of public relations.

Understanding the concept of public relations can enhance our understanding of political public relations. Unfortunately, it is not easy to grasp what truly constitutes public relations. Such uneasiness is responsible for the uncountable definitions of public relations. Even Rex Harlow, according to [Ajala \(2001\)](#) could not exhaust all the definitions of public relations from various scholars and professional bodies despite his efforts. However, there is an issue on the criminality of public relations by some definitions ([Azmi & Zainudin, 2021](#); [Davies, 2016](#)). Criminal approaches to public relations are those that associate the latter with “using what you have to get what you want.” Thus, it means vote buying will never be condemned, as those seeking elective offices are using material things and money to obtain votes from the electorate in whatever way. Certainly, public relations are not a cover up strategy, nor do they play sycophancy or mere lip service; it is not propaganda either. Interestingly, [Osuji \(2001\)](#) believes that public relations are not propaganda and not a form of bribery.

Modern public relations take a Marxist approach when public relations are used as tool to win the affection, sympathy, understanding and support of the public by an organization for harmonious coexistence leading to development. When modern public relations seek to achieve development, this is referred to “developmental public relations.” The World Assembly of Public Relations that met in the city of Mexico in 1978 came up with a definition of “public relations” that is popularly referred to as the Mexican Statement. According to [Mohamad et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Swann \(2019\)](#) states that:

“... Public relations are the art and science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization leaders, and implementing planned programmes of actions which serve both the organization and the public interest ...”

The Mexican Statement is crucial in this effort to assist the government and INEC in finding a solution to the menace of vote buying in Nigeria. Political public relations, therefore, do not only refer to the “art” but also to the “science” of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences in society, and counseling those in leadership positions about the implications of the trends observed and analyzed. Political public relations are also concerned with planned programs by governments, whose execution can be of interest both to the former and the rest of the public. It is said that the government is engaged in political public relations, in which it can observe and predict the consequences of vote buying as well as embark on planned and executed programs that can go a long way in stopping vote buying in Nigeria.

The British Institute of Public Relations offers a similar notion to that of the Mexican Statement. According to [Chiakaan \(2016\)](#), the institute simply defines public relations as “the deliberate and planned effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its public.” When elections are credibly conducted, in which the people are allowed to cast their votes according to the dictates of their hearts, thus leading to the election of the people they have voted for, it can not only make them pleased but also supportive of the government. This phenomenon can be described as an aspect of political public relations. Therefore, in this sense, political public relations do not differ from traditional public relations. It is concerned with the management of planned and executed programs by the government as well as governmental and non-governmental bodies that are communicated to the people to enable them to think, speak, and act well toward the government. It covers the entire political process. In his conceptualization of political public relations, [Osuji \(2001\)](#) states that:

“... If we accept some or all of the above definitions, then we can postulate that political public relations is that aspect of public relations that is used in furtherance of political process. It may cover very many areas of political process, party formation, political campaign, membership drive, public and private, political communications, image building, influence, lobbying, legislative proceedings, executive relationship with various groups etc. political public relations is, therefore, sustained efforts to enhance or advance the cause of (politicians) or those involved in furtherance of political processes in a society whether elected or appointed ...”

From the foregoing discourse, when public relations are implemented to achieve credibility in Nigerian elections, it is considered an aspect of political public relations. The major aim of political public relations is to advance democracy for the purpose of achieving development. Furthermore, it is also related to political communication ([Denton & Woodward, 1998](#)).

3.2. Concept of vote-buying

Vote buying has various definitions according to different scholars. For instance, [Schaffer and Schedler \(2006\)](#) define “vote buying” as a practice wherein candidates buy and sell votes in the same way as they buy and sell produce or everyday items. This implies that vote buying is not actually different from a marketing interaction between buyers and sellers of goods. The buyers, in this case, are the political parties and their candidates, who use money and other material items to buy votes from the electorate or induce them to vote for them during elections. This notion echoes that of [Nkwede and Abah \(2019\)](#), who posit that vote buying is an act of exchanging one’s own vote for material gains. Looking at vote buying from a contemporaneous perspective, [Canare et al. \(2018\)](#) note that this practice is about clientelism, whereby voters support candidates who provide them with particularistic forms of redistribution. Similarly, [Matenga \(2016\)](#) defines vote buying as a contract or an action in which voters sell their vote to the “highest bidder.” Matenga further defines vote buying as “any form of financial, material or promising inducement or reward by a candidate, political party, agent or supporter to influence a voter to cast his or her vote or even abstain from doing so in order to enhance the chances of a particular contestant to win an election.”

Another similar definition of vote buying is proposed by [Oladopo et al. \(2020\)](#), who define it as “any form of financial, material or promising inducement or reward by a candidate, political party, agent or supporter to influence a voter to cast his or her vote or even abstain from doing so in order to enhance the chances of a particular contestant to win an election.” Armed with the various submissions, it can be deduced that two parties are involved in the practice of vote buying: political parties or their candidates/agents, on the one hand, and the electorate with their voters’ cards, on the other hand. Here, the politicians offer money and other material things or promises to induce the electorate to vote for them or to prevent them from voting for candidates who, otherwise, they would have originally voted for. Thus, in this regard, vote buying is anti-democratic; it ruins the spirit of fair play, which modern democracy upholds. Hence, it will not be out of place to infer that vote buying is an undemocratic strategy of using financial or other material things by parties in an election aimed at obtaining unwarranted and unmerited favors from voters and those involved in determining the outcome of an election.

3.3. Dangers associated with vote-buying

Studies have already reviewed this phenomenon, and different scholars have shown that vote buying is not healthy for democracy and the development of Nigeria and other developing nations. In particular, [Onuoha and Ojo \(2018\)](#) condemns it:

“... The consequences of vote buying are manifold... it unduly raises the cost of elections thereby shutting out contestants with little finances and promoting political corruption. When victory is purchased rather than won fairly, it obviously leads to state capture. It equally compromises the credibility, legitimacy and integrity of elections vote buying undermines the integrity of elections as the winners are often the highest bidders and not necessarily the most popular or credible contestants. It, therefore, discourages conscientious people from participating in electoral political process and causes citizens to lose faith in state institutions ...”

Vote buying is a practice that rather makes a mockery of democracy. This is premised on the fact that when money is the determining factor of electing people into public offices, such as governors, presidents, senators, and so on, many credible people who would have been elected and who would have governed the nation well will not be elected. The implication is that governance will become a business venture for those who would simply use their money to secure a government position for their own interests. This, no doubt, has a counter-productive effect: rather than performing to improve the living standard of the people and bring about development in the country, the so-called elected people would only be after their personal gains.

Vote buying, from the foregoing discourse, also fosters bad governance. When people spend massive amounts of money to influence voters and others involved in the electoral system to win elections, the implication is that their performance can hardly reflect the interest of the masses. In a real democratic election, the electorate has the power to elect their leaders and have equal say in voting them out of power as well. This power possessed by the electorate means that elected public office holders are more conscious of how they govern the masses and the way they perform in ways that would endear them to the electorate and win subsequent elections. The beauty of democracy, however, is killed by the practice of vote buying. Political leaders have always believed that that their money can buy votes for them anytime.

Many scholars, such as [Omotola \(2007\)](#), [Saliu and Lipade \(2008\)](#), [Durotoye \(2014\)](#), [Ejue and Ekanem \(2011\)](#), and [Canare et al. \(2018\)](#), have—in various ways—spoken against vote buying as being destructive to the democratic system of electing good leaders. In their work on money politics and vote buying, [Adamu et al. \(2016\)](#) have identified some challenges and dangers related to vote buying:

- 1) Vote buying sends a wrong signal regarding the value and nature of our leaders.
- 2) Vote buying does not give legitimacy to a government, which is supposed to be the foundation upon which the people express support of and trust in the government.
- 3) Vote buying leads to the militarization of the electoral process—a practice that heightens the apprehension of voters who may be forced to collect money and comply under duress.
- 4) People with integrity and those who genuinely want to serve the people but have no money to buy votes may lose out in the electoral contest, while bad candidates with abundant financial resources or those with corrupt tendencies may get elected.
- 5) Money politics, vote buying, and voting behavior have also resulted in election results having little or nothing to do with the elected politicians' performance in office. As performance is no longer considered as the critical factor in electoral outcomes, their incentive to perform is weak.
- 6) The practice of vote buying constitutes serious impediments on public policy and other important segments, which, in turn, brings the highest indignity to the electoral and democratic process.

3.4. Political public relations approaches in curbing vote-buying in Nigeria

If we have already agreed that political public relations represent a broader aspect of traditional public relations but is essentially concerned with the application of public relations approaches for the betterment of democracy and governance, it is thus implied that political public relations has a very fundamental role to play in putting an end to the practice of money politics and vote buying in Nigeria.

Importantly, when elections are conducted based on principles laid down constitutionally, when elected leaders in government perform well, it implies that political public relations are at work. Public relations, as a field of study, is inclined to produce good performance that is publicly appreciated. This perception has made [Nwosu \(1996\)](#) appreciate what he calls the commonsensical definition of public relations: “good deeds by an organization that are made known ... good things an organization does which are appreciated by its publics.”

The implication of the foregoing discourse is that if vote buying is to be discouraged, the government must take charge of its responsibilities. In this regard, the performance of the Nigerian government in the past and present leaves much to be desired. Lamenting this unfortunate situation, [Chiakaan and Tsafa \(2021\)](#) state that:

“... Fundamentally, the problem lies in the inability of the Nigerian government to provide good governance to Nigerians. If there is absence of good governance, the reverse is the case; bad governance.

Interpretatively, [Jev and Dzoho \(2014\)](#) posit government as encompassing, ‘the state’s institutional and structural arrangements, decision making process and implementation capacity, and the relationship between the governing apparatus and the government, that is the people in terms of their standard of living ...’

Vote buying is quickly gaining ground in the field of Nigerian politics, because the government and others responsible for providing leadership have failed in improving the lives of the masses. In fact, poverty has become more widespread in Nigeria, despite its abundant natural resources. As [Jev and Dzoho \(2014\)](#) stated:

“... Thus, the poor in Nigeria are still widely considered worse off as many indicators, reflecting the ability to provide for physical subsistence for the up-liftment of human dignity are below expectation. These include inadequate levels of supply of food, clothing, shelter, portable water, health service and basic education ...”

No doubt, poverty has alienated the poor Nigerians farther away from the government. This implies that a harmonious coexistence between the government and those who are governed is seriously lacking. As a result, some eligible Nigerians do not respect the laid down principles for credible elections in the country. Political public relations require that the government exercise responsibility and accountability, while living up to Nigerians’ expectations of eliminating poverty, thus making them happy and cooperative in eradicating various forms of vices.

When political public relations are recognized and effectively applied by the government, corruption cannot be an acceptable practice. To date, the government has seriously and frantically fought corrupt leaders both in the past and present, taking them to court for judgment and appropriate punishment. Unfortunately, government efforts have yet to be fully appreciated by the public. However, according to [Collins and Gambrel \(2017\)](#), corruption portends negative effects on democracy in terms of decreasing government effectiveness and political legitimacy and increasing instability. Where the poor masses see the people, whom they elected to help them improve their living standard, amassing wealth for themselves, they see nothing wrong with collecting money from them before voting for them. Therefore, eliminating corruption is another powerful political public relations instrument in the fight against vote buying in Nigeria.

Certainly, public relations activities are made possible by communication, which is the foundation upon which all public relations activities are built and sustained. Haywood (1984) in [Chiakaan \(2016\)](#) agrees with this view:

“... organizations discuss whether they should have public relations or not; they have no option. An organization has no choice whether to ‘have’ public relations. All organization are communicating with all audience that are of importance to them, whether they like it or not; all are listening (or not listening) to all the reactions of key publics ...”

The focus of the foregoing discourse is that the government and its agencies related to the conduct of elections should employ the weapon of communication in the war against vote buying. In this regard, adopting an integrated communication approach may be helpful. By employing planned and executed communication approaches, such as direct communication, community meetings, advertising, sponsorships, commentaries, and many others, through different communication media, the poor Nigerian masses can be educated about the drawbacks associated with vote buying.

3.5. Exploring other related empirical studies on Vote Buying

Although many past studies are somewhat similar, only few of such works are selected and reviewed in the current study. The first of such studies is the one carried out by [Onuoha and Ojo \(2018\)](#) entitled *Practice and Perils of Vote Buying in Nigeria’s Recent Elections*. They adopted a qualitative design in contextually analyzing data collected from secondary sources. They discovered that vote buying is not fundamentally new to Nigeria’s electoral politics, nor is it only restricted to Nigeria or Africa. They further condemned the practice of vote buying, describing it as antithetical to the ethos and norms of democracy. Among many others, the study recommended that the INEC and the Economic Financial Crimes Commission should develop a strategic collaborative framework to ensure the effective monitoring of political parties’ campaign funds in order to effectively curb electoral fraud, including vote buying. It also recommended that media and civil society organizations should intensify voter education campaigns to heighten public awareness regarding the negative implications of vote trading.

The study of [Adamu et al. \(2016\)](#) entitled *Money Politics and Analysis of Voting Behaviour in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects for Free and Fair Elections* is another qualitative study that contextually analyzed data from secondary sources. They identified several factors, such as the ignorance of the electorate, apathy, poverty, inadequate information, deceit by politicians, and many others, as the main factors responsible for the persistence of vote buying in Nigeria. The study also made many recommendations, including the expansion of the scope of responsibilities involving elaborate sensitization and voter education regarding the

importance of their conscience in the voting process in elections held by government and non-government organizations.

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

Like others, Lucky (2014) similarly raised his voice against vote buying. Lucky's study, entitled *Money Politics and Vote Buying in Nigeria: The Borne of Good Governance*, adopted a qualitative design with data also collected from secondary sources and analyzed contextually. Among other factors, the author found that vote buying is caused by the inability of many political parties and contestants to implement comprehensive and comprehensible manifestoes for scrutiny by voters as well as the political cynicism on the part of voters, who believe that political office holders are incurably corrupt, self-seeking, and incompetent; that politics is a dirty and dishonorable enterprise; and that the whole process is a fraud and a betrayal of public trust. Over the years, the people's perception that every elected or appointed public officer is amassing wealth from the public treasury was greatly reinforced by the obscene display of opulence by public office holders and the ostentatious lifestyles of many politicians. The study preached against vote buying, disclosing that money politics and vote buying have resulted in elections results having little or nothing to do with the elected politicians' performance in office.

A qualitative study by Mohammed (2016) entitled *The Menace of Vote buying and selling in Nigeria and Ways Forward* echoes the studies reviewed here. In fact, Mohammed's study reinforces the notion that vote buying is not only destructive to Nigeria's democracy but also a clog in the wheel of development.

In their study entitled *Election Fraud in Nigeria: A Philosophical Evaluation of the Framework of Electoral Violence*, Casimir et al. (2013) approached the issue of electoral fraud in new and emerging democracies, such as Nigeria. Like other studies, they contextually analyzed the data they qualitatively obtained and showed that vote buying constitutes a major issue leading to electoral violence and electoral fraud in Nigeria's democracy, with negative effects on good governance and national development. Vote buying has further been condemned by Nkwede and Abah (2019) in their study on *Election and Vote Buying in Nigeria: An Albatross to Democratization Process*. They argued that vote buying in Nigeria has impacted negatively the country's democratic process, as it leads to political apathy, leadership crisis, political violence, poor political culture, and insensitivity to the needs of the people. One noticeable gap between among all previous studies reviewed and the current one is the fact that none of the studies have clearly advocated for the application of political public relations in managing the problem of vote buying, which has undermined democracy and development in Nigeria. Thus, the current work focuses on addressing this gap.

4. Conclusion

Vote buying, an unacceptable practice globally, appears to have become an integral part of Nigerian elections. Many elections conducted by different electoral bodies in Nigeria, up to the ones conducted by INEC especially in 2015 and 2019, have been characterized by vote buying. Unfortunately, this is an anti-democratic practice that can never take Nigeria out of her current predicament of underdevelopment. The reason is that where voters are offered money or other material gains to vote for candidates who are not their choice, their conscience—and their choice—is taken away from them. This also implies that many credible factors that can be used as criteria for voting candidates into political offices for the betterment of the society are sacrificed. In turn, this paves the way for unpopular or unqualified candidates with questionable attributes to be elected into government and other public offices.

This situation, therefore, calls for a collective effort toward eliminating this practice. On this noted, government and other agencies charged with democratic upliftment and sustenance must employ political public relations to fight the menace of vote buying in Nigeria. Among others, this is a tool that demands for Nigerian leaders' good governance, resulting in the elimination of poverty and other forms of injustices. At the same time, it requires freedom of the press and a high reduction of illiteracy, with more attention given to education and security. The following recommendations, based on what has been discussed, are hereby proposed:

- 1) Applying a political public relations approach requires that the INEC, the body in charge of elections in Nigeria, should be free from government interference. In other words, the INEC must be a truly independent body.
- 2) A political public relations approach further means that the INEC should employ strategic communication by adequately utilizing mass communication, new media, and traditional communication to ensure that voters are educated. In this way, they will know the dangers of selling their votes, thus helping them learn more about their rights during an election.
- 3) A political public relations approach will require the INEC to implement digital results transmission. This calls for electronic voting and electronic counting and transmission of results.
- 4) Again, the judiciary should never hesitate and delay determining cases that are inclined to vote buying and other harmful electoral practices. Any delay may cultivate fear among those who may wish to use money and other dubious strategies to woo voters in elections.
- 5) The body responsible for the conduct of elections in Nigeria, the INEC, should reduce the cost of buying forms by political candidates wishing to run in elections. The INEC must also ensure that political parties and their candidates do not spend beyond a fixed amount of money during their campaigns leading to elections.

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Authors Contributions

Egbulefu, Chamberlain Chinsom conceived of the research idea. Gbaden, Jacob Chiakaan and Kpera, Wombu Richard developed, researched, and reviewed the concepts and related literature to the study; they also developed the theory upon which the study is built. Kaigama, Kwapsoni Pius typed the manuscript and is responsible for all communications with publishers of ASEAN Journal of Community Engagement. The authors participated in discussing the results and proofreading the manuscripts leading up to the final submission of the manuscript.

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