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Comparative Evidence of Voters' Inducement in Some Selected States Across the Globe: The Attitude is not in Colour but in Nature

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of vote buying across selected democracies, namely the United States, France, India, Kenya, and Nigeria, with the aim of demonstrating that electoral inducement is a global challenge rooted more in human behavior and elite interests than in race, culture, or geographical location. Drawing on the Elite Theory of Pareto, Mosca, Michels, and Mills, the paper argues that political elites frequently manipulate electoral processes through material inducements to maintain power and preserve existing political structures. The study adopts a comparative political approach and relies on secondary data from scholarly literature, reports, and documented electoral experiences. The findings reveal that vote buying has deep historical origins, dating back to the Roman Republic, and continues to manifest in both developed and developing democracies. While the United States and France have significantly reduced direct vote buying through institutional reforms, legal regulations, and stronger democratic norms, instances of electoral inducement and political patronage still occur. In contrast, India, Kenya, and Nigeria experience higher levels of vote buying, often facilitated by poverty, weak accountability mechanisms, intense electoral competition, and clientelistic political systems. The study identifies common patterns across the selected countries, including the use of material incentives to influence voter behavior and the role of socioeconomic vulnerability in increasing voter susceptibility. The paper concludes that vote buying remains a serious threat to democratic consolidation, electoral integrity, and good governance. It recommends stronger enforcement of electoral laws, increased voter education, improved political accountability, and institutional reforms aimed at reducing the influence of money in politics and promoting issue-based democratic participation.

Key words: Clientelist Political systems, Democracy, Inducement, Patronage Politics, Voters,' and Vote Buying.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vote-buying is an international phenomenon, its growth across the globe political system, is a thing of concerns especially from nations that believed they have attained high degree of democracy maturity like United State of America and France etc. Also, in Australia, where political campaigns often utilize data-driven strategies such as political micro-targeting style to influence voters' behaviour. Techniques such as psychographic profiling are employed, where demographic and psychological data are analyzed to tailor messages that resonate with individual voters. These methods involve leveraging digital platforms and algorithms to exploit cognitive biases and unconscious decision-making processes; (O'Neil, 2015, Schaffer, 2002). Additionally, traditional media like television and print remain significant for disseminating persuasive political advertisement (IRI, 2024).

Vote buying and selling have grown commonplace in different continent of the world, endangering the countries willingness to adopt democratic values. Voting is a vital component of civic participation in democracy, in which politicians are largely expected to "play fair by acknowledging the legitimacy of their opponents, compete for power by seeking to attract voters to their ideology or policy programmed, and acknowledge the outcome of free elections as a judgment on their success or failure. Davies (2006) also opened that Vote-buying is a dishonorable trend in politics across the globe that has its roots in a number of predisposing conditions, being aided. Political parties' and candidates' incapacity to present thorough and understandable manifestos for voters to review, meaningless slogans and demagogic, rabble-rousing speeches are given in place of precise manifestos that would allow the electorate to make an informed political decision.

Oyedeji and Jegede (2024) Opined that despite liberal Democracy has been deemed the best form of government in the world, and it is also believed that the worst democracy is preferable to the best autocracy, but the menace of vote buying and selling has become a social problem in our electoral process, negatively impacting democratic consolidation. Vote buying start from monetisation of party internal competition that undermined participatory governance, weakens accountability, discourages ideological engagement and reproduces a hierarchical order in which financial backers dominate political outcomes. In this situation, control of party finances effectively became synonymous with control of the party itself, eroding institutional autonomy and limiting reform potential.

The significant of this paper is that the advent of comparative politics has informed the political scientist for the need to enquire through universally valid body of knowledge concerning political behavior which transcends national boundaries, by providing an explanation to the differences or similarities in behavior of politicians and political systems in different cultural settings for the purpose of learning lessons that can metamorphoses into development.

If vote buying is not corrected within the ambit of extant laws as enshrined in the constitution, the average citizen might develops a justifiable cynicism towards the political process, many participants will believed that democratic competition is a game set within arbitrary rules for the contestation of power, rather than a genuinely democratic process in which majority public preferences will set the agenda for public policy.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Historical Origin of Vote Buying

Vote buying is not a modern phenomenon; it has existed since ancient times. In the **Roman Republic (509–27 BCE)**, many politicians sought popular support by distributing money, grain, food, and sponsoring public games and entertainment. These acts were often used to increase their popularity and improve their chances of being elected to public office. For example, politicians would: Provide free or subsidized grain to citizens, Sponsor gladiatorial contests, chariot races, and public festivals, Distribute gifts or money to supporters and use personal wealth to gain political influence and voter loyalty. Although not always identical to modern vote buying, these practices were early forms of electoral influence and patronage. As a result, Roman authorities occasionally passed laws to curb electoral bribery, known as *ambitus* laws, which attempted to limit corruption in elections. (Boatwright etl 2012)

In the 18th and 19th centuries, elections in the United Kingdom and the United States were often affected by vote buying and other forms of electoral corruption. Candidates and political agents frequently offered cash, food, drinks, gifts, employment opportunities, or other favors to persuade people to vote for them. In Britain, the practice became especially common in small constituencies known as "rotten boroughs," where wealthy individuals could easily influence a large proportion of voters. In the United States, political machines in many cities distributed jobs, money, and assistance in exchange for political support. These practices weakened the principle of free and fair elections because voters were influenced by material rewards rather than by political ideas or policies. As democratic reforms expanded, both countries introduced laws and electoral reforms to reduce bribery, increase transparency, and protect the independence of voters. (Grenby, 2024; Packham, 2021)

2.2. Vote Buying

The modern term "vote buying" developed from the idea of treating a vote as something that could be obtained through material exchange. The word "vote" comes from the Latin "votum," meaning a choice, wish, or vow, while "buy" comes from Old English "bycgan," meaning to acquire through payment. Thus, "vote buying" literally means obtaining a person's electoral choice through money, gifts, or favors. (Schaffer 2014 and Murugesan 2020).

3. Theoretical Framework

Elite Theory, originated as a reactionary approach to the classical democratic ideal that political power is highly decentralized among the citizens. This assumption was refuted by early theorists including Vilfredo Pareto (1968), Gaetano Mosca (1939) and Robert Michels (1911) who believed that in every society, irrespective of whether they are autocracies, democracies, or transitional regimes, political power always ends up being concentrated in the hands of a small cohesive minority: the elite. Mosca supported this position by his concept of the political class, arguing that a small group of people with better organizational and strategic abilities always controls the governance. The iron law of oligarchy, formulated by Michels, introduced a structural component, and states that even such organizations that are based on democratic principles are likely to evolve, over time, to have hierarchical leadership systems that resist change. These ideas were expanded later by C. Wright Mills (1956) in his study on the power elite of the United States, where he emphasized interlocking interests held by political, economic and military elite. Taken together, these views present a strong theoretical framework through which the workings of elite dominance can be comprehended across different political settings and how it influences decision-making, institutional behaviour and the future of democratic governance.

The Elite Theory can be used to understand why in most countries across the globes, the replacement of political leaders does not always imply deeper democratic reforms, rather, in most cases, the rotation of the elite subjects with close interests in preserving the status quo through vote buying. This has been witnessed not only in the African states, but also in some countries in first and second world. I use this theory to gives a comparative perspective through which vote buying has become global trend where the cohesion and competition of the elites define the style and content of governance. This paper used the lens of this theory to sustain the argument that most electoral process has been defiled by elite and therefore challenged the credibility of most winners in different political parties across the globe.

4. Comparative Analysis of United State of America, France, Kenya, India and Nigeria on Vote Buying

4.1. UNITED STATES

Vote buying and electoral fraud, particularly during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, have remained enduring themes in the political history of the United States. As Howard W. Allen and Kate Warren Allen observed, accounts of fraudulent electoral practices—including vote buying, electoral manipulation by public officials, and other forms of election misconduct—constitute an important component of American political history. Such narratives have contributed significantly to the perception that electoral corruption was widespread during earlier periods of American democracy. (Allen & Allen 1991).

The scholarly literature on vote buying has gradually evolved from documenting isolated incidents of electoral malpractice to examining its broader institutional and political consequences. A significant contribution to this debate was (Burnham's 1965) influential article, *The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe*, published more than five decades ago. Rather than emphasizing electoral corruption, Burnham focused on the exceptionally high levels of voter participation between the 1840s and the 1890s. His analysis assumed that these votes reflected genuine democratic engagement rather than widespread electoral manipulation. Consequently, Burnham characterized this era as the "golden age" or

"Camelot" of American democracy, viewing high electoral participation as evidence of a vibrant and inclusive political system.

Although vote-buying is frequently associated with nineteenth-century American politics, contemporary evidence demonstrates that the practice has not been entirely eliminated. Investigative reports published by the Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting since the late 1980s have documented numerous cases of electoral misconduct, several of which received national recognition for investigative journalism (Brusco et al., 2004). A notable example occurred in 2016, when a federal jury convicted two officials from Magoffin County, Kentucky, for their involvement in a vote-buying scheme linked to the 2014 county elections (Estep, 2016).

Therefore, any assertion that electoral corruption has never existed in the United States would represent a distortion of historical reality. Historical records clearly demonstrate the occurrence of electoral fraud, as illustrated by George Caleb Bingham's challenge to the Missouri legislature's decision to overturn his electoral victory in Saline County, Missouri, in 1846. Rash, (1991). Likewise, more recent prosecutions involving election officials in Magoffin County, Kentucky, from the late 1980s through 2016 confirm that vote buying and related electoral offences have persisted, albeit primarily at lower levels of political administration. Dunlop (2016)

Rather than attributing changes in electoral participation solely to vote buying, many American scholars have emphasized the importance of institutional reforms introduced during the 1890s. These reforms included the establishment of voter registration systems, the adoption of the Australian secret ballot, and the extension of suffrage to women. Collectively, these institutional innovations are widely regarded as significant explanatory factors for the decline in voter turnout observed throughout the twentieth century (Walter, 1974).

Nevertheless, proponents of these institutional explanations frequently relied upon historical accounts of electoral corruption to question the legitimacy of the exceptionally high voter participation recorded before the reform era. In this regard, Lionel Fredman argued that the introduction of the secret ballot was largely a response to persistent electoral abuses. According to Fredman, by the 1850s many Americans had concluded that extensive ballot manipulation had undermined the integrity of elections, rendering the electoral process increasingly ineffective. Consequently, historical experiences of electoral fraud became, and continue to remain, one of the principal explanations advanced for the decline in voter turnout in the United States (Richard, 2004).

4.2. FRANCE

France has established one of the most comprehensive legal frameworks for regulating campaign finance and preventing electoral corruption, the country has not been entirely immune to allegations of vote buying and other forms of electoral malpractice. The principal legislative instruments governing political party financing are the **Law on Financial Transparency in Political Life** (1988), as amended in 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2016, together with the **French Electoral Code**, which was substantially revised in 2016. These legal provisions impose stringent restrictions on the financing of political parties by limiting private contributions and prohibiting donations from foreign entities, corporations, trade unions, and anonymous donors. They also establish ceilings on the amount of financial contributions that political parties and candidates may receive. In addition, France operates a system of public funding in which political parties receive financial support proportional to their share of votes obtained in the preceding election. Other forms of state assistance include subsidized media access and tax incentives, such as exemptions from stamp duties. Furthermore, candidates who secure at least five percent of the valid votes are entitled to reimbursement for campaign-related expenses, including the printing of ballots, posters, campaign circulars, and public display costs (Schweitzer, 2024).

To ensure financial accountability and transparency, political parties are legally required to maintain annual financial accounts and submit detailed reports on campaign expenditures and sources of funding. These reports must disclose the identities of donors and are made publicly available for scrutiny. Oversight responsibility rests with the National Commission for Campaign Accounts and Political Funding, which monitors compliance with campaign finance regulations. Political parties or candidates found in violation of these provisions may be subjected to various sanctions, including financial penalties, withdrawal of public funding, deregistration of political parties, and, in serious cases, imprisonment (Cornuez, 2024).

Despite this robust regulatory framework, France has experienced several high-profile vote-buying scandals. One of the most notable involved the French industrialist and senator Serge Dassault, who was taken into police custody following the lifting of his parliamentary immunity as part of a long-running judicial investigation. Dassault was accused of orchestrating a systematic vote-buying operation in Corbeil-Essonnes, a suburb of Paris where he had previously served as mayor. Investigating magistrates alleged that the scheme influenced the outcomes of local council elections held in 2008, 2009, and 2010, all of which were won either by Dassault or his political successor, Jean-Pierre Bechter. The French Council of State subsequently annulled the results of the 2008 election after determining that financial inducements had been distributed to voters. Bechter and two additional individuals were later formally charged in connection with the investigation (Sulzer, 2024).

Concerns regarding electoral integrity also emerged during the election of the President of the French National Assembly on 19 July 2024. The parliamentary election took place amid a fragmented political environment following the poor electoral performance of President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance Party in the European Parliament elections. Allegations of ballot stuffing and other forms of electoral manipulation prompted several lawmakers to demand a formal investigation into the conduct of the parliamentary vote (Schweitzer, 2024).

Responding to these allegations, Yaël Braun-Pivet emphasized the integrity of the parliamentary voting process and reaffirmed the importance of strict compliance with French electoral law. In a statement published on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), she explained that the vote-counting process was supervised by six tellers appointed at the beginning of the parliamentary session and conducted under established procedures by National Assembly staff. She stressed that adherence to democratic rules and institutional safeguards remains essential to preserving the credibility and legitimacy of France's electoral system (Tezkratt, Julie & de Souza Bradley, 2024).

Overall, the controversies surrounding recent elections illustrate that, despite France's comprehensive legal and institutional mechanisms for preventing electoral corruption, allegations of vote buying and electoral fraud continue to arise. These incidents reflect broader political challenges associated with an increasingly fragmented party system and the absence of a clear parliamentary majority. Consequently, the French experience demonstrates that strong legal regulations alone cannot entirely eliminate electoral malpractice but must be complemented by effective enforcement, institutional oversight, and sustained political accountability.

4.3. INDIA

India is widely characterized as a **patronage democracy**, where political patronage and clientelistic exchanges continue to play a significant role in electoral politics (Chandra, 2004). The influence of money in Indian elections remains substantial, with large sums of cash and other inducements frequently deployed during election campaigns. For example, in the period preceding the 2015 Bihar State Assembly elections, law enforcement agencies confiscated approximately ₹17 crore (US$2.5 million) in cash and more than 150,000 litres of liquor under the Electoral Code of Conduct. These seizures reflected the widespread use of monetary incentives and alcoholic beverages as instruments for influencing voter preferences in the state (Pandey, 2015). Similarly, during India's 2014 General Elections, *The Wall Street Journal* observed that many voters were more concerned with the amount of cash, alcohol, and other material benefits candidates would distribute than with identifying the likely electoral winner (Brusco et al., 2004). Such reports reinforce the widely held perception that vote buying remains an influential factor in shaping electoral behaviour in India.

The existing literature identifies numerous factors that contribute to the persistence of clientelism and vote buying. Economic conditions and voters' responsiveness to material inducements have been identified as important determinants of clientelistic politics (Wantchekon, 2003). Other scholars emphasize the influence of state institutions and politicians' control over public resources, which enable the distribution of patronage to secure electoral support (Hicken, 2011). Political competition also creates incentives for candidates and political parties to employ clientelistic strategies in order to maximize electoral success

(Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). In addition, researchers have highlighted the importance of social and cultural factors, including norms of reciprocity (Auyero, 2000; Lemarchand, 1977; Putnam, 1993), ethnic identities (Chandra, 2004; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007), and institutional variables such as regime type, campaign finance regulations, electoral systems, and ballot design in shaping patterns of vote buying and clientelism (Golden, 2003; van de Walle, 2003; Roniger, 2004; Lehoucq & Molina, 2002; Brusco et al., 2004; Hicken, 2007).

The influence of money politics in India extends beyond parliamentary and state assembly elections to local government elections, particularly those involving the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Electoral contests at all levels increasingly involve the distribution of material incentives to individuals and households with the objective of securing electoral support. The provision of cash, gifts, and other private benefits to voters has become a common feature of electoral competition (Cox, 1998, 2010).

Historically, vote buying in India was largely mediated through influential community leaders rather than through direct transactions between candidates and voters. Approximately two to three decades ago, candidates commonly relied on landlords, caste leaders, financiers, and other locally influential individuals who exercised considerable social and economic authority within their communities (Witsoe, 2011). These intermediaries mobilized electoral support on behalf of political candidates by leveraging their influence over dependent voters.

However, significant socio-economic transformations have altered the nature of vote buying in India. Changes in land ownership patterns, urbanization, and the expansion of the middle class have contributed to the commercialization and marketization of electoral politics. As a result, political candidates increasingly bypass traditional intermediaries and engage directly with individual voters through the distribution of cash and other material benefits (Maurer, 2006; Nichter, 2008; Rotemberg, 2009). Consequently, direct vote buying has become an increasingly visible strategy in contemporary Indian elections.

Overall, despite the existence of electoral regulations designed to promote free and fair elections, vote buying continues to constitute a significant feature of India's democratic process. It is widely acknowledged that major political parties frequently employ financial incentives, gifts, and other material rewards to influence voter behaviour, underscoring the persistent role of clientelism and money politics in the country's electoral system.

4.4. KENYA

Kenya's 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections represented a significant milestone in the country's democratic development, as they were the third general elections conducted following the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1991. These elections were historically important for several reasons. Most notably, they marked the first peaceful transfer of executive power since the democratic transition, with Mwai Kibaki of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) defeating Uhuru Kenyatta, the presidential candidate of the long-governing Kenyan African National Union (KANU). The outcome was widely regarded by domestic and international observers as a major step toward democratic consolidation in Kenya. Furthermore, the elections were the first in which former President Daniel arap Moi, who had dominated Kenyan politics for decades, did not contest the presidency. In compliance with the constitutional term limits, Moi endorsed Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, as his preferred successor. Equally significant was the decision by previously fragmented opposition parties to overcome longstanding political divisions and unite under the National Rainbow Coalition in support of Kibaki's candidacy. Previous studies suggest that opposition disunity had contributed substantially to Moi's victories in the 1992 and 1997 elections, both of which he won with less than an absolute majority of the popular vote (Ndegwa, 2003).

The 2002 elections also demonstrated increased institutional independence and professionalism on the part of Kenya's Electoral Commission. Unlike previous electoral exercises, during which the Commission's impartiality had frequently been questioned, the electoral management body adopted more transparent procedures to enhance public confidence in the electoral process. Vote counting and ballot verification were conducted openly at polling stations under the supervision of political party agents and both domestic and international election observers. These reforms significantly reduced opportunities for electoral manipulation during the vote-counting process, which had been widely alleged in previous elections (Ndegwa, 2003; Nichter, 2008).

Despite these institutional improvements, political actors continued to employ both legal and illegal strategies to influence electoral outcomes before polling day. Reports indicated that the pre-election period was characterized by incidents of political violence, while many citizens alleged that they had been denied the opportunity to register as voters. In addition, political party operatives were reported to have distributed cash and other material incentives in exchange for electoral support. John Githongo, the former Permanent Secretary for Governance and Ethics in the Office of the President of Kenya, who later went into exile, recalled witnessing the distribution of cash, food, and campaign materials such as T-shirts to voters as inducements for political support (Githongo, 2007).

Similar patterns of electoral inducement were evident during Kenya's 2017 general elections. Political candidates routinely distributed cash handouts at campaign rallies and public gatherings with the intention of influencing voting behaviour. While these practices are commonly described as vote buying, anthropological studies have offered a more nuanced interpretation by portraying such exchanges as forms of gift-giving embedded within broader social relationships of reciprocity, obligation, and mutual expectation. From this perspective, the exchange of gifts reflects long-standing cultural norms rather than purely transactional political behaviour.

Nevertheless, these same studies acknowledge that material inducements do not necessarily guarantee electoral loyalty. Building on ethnographic research concerning deception, reciprocity, and political behaviour, scholars argue that many Kenyan voters strategically accepted financial gifts from multiple candidates without feeling morally obligated to support them at the ballot box. Rather than perceiving themselves as passive beneficiaries of political generosity, many voters deliberately performed public displays of political support to maximize access to campaign resources before ultimately casting their votes according to their own preferences (Nichter, 2008).

At the same time, the electoral process in Kenya has continued to be characterized by recurring cycles of political optimism and disappointment. Many citizens become attracted by campaign promises of political and economic transformation, only to experience frustration when such promises remain unfulfilled after elections. Consequently, repeated experiences of unfulfilled expectations, combined with the widespread distribution of cash during election campaigns, have reinforced public perceptions that electoral participation often occurs within a political environment where voters possess limited meaningful choices. This dynamic has contributed to growing concerns regarding the quality of democratic governance and the persistence of clientelistic politics in Kenya (Nichter, 2008).

4.5. NIGERIA

Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has continued to face significant challenges. Electoral integrity has been undermined by numerous irregularities, including multiple voter registration, manipulation of electoral procedures, political thuggery, ballot box snatching and stuffing, electoral violence, and vote buying. These practices have weakened the credibility of elections and constrained the realization of genuine democratic governance. Political parties occupy a central position in promoting democratic competition and ensuring electoral transparency. However, when political actors resort to vote buying as a campaign strategy, individuals who lack genuine public support often emerge victorious. Consequently, elected officials are able to exercise political authority without adequately representing the interests and aspirations of the electorate. (Oyedeji and Jegede 2024)

The growing influence of money in Nigerian politics has become one of the defining characteristics of the country's electoral process. As observed by Davies (2006), money politics has assumed such prominence that the concept of "vote buying" has become firmly embedded in Nigeria's political vocabulary with predominantly negative connotations. The increasing commercialization of elections has undermined the principle of electoral choice by inducing voters to support candidates whom they might not otherwise elect under competitive and transparent conditions. As a result, poor governance outcomes frequently follow electoral contests characterized by financial inducements, limiting the delivery of essential public services such as quality healthcare, accessible transportation infrastructure, potable water, education, and employment opportunities.

Although the Nigerian Electoral Act establishes legal limits on campaign financing and regulates political expenditures, effective implementation and enforcement of these provisions remain inadequate. The Independent National Electoral Commission has repeatedly expressed concerns regarding the financial inducement of some electoral officials, leading to the manipulation of election results and other forms of electoral malpractice. Furthermore, the Commission has acknowledged its limited statutory authority to enforce electoral laws comprehensively and to prosecute electoral offenders effectively, thereby weakening the deterrent effect of existing legal sanctions (Okwuadimma & Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2021).

Political aspirants frequently mobilize financial resources from a wide range of formal and informal sources and expend substantial sums during election campaigns. Such excessive campaign spending creates favourable conditions for vote buying and other forms of electoral corruption (Sakariyau, Aliu, & Adamu, 2015). Vote buying manifests in several forms, including direct cash payments to voters, distribution of food items and other consumer goods, promises of employment opportunities, provision of community infrastructure immediately before elections, and conditional pledges of personal benefits contingent upon a candidate's electoral victory (Baidoo, Dankwa, & Eshun, 2018). Schaffer and Schedler (2005) conceptualize vote buying as a straightforward economic exchange in which political candidates effectively purchase electoral support while voters exchange their votes for material rewards. Consequently, electoral gifts and financial incentives function as transactional instruments designed to influence voting behaviour.

Several interrelated factors have contributed to the persistence of money politics and vote buying in Nigeria. These include widespread poverty, political ignorance, voter apathy, inadequate civic education, limited public awareness of electoral rights, insufficient voter sensitization, and the willingness of some citizens to exchange their votes for immediate material benefits. Equally important are the deceptive campaign strategies employed by political elites and the prevailing attitudes of both politicians and voters toward electoral politics. Many political office seekers perceive politics primarily as a profitable investment capable of generating substantial personal returns rather than as an opportunity for public service. Conversely, many voters regard election periods as rare opportunities to receive financial compensation or material benefits, viewing vote selling as their own means of sharing in the nation's resources from which they are ordinarily excluded (Ovwasa, 2013).

Davies (2006) further argues that the inability of many political parties to develop coherent, issue-based manifestos has contributed significantly to the prevalence of vote buying. Rather than presenting comprehensive policy programmes that would enable voters to make informed electoral decisions, political campaigns frequently rely on populist slogans, emotional rhetoric, and inflammatory speeches that offer little substantive policy direction. Such campaign strategies often fail to persuade voters, thereby increasing candidates' reliance on financial inducements as an alternative means of securing electoral support.

Political cynicism among the electorate has also reinforced the practice of vote buying. Many citizens perceive political leaders as inherently corrupt, self-serving, and ineffective, while viewing politics as an enterprise characterized by dishonesty and betrayal of public trust. These perceptions have been strengthened by the repeated failure of elected officials to fulfil campaign promises after assuming office. Consequently, many voters rationalize the acceptance of cash or other inducements during elections as a practical means of obtaining their share of national resources before politicians assume office. Likewise, candidates who distribute money and material gifts often regard such expenditures as strategic investments intended to minimize the risk of electoral defeat.

Another important factor identified by Davies (2006) is the increasing personalization of political campaigns. Electoral contests frequently emphasize the personal attributes, wealth, and popularity of individual candidates rather than the ideological orientation or policy platforms of their political parties. This shift in emphasis diminishes the relevance of party programmes while encouraging candidates to finance expensive personal campaigns to mobilize electoral support independently of their parties. Moreover, the conspicuous display of wealth by many public office holders—often perceived to have been acquired through the misuse of public resources—has reinforced the belief among voters that elections provide an opportunity to maximize personal gain by supporting the highest bidder.

The determination of politicians to secure electoral victory at all costs has further intensified electoral malpractice in Nigeria. Desperate candidates often employ financial incentives and material inducements to influence both voters and electoral officials. Taking advantage of widespread poverty, politicians frequently distribute food items, clothing, and other consumable goods shortly before elections or even on election day, despite the explicit prohibition of such practices under the Electoral Act. In some instances, candidates publicly throw money into crowds during campaign rallies, prompting chaotic scenes in which supporters scramble for cash and occasionally sustain injuries (Ovwasa, 2014).

Overall, the persistence of vote buying continues to undermine the credibility and legitimacy of elections in Nigeria. Financial inducements distort the electoral preferences of citizens by encouraging voters to support candidates based on immediate material benefits rather than competence, integrity, or policy alternatives. Consequently, elections increasingly resemble commercial transactions in which political offices are effectively awarded to the highest bidder rather than to the candidate preferred by the electorate. Despite repeated electoral reforms, vote buying remains a pervasive feature of Nigeria's democratic process and has continued to characterize general elections from the post-independence period to the present day, posing a significant challenge to democratic consolidation and good governance.

5. METHODOLOGY

Data were collected through documentary analysis. Relevant publications on vote buying were reviewed. The study employs qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), the reviewed documentary information were analyzed thematically to compare vote Buying in: America, France, India, Kenya, and Nigeria.

6. RESULT

Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Vote Buying in America, France, India, Kenya, and Nigeria.

Country	Nature of Vote Buying	Common Methods	Main Causes	Level of Prevalence
United States	Historically significant, now mostly indirect	Campaign donations, patronage, political favors	Influence of wealthy interests, lobbying	Low to Moderate
France	Mostly historical; rare today	Gifts, local patronage, misuse of public resources	Local political networks	Low
India	Widespread during elections	Cash, food, liquor, household items	Poverty, intense electoral competition	High

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Kenya	Common in many elections	Cash handouts, community projects, gifts	Ethnic politics, poverty, weak accountability	High
Nigeria	Highly pervasive and visible	Cash payments, food items, recharge cards, gifts	Poverty, distrust in government, clientelism	Very High

Source: 2026 Vote Inducement Qualitative Comparative Analysis Work.

6.1. Similarities Across the Five Countries

1. Politicians seek electoral support through material incentives.
2. Vote buying tends to flourish where accountability is weak.
3. Economic hardship increases voter susceptibility.
4. Electoral competition encourages candidates to use inducements.

6.2. Major Differences

- **United States and France:** Direct vote buying has largely declined due to strong institutions, effective law enforcement, and political modernization.
- **India:** Vote buying remains widespread but is actively monitored by electoral authorities.
- **Kenya and Nigeria:** Vote buying is more overt and closely linked to poverty, patronage politics, and clsientelistic political systems.

Bar Chart

Vote Buying Prevalence Across Countries

Scale:
█ = 1 Unit
1 = Low
2 = Low–Moderate
4 = High
5 = Very High
Source: 2026 Vote Inducement Qualitative Comparative Analysis Graph

The bar chart showing the comparative analysis of the **Level of Prevalence** of vote buying across the five countries.

6.3. Key Findings from the Data

- **The Development Divide:** There is a stark contrast between Western democracies (France and the US) and developing economies (India, Kenya, and Nigeria). In Western nations, institutional strength and stricter law enforcement have pushed vote-buying behaviors into history or more institutionalized channels (like lobbying/political favors).
- **The Poverty Factor:** As noted in the similarities, economic hardship directly drives susceptibility. The countries marked as **High** or **Very High** (India, Kenya, and Nigeria) suffer from higher poverty rates, making immediate material incentives like cash, food, or household items highly effective.
- **Overt vs. Indirect Methods:** In Nigeria and Kenya, the practice is highly visible and deeply intertwined with systemic clientelism. In contrast, even where it occurs at a "High" level in India, it faces a highly active, adversarial regulatory environment via viable Election Commission.

7. Conclusion

Vote buying exists in different forms across democracies, but its intensity varies considerably. The United States and France have largely moved away from direct vote buying through institutional reforms and stronger democratic norms. India continues to struggle with electoral inducements despite robust electoral oversight. Kenya and Nigeria experience more extensive vote buying, largely because of socioeconomic challenges, patronage politics, and weaker enforcement mechanisms. Consequently, Nigeria and Kenya exhibit the highest levels of direct vote buying among the five countries, while the United States and France show the lowest levels.

8. Recommendations

1. **Strengthen the Enforcement of Electoral Laws and Sanctions**

   Governments should strengthen the enforcement of existing electoral laws by ensuring that electoral management bodies and anti-corruption agencies possess sufficient legal authority, operational independence, and financial resources to investigate and prosecute cases of vote buying. Stiffer penalties for politicians, political parties, electoral officials, and voters involved in electoral bribery should be consistently enforced to serve as an effective deterrent.

2. **Enhance Civic and Voter Education**

Electoral commissions, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and the media should intensify civic education programmes that emphasize the importance of voting based on competence, integrity, and policy alternatives rather than immediate material benefits. Continuous voter enlightenment will reduce citizens' vulnerability to electoral inducements and strengthen democratic participation.

3. **Promote Socioeconomic Development and Poverty Reduction**

Since poverty remains one of the major drivers of vote buying, governments should implement sustainable poverty alleviation programmes through employment creation, social protection policies, improved access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Improving citizens' living standards will reduce their dependence on financial inducements during elections.

4. **Improve Transparency and Regulation of Political Financing**

Governments should strengthen campaign finance regulations by requiring full disclosure of political donations, campaign expenditures, and sources of party funding. Independent auditing of campaign finances and strict compliance with spending limits will reduce the excessive influence of money in electoral politics and discourage illicit campaign financing.

5. **Strengthen Democratic Institutions and Electoral Accountability**

Electoral management bodies, the judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, law enforcement institutions, and political parties should be further strengthened to ensure transparency, impartiality, and accountability throughout the electoral process. Countries such as **Nigeria** and **Kenya** can adopt some of the institutional best practices successfully implemented in the **United States** and **France**, including improved voter registration systems, transparent vote counting, stronger judicial oversight, and effective monitoring of campaign activities.

6. **Encourage Issue-Based Politics and Internal Party Democracy**

   Political parties should prioritize ideology, policy programmes, and national development agendas rather than relying on financial inducements to mobilize electoral support. Internal party democracy, transparent candidate selection processes, and issue-based campaigns should be promoted to shift political competition from patronage and clientelism toward competence, accountability, and good governance.

These recommendations; align closely with the comparative findings that strong institutions, effective law enforcement, political accountability, and improved socioeconomic conditions are the most effective mechanisms for reducing vote buying and strengthening democratic governance across different political systems.

Reference:

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