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## **Media Framing of the Legitimacy of Nigerian Elections in Relation to Stomach Infrastructure**

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## Abstract

The thesis aims to explore the media framing of Nigeria's 2023 election in relation to vote-buying: How did the Nigerian print media portray the legitimacy of the 2023 election in relation to vote-buying? In addressing the research question, Entman's (1993) framing theory is used. For identifying the themes and patterns around the framing of the election Entman's four questions, defining the problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and treatment recommendations, in connection with the existing literature on vote buying are employed. The thesis is a single-case study adopting a qualitative content analysis for analyzing 26 articles from *Daily Post*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Premium Times*, *PUNCH*, *The Cable*, *TheGuardian*, *ThisDay*, and *Vanguard*. The results indicated that the media, with the exception of two media outlets, overwhelmingly framed vote-buying as an illegitimate fraudulent electoral practice caused by poverty and hunger. It is framed as detrimental to democratic governance and the media suggested predominantly enforcement measures such as election monitoring and criminal prosecution as possible remedies.

**Key Words:** Nigeria elections, Vote-buying, Media framing, Election legitimacy.

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# 1 Introduction and General Aim

Nigeria's general election was conducted on February 25, 2023. ECOWAS deployed 240 election observers, and they jointly declared the election to be peaceful even though the election was criticized for poor planning, and lack of transparency which did not affect the result (Kohnert, 2023). The election is part of the democratization process in Nigeria. Elections are a key framework for realizing the purpose of democracy (Nwakpoke, 2019). Elections allow the electorate to exercise their franchise and elect leaders of their choice. Nonetheless, elections alone are not a determinant of democracy, but they provide a platform for orderly leadership succession and ensure legitimization and political authority (Nwakpoke, 2019).

Nigeria's election is often characterized by irregularities which have over the years resulted in a weak political system without well-defined philosophies and ideologies. Being a significant part of the election process, the media plays a crucial role in democratization. Therefore, there is no successful election without the media. The media is a powerful instrument for influencing public opinion through the reports they choose to provide and the strategies for delivering this information. Oboh (2016) described the media as the Fourth Estate of the Realm, holding the government accountable for the conduct of the 2023 elections. McQuail (2005) stated that the "Fourth Estate" refers to political power possessed by the media, which is synonymous with the other three estates of powers in Britain: Lords, Church, and Commons.

The media scramble to win more audiences by framing elections. Framing of the legitimacy of Nigeria's election refers to the journalistic approach of including some aspects of an event in reporting it while ignoring others. Jamieson et al (2003) reflected on how news information is arranged and packaged and opined that framing determines what information is included and what is ignored. Framing is a mechanism purposively used to "direct attention and then to guide the processing of information so that a preferred reading of the facts comes to dominate public understanding" Gandy (2001, p. 365). The major idea of framing is to reveal that the information delivered to the audience influences people's choices concerning how they process such information. Frames normally operate in an abstract form to provide meaning to a specific message. Framing is increasingly connected to news and how the media emphasizes the information they deliver.

Media framing is carried out through three dimensions, such as active processing, reflective interrogation, and selective scanning (Kosicki, et al, 1990). Active processing means seeking

information about the election based on its incompleteness released by the media, reflective interrogation means thoughts on information collected from the media while selective scanning means using the media to collect certain information about the election that is relevant to the audience. Thus, framing explores how the media attempts to influence the audience's opinion by stressing salient issues on how the audience thinks. The emphasis on certain issues can unconsciously influence the audience's thoughts, thereby modding their opinion through a structure.

Nigeria's electoral process has been described to be corrupt, determined by stomach infrastructure. Stomach infrastructure refers to practices of persuading potential electorates to support a specific candidate in an election by offering them financial or material gifts in return (Oyelola, 2014). Stomach infrastructure during Nigeria's 2023 election accompanied a hidden agenda of vote-buying. Vote-buying violates Nigeria's electoral law and threatens the progress towards the consolidation and deepening of democracy (Osah, 2021). Vote buying comprises exchanging material or services gains to gain votes.

Stomach infrastructure is beyond financial or material inducement during an election. It often includes post-election inducements. Specifically, stomach infrastructure is aimed at satisfying voters' immediate needs instead of long-term needs. Stomach infrastructure appeared to be a long-term tradition in Nigeria. The problem related to stomach infrastructure is characterized by corruption and intimidation within the political system. It includes various unethical practices, like wealthy politicians buying votes to secure their positions in office, and the presence of corrupt leaders.

Studies on media framing have become a growing area as researchers investigate ways in which issues, policies, personalities, and events are presented in the news. The increasing popularity of the concept is seen in both scholarly literature and in the public's imaginations (Asiamah, 2022). Currently, studies on framing are prevalent in journalism and political science (Entman, et al., 2018). These studies approached media framing from two perspectives; analysing the content of news (frame building) and identifying the effect of the news on the audience (frame setting) (Thankachan, et al., 2021). Frame building explores media's framing issues like elections, politics, environmental issues, social movements, conflicts, etc (Ogbodo, et al., 2020). In this research, the goal is to look at and answer the research question: How has the Nigerian media framed the 2023 elections concerning stomach infrastructure?

The potential gains in the study of media framing are because media framing tends to change an audience's perception without necessarily altering the facts as the same information is used as the source. Media framing of the legitimacy of an election is seen to influence how the audience perceives information and indirectly determines what the audience thinks about the news. Furthermore, the study also attempts to examine the framing of the legitimacy of Nigerian elections concerning stomach infrastructure. The study will critically analyse how the media present and discusses the impact of stomach infrastructure on electoral outcomes, electorates' behaviour, and perceptions of democratic legitimacy.

The study will offer a wider understanding of the dynamics of Nigerian politics and the challenges of democratization. By describing media representation in relation to the legitimacy of Nigerian elections, the study will discuss critical issues concerning electoral integrity, voters' education, and the role of the media in promoting participatory democracy in Nigeria.

This thesis begins with a literature review, exploring previous studies on media framing on elections. The next chapter comprises the theoretical approach of the thesis, introducing Entman's framing theory, stating how a story presented by the media can affect how an audience perceives and understands it. The following chapter specifies the aim and the research questions of the thesis. Chapter Five critically analyses the research design and methods. It analyses the descriptive comparative design, including an explanation of the method of data collection and qualitative content analysis of data. Chapter Six presents the results and analysis of the media's framing of Nigeria's 2023 election. Finally, chapter seven rounds up the thesis with a conclusion.

## 2 Literature Review

This section presents the literature review. The literature review explores previous studies, demonstrating knowledge and understanding of previous studies on media framing placed in context. The literature review critically evaluates material and gives a background of current knowledge, allowing the researcher to identify relevant theories, methods, and gaps in the existing studies.

### 2.1 Media Framing of the Legitimacy of Elections

The Canadian Election of 2000 was framed by two major newspapers in Canada. Both media framed the election as a game, focusing on politicians, strategies, electoral results, and nuances of party support (Trimble, et al., 2004). The media framed the election as illegitimate because headlines focused on classic pugilistic attitudes of the game frame, filled with tussle and weapon fire, and by headlines promoting the use aggressive strategies and level personal attacks on opponents. The media framed negative rallies by casting the game and its political players as inept, dishonest, manipulative, and even corrupt (Trimble, et al., 2004). Dalton, et al (1998) equally stated that the media framed America's Presidential Election in 1992 in equivalent manner. The major distinctive attribute of America's 1992 election, and the more disturbing in its implication for American politics, is the media framing of the "southernization" of national elections, reflecting the traditional no-party politics linked to the elections in the South (Savage, 1993). According to the New York Times (2008), southernization refers to the Southern values and beliefs that characterized the election process, reaching its climax in the 1990s when the Democratic President and Vice President came from the South and Congressional leaders in both political parties came from the South. Newsweek (2008) stated that the southern values were increasingly significant in America's election through the early twenty-first century. The American media in the late 2000s adopted the phrase "southernization" to frame the cultural and political implications.

According to McMenemy et al (2012), the media framed the 2011 Irish general election as a political contest (horserace framing) where the Irish media concentrated on the events and policies (Strömbäck, et al, 2010). The Irish economic crisis in 2010 affected media framing because the revenue of the media declined by 56% forcing the media to engage more in commercially oriented elections coverage. Instead of focusing on substantive policy issues, the media framed the election as 'horse races' between different political parties and rival political



candidates. In addition, the media was objective and non-partisan in framing the Irish election, indicating the professionalism of the media in framing the elections as legitimate 'races' for public office instead of a battle of ideas (O'Malley, et al., 2013).

Both the public and private media disagreed with the legitimacy of Nigeria's 2007 general elections (Oboh, 2016). The Federal Government influenced the public media to frame the elections as free and fair, despite the report by the Election Observation Mission, stating that the elections were rigged. The media framing of elections in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria indicated that there was a direct connection between media framing and electoral violence in Nigeria (Jinmi-Ahisu et al., 2021). Similarly, foreign media framing of Nigeria's 2019 general elections shows cases of electoral malpractices such as vote-buying, intimidation, corruption, and gross violations of human rights among Nigeria's major political parties, APC and PDP (Elega et al., 2021). Electoral malpractices hampered the development and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. It has negatively affected the transition of one political administration to the other (Donald, et al., 2020). The media framing of electoral malpractices in Nigeria, especially in the 2019 general election has destructive repercussions on Nigeria's democracy (Jinmi-Ahisu, et al., 2021). It eliminates the emergence of a legitimate government because it is not formed based on popular mandate.

Since Nigeria returned to civilian administration on 29 May 1999, seven general elections have been conducted, including re-run elections and local government elections (Donald, et al., 2020). None of these elections met the requirements of local and international standards. But the distributing trend is that each general election was worse than the preceding one. The trend in these elections indicated that Nigeria fared very badly in every election as it is impossible to consolidate democracy. This is a result of the political willingness of political leaders to understand that conducting legitimate elections is crucial to the growth and development of democracy. Nevertheless, the media play a significant role in raising awareness of the significance of legitimate elections. For example, during Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections, the media framed the election to help foster national unity, imminent economic crisis and the need for economic diversification, the readiness of INEC to conduct elections, the competence of the candidates to fight corruption, pre-election violence, vote-buying, and use of divisive rhetoric by politicians (Oluwaseun et al, 2021). The media framing contributed to creating a better perception of Nigeria's electoral process.

Previous research indicated that media framing is a crucial factor in describing whether an election is legitimate or not. An election is not considered legitimate when access to government-owned media in specific is not handled fairly. According to the Institute for Public Policy Research (2014), the media has three major roles during the process of an election: The media offers a channel through which political parties and contestants can express their political views and present their policies; the media provides voters with information concerning the electoral processes, i.e election dates, voter registration, voting units, etc; and the media acts as a watchdog for legitimate elections by identifying and reporting on malpractices and political irregularities. The media equally assists the electorate to make an informed decision and that the election is free and fair.

## **2.2 The Media and Elections in Nigeria**

Media plays a crucial role in elections in Nigeria. The media help to gather and disseminate information during elections which significantly helps in sustaining the democratic process, and outcome, good governance, and the general democratic health of Nigeria's electoral system. Specifically, during the election, the Nigerian media uncovered cases of manoeuvrings and human rights violations such as the case during the 2023 elections where the deprived individuals were made vulnerable to all forms of human rights abuse (Ani, 2023). The media equally rebuked vote buying during the 2015 election in Oyo State where voters sold their votes for material things such as clothes and food (Stober, 2016). According to Stober (2016), the media took a critical stance against the concept of "vote-buying" and its implications on the legitimacy of Nigeria's elections during the election. The media highlighted how vote-buying undermines Nigeria's democratic process of legitimate election. The media also encourages the voters to participate in the electoral process and ensure that the election results are credible and acceptable to the general population (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2014). In trying to strengthen an effective broadcast to promote balanced, conflict-sensitive reporting, well-informed listeners, and accountability of public representatives and institutions, the media provide information, advance mutual understanding, ensure cooperation, and harmonize their commitment on ethical issues concerning election reporting (Bappayo, et al., 2021).

Previous studies found that the media has also come under criticism for providing the audience with unbalanced and biased accounts of the integrity and competence of candidates, which would help electorates vote intelligently for qualified candidates (Obboh, 2016). This is among the dysfunctional repercussions of electorates having to depend on the media to pass judgments

on political parties and candidates to vote during an election. Aghamelu (2023) alleged that the media is irresponsible in election coverage in Nigeria. Aghamelu (2023) argued that the media has unduly allowed itself to be manipulated by political actors during the election by promoting the politic of tribalism. The reports of EU election observers on Nigeria's 2003 general elections revealed that the performance of the media during the elections was flawed because it failed to offer unbiased, fair, and informative reports about political parties and candidates contesting in the elections. Media outlets owned by federal and state governments were biased to please political parties and candidates in power.

The media also engaged in advocacy as a means for voter education against vote selling. The media uses editorials, feature articles, cartoons, advertorials, public service announcements, and social media progressive change is inevitable in increasing the knowledge and awareness of vote selling. Anyanwu et al (2022) stated that media advocacy was consistently used to educate voters against vote-buying. The media used a popular jingle "Not for Sale" performed by famous Nigerian singers. The jingle aims to awaken the consciousness of voters that they need to make decided efforts to safeguard the interest of Nigeria during the 2023 general elections (Oduwole, 2022). Dzisah (2019) argued that the role of media advocacy in educating voters against vote selling cannot be overemphasized, given that it helps voters to know their rights and privileges, develop good morals, and build capacity among citizens. It stressed every activity that would educate voters concerning issues via the media.

### **2.3 Election Legitimacy and Vote Buying**

Election legitimacy means the extent to which political actors believe that an entire election process is legitimate and binding (Elklit, et al., 2002). According to Ogundiya (2021), election legitimacy refers to means political office holders are legally elected within the structure of popular participation. Siachiwena et al (2021) noted that election legitimacy can be measured in the following ways: was it accepted as free and fair? Was there widespread political violence before or after the election? Did the loser accept the results? The confidence of political actors and citizens in commissions charged with the responsibility of conducting elections is crucial. Erlich et al (2016) argued when a losing candidate accepts the outcome of a legitimate election does not mean that a challenging outcome is rendered invalid.

Previous literature on election legitimacy centred on the extent to which elections offer democratic legitimacy to competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky, et al., 2010). Levitsky et al (2010) argued 14 African nations (e.g., Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, etc.) that are grouped as ‘competitive authoritarian regimes.’ These nations have democratic institutions on paper, conduct regular democratic elections, and have some level of competition that gives opposition parties a theoretical opportunity of winning; but the incumbents overturn democracy (Bogaards, et al., 2016). Williamson (2020) said in competitive authoritarian rule, elections are conducted to convince the public that elected leaders have a democratic mandate to govern, but leaders in these regimes use democratic institutions and procedures to win legitimacy to perpetuate their power.

Akanle et al (2009) revealed that the lack of election legitimacy in Nigeria is sometimes expressed through voter apathy as evident in poor voter turnout during election campaigns and polling units as seen during Nigeria’s 2003 and 2007 general elections compared to June 12 election 1993. Ogundiya et al (2011, p.145) stated that the “procedure is central to legitimizing democracy, eventual public office holders, popular democratic expectations, comments, and the actual delivery of the ‘dividend of democracy’ to the people.”

### **2.3.1 Vote Buying**

Vote buying means using financial resources, material goods, or promissory inducement or compensation by political actors to influence electorates to vote for a specific candidate in an election (Vande, 2022).

There are two contrasting debates in the academic literature concerning vote buying. Munro (2010) provided two significant elements, arguing that vote buying is personal and voluntary. When this argument is accepted, not all electoral incentives given during elections are considered clientelism. Clientelism focuses on vote-buying or non-clientelist exchanges (Muhtadi, 2019). Clientelism is used in several countries during an election to distribute material resources to voters in direct exchange for votes. Politicians and political parties compete both on policy reforms and material resources given to voters. These inducements comprised money, food, clothes, and other human necessities. In countries where voters depend on such inducements, and where governments fail to provide basic social infrastructures, vote-buying has a serious implication for democracy, accountability, and responsiveness (Gans-Morse, Mazzuca and Nichter, 2014). Furthermore, Schaffer et al (2007) stated that vote buying is an act that does not need to include an element of clientelism. Diaz-Cayeros (2012) et al

argued that parties, particularly in Mexico targeted loyal supporters to maintain their electoral coalitions within a period. The electoral law in Mexico allows politicians and political parties to offer gifts to voters so long as the gift will not influence voting. The cost of such gifts must be known to the electoral bodies and cannot exceed the stipulated amount for campaign expenditure (Linthicum, 2018). This allows politicians and political parties to target their loyalists, specifically with a consideration that when they neglect their loyalists, they might defect. Therefore, this will motivate the vulnerable to vote since they are often denied the benefit of public resources (According to Desposato, 2007). Vande (2020) argued that on average, vulnerable voters should have greater utility for immediate private resources instead of delayed public resources. Besides, unless a voter has another source of income and simply does not require the inducement, it is unlikely that vulnerable voters will therefore be able to avoid vote-buying inducements.

The second debate argued that vote-buying is an integral part of money politics in Nigeria. Vote-buying during Nigeria's election is carried out at multiple phases of the electoral process and has been perpetuated eminently during voters' registration, nomination time, campaigning, and the day of the election. Vote-buying is more common on pre-election, election day, and post-election (see figure). The entire phase is considered an act of electoral corruption because it is a form of material inducement or bribe given to voters to gain their votes, particularly financial resources or gratuity given to fiduciary actors, etc (Magaji, et al., 2022). According to Canare et al (2018), the implications of the entire phases of vote-buying cause great loss to society weaken accountability in governance, and hinder institutional growth needed for democracy. Vote-buying is also found to be a barrier to good governance, as it perpetuates clientelist networks and undermines the provision of public goods and services (Grindle, 2006). Agu et al (2013) equally stated that vote buying hurt democracy. It hampered voters' independence and rights to justly elect candidates into political offices which directly determine the quality of election and governance. Baidoo et al. (2018) remind readers that every democracy frowns against vote buying. It questioned the quality of democracy. In this regard, several arguments are often against vote buying. Firstly, these arguments hold that vote buying offers wealthier individuals an unfair benefit, it defiles the principle of equality. Secondly, there is an argument that vote buying can encourage inefficiency. This is because the voters' interests are bought by parties before the election, and their interests or needs can therefore be neglected by political representatives after the election.

The findings from previous research stated that to address the problem of vote-buying, criminal law provisions should be applied as contained in the Criminal Code and Penal Code. According to Jinmi-Ahisu et al (2021), when political actors offer inducements to voters in return for their votes, it translates to bribing them. The criminal law that can be applied to prosecute violators, there should be sufficient provisions in the Electoral Act for addressing the problem. Similarly, Asiamah (2022) suggested that security agencies must ensure swift election monitoring and election outcomes. The major goal of every civilized nation is to maintain law and order during the entire process of an election and ensure the lives and properties of citizens are safeguarded (Asiamah, 2022). Kohnert (2023) suggested that there is a need to have more domestic and international election observers. For example, ECOWAS deployed 240 election observers during Nigeria's 2023 election (Kohnert, 2023).

## **2.4 Gap**

The media plays a crucial role in democratization. Several studies investigated how the media present issues, policies, personalities, and events. Many of these studies explore the role of the Nigerian news media in shaping public perceptions and narratives surrounding the electoral process, with a specific focus on the influence of stomach infrastructure on the legitimacy of elections. These studies did not adequately explore the role of the print media in relation to the legitimacy of Nigeria's election. Therefore, this creates a gap in academic scholarship which this research intends to cover. Therefore, this study will provide a critical analysis of how the media framed the legitimacy of Nigeria's 2023 election in relation to stomach infrastructure.

### 3. Theoretical Approach

This section presents the theoretical concepts adopted to address the research question which is: How the Nigerian print media framed the legitimacy of the 2023 election in relation to vote buying? They comprise four different sections. Firstly, Entman's framing theory is presented. The second section presents the framing theory that was used in designing the analytical framework. The third section provides the operationalization of the theory of vote buying that was included in the analytical framework. The last section provided the analytical framework adopted in the thesis.

#### 3.1 Framing Theory

Framing theory is designed as a model to analyze ways in which collective meaning is developed and modified through discourse. A frame is an instrument to be used as a set of beliefs or conceptual framework for arranging political thoughts, discourses, and policies to state or impose specific facets of perceived reality. Volkmer (2018) stated that frames are adopted to schematically interpret reality via language. Framing theory offers the theoretical and conceptual model to understand and group meanings and contexts in the media presentation of information and will be employed in the research to analyze framing.

In demonstrating how framing can carry unuttered meanings based on how an event is presented, this research draws from the 'glass half filled with *water*' hypothesis. The glass can be described as either half full or even half empty. In both cases there is still some amount of water, nonetheless when the glass is presented as half empty, it can be refilled. However, when presented as half full, such a meaning is nonexistent, potentially modifying the idea about the glass of water (Volkmer, 2018).

Framing theory provides an understanding of the audience's perceived issues. To frame an event or issue is to stress a perceived reality, adding relevance and meaning to these issues before the audience (Entman, 1993). Concerning media reporting, the news is considered as reconstructions of reality and not imagination. Therefore, the media's framing of an event or issue has a direct link with the event or issue. Strömbäck (2014) cautioned that despite this strong link, it is not explicit, and therefore media reports of reality should not be considered reality itself.

Framing in the Nigerian print media has an impact on most of the audience which shapes their opinion about public opinion (Chong, et al., 2007). When a media creates content by selecting the type and kind of information to be published, they will frame reality in such a particular perspective. The implication lies in a one-sided presentation which affects the opinion of the audience about an issue or event. Depending on how an issue is framed an audience will have different reactions to the issue. When an event or issue is framed in a certain way, specific ideologies or moral values can be linked to the subject that affects the audience.

To analyze the media framing of an election, the Entman (1993) theory was adopted. Entman's (1993) framing theory focuses on the idea that media interpretation of a specific aspect of an event or issue can potentially shape public opinion or understanding (Entman, 1993). Goffman's (1974) study "Frame Analysis" supported the notion that Entman's (1993) framing theory influences how the audience interprets things based on their primary frameworks. Arowolo (2017) equally supported this assertion, noting that the two distinct primary frameworks, namely natural and social influenced how the audiences see reality. The distinction between the two frameworks is their functions.

### **3.2 Entman's Framing Theory**

According to Entman (1993, p.52), framing is "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation." Entman's (1993) framing theory focuses on media coverage involving selecting, emphasizing, and interpreting a specific issue, which can shape public understanding and opinion. Frames equally mean an interpretation pattern through which the audience classifies information to efficiently handle it. Framing stresses on a particular aspect of reality.

Entman (1993) stresses the role of power and politics in framing. Entman's (1993) theory argued that media is not objective or neutral but is influenced by economic and political interests that shape their contents, the audience can become more critical media consumers and better assess the accuracy and biases of media coverage. Therefore, the media framing can reflect and strengthen the existing power structures and social strata and challenge and change them. Similarly, Entman's (1993) theory states the need for diverse and independent media sources that can challenge dominant narratives and opinions.



Entman (1993) theory is useful for offering a significant framework for understanding how media coverage shapes public perceptions and understanding of social issues. By identifying the key elements of framing and the role of power and politics in shaping media content, Entman (1993) theory emphasized the significance of critical media literacy and the need for diverse and independent media sources that can challenge dominant narratives and perspectives. Furthermore, the theory helps to minimize the complexities of information, and equally serves as a two-way traffic: the theory helps interpret and reconstruct reality (Volkmer, 2018).

To identify the construction portrayed by the media, Entman (1993) divided framing into four elements:

### ***3.2.2 Defining the Problems***

This element is the mainframe, and it stresses how the media understand events. In times of problems or events, how does the media present them? In defining the problem, Entman (1993) stated that it determines the role of a causative factor about cause and benefit, normally weighed about common cultural values. Arifin et al. (2020) argued that the same event or problem can be understood in several ways. And these multiple frames will cause different formed realities. According to Dan et al (2018), frames depend on existing concepts, beliefs, and norms of any specific society to accomplish these roles. That is, frames are collectively related, and there can be a limited number of news frames if the culture's dominant concepts, beliefs, and norms are equally limited.

### ***3.2.3 Diagnose Causes***

This element identified the factors causing the problem. The element used to frame who is considered as the participant in the event. The cause can refer to “what,” and equally “who.”

### ***3.2.4 Make Moral Judgment***

This framing concept is used to justify/present reasons for defining a problem that has been identified. After the problem is defined, and the cause of the problem has been determined, it requires a convincing argument to justify a theory until the problem has been identified and the root of the problem has been found (Arifin, et al., 2020). Entman (1993) stated that this element evaluates causal agents and their impact.

### 3.2.5 Treatment Recommendations

This element is used to establish the desires of the media. The approach adopted to address the problem? Of course, the remedy is based on how the issue is seen and who is seen as the root cause of the problem. Furthermore, this element provides and justifies treatments for a specific problem and forecasts their impact (Entman, 1993).

**Table 1: Description of Entman's Theory**

1.	Defining the Problems (Defining Problems)	How is an event/problem perceived? As a what exactly? Or as a What is the problem?
2.	Diagnose causes (Determining the problem or source of the problem)	What was the event perceived as caused? What is regarded as the cause of the problem? Who (the participant) is regarded as the root cause of the problem?
3.	Make moral judgment (Taking moral decisions)	What moral value is provided to justify the problem? What moral principles are adopted to legitimize or delegitimize an issue?
4.	Treatment Recommendation (Stressing on completion)	What remedies are provided to address the problem/issue? What approach is provided and must be implemented to address the problem?

**Source: Entman 1993**

Entman (1993) classified media frames into two groups: procedural and substantive. Wasilewski (2020) stated that the focus and function of procedural are narrow and substantive and carry out at least out of the four main functions: defining the problems (defining problems), diagnosing causes (determining the problem or source of the problem), making a moral judgment (taking moral decisions), treatment and recommendation (stressing on completion). To show how frames are produced and absorbed, Entman (1993) developed a “cascade model” composed of apart from mass media — other political participants such as audience, politicians, etc. While political authorities establish frames, the media either strengthen or modify them while audiences either accept or reject frames.

According to Wasilewski (2020, p.2), the “interface between journalists and elites is a crucial point of transmission for spreading activation of frames.” Entman (1993) argued that it is extremely hard if not impossible to identify which of the two has more influence in the process of constructing frames, they need to be analyzed individually. By isolating procedural frames from substantive frames and, consequently, the Nigerian print media as suggested by theory, three observations can be identified. Firstly, the procedural frames pave the way for the formation of substantive (ideological) frames. Secondly, the substantial frames assist the audiences in contextualizing individual issues in a broader discourse and, by so doing, help

individuals understand how they relate to existing ideologies. Thirdly, while substantial frames are designed by elites, they are conditioned to borrow from Mills' (1956) elitist theory, the structure within which optional policies can be developed and argued (Connolly, 1967). Therefore, substantive frames restrict the structure within which responses to problems are developed and allow elites to maintain the status quo.

Entman (1993) theory has served to describe media framing (Coombs, 2013). In this thesis, however, the theory is used to analyze the role of the Nigerian print media as an institution of political socialization, particularly their ability to ideologically frame Nigeria's 2023 election. The theory explains the formation and evolution of news frames during the election. Entman (1993) theory developed the idea of spreading activation, which the theory borrowed from cognitive psychology; it equally explained the significance of how information is arranged (Entman, 2004).

Entman (1993) theory analyses the relationship between the media and the audiences' perception. Capron (2019) showed how media news affects the audience by influencing their perception. Capron (2019) further argued that news has the power to change audiences' views. Using examples of election coverage, Arafin et al (2020) revealed that the media can frame certain events either as a problem or a solution. Media Frames point to some bits of information concerning an event or issue that is the subject of communication, thereby elevating them in salience (Entman, 1993).

Studies found when audiences are exposed to a repeated news frame, it influences their political perception over time (Lecheler, et al., 2015). By showing the audience the same frame within a specific period, the repetitive framing caused a stronger effect compared to a single exposure to framing. Repetitive frame during election uses text to portray media frames, "which are revealed by the presence or absence of specific keywords, sources of information, stereotyped images, stock phrases, and sentences that offer thematically strengthening clusters of facts or conclusion (Entman, 1993). Keywords and sentences were particularly examined to determine the tones and themes of the media articles that may portray framing.

### **3.3 Vote Buying**

One country in Africa that has gained particular attention concerning vote-buying practices is Nigeria. It is hard to find an analysis in the mass media or academic literature, of Nigeria's

current electoral system that does not refer to vote buying. Vote buying gained prominence in several academic studies. Many of these studies on vote buying are based on unreliable evidence, sometimes drawing from unverifiable rumours and claims (Corstange, 2012).

There are two contrasting debates in the academic literature concerning vote buying. Muno (2010) provided two significant elements, arguing that vote buying is personal and voluntary. When this argument is accepted, not all electoral incentives given during elections are considered clientelism. Hicken (2011) argued that several instances of vote buying documented by scholars do not fit neatly into the practice. Aspinall, (2014) asserted that several instances of vote buying are a one-time relationship instead of an example of a consistent, or repetition, and mutually beneficial relationship of exchange. Muhtadi (2019) concluded that vote buying can represent clientelist or non-clientelist exchanges. Schaffer et al (2007) stated that vote buying is an act that does not need to include an element of clientelism. Diaz-Cayeros (2012) and his collaborators equally provided empirical support for the hypothesis of vote-buying. Their studies focused on the endogeneity of partisan loyalties to financial benefits. Diaz-Cayeros et al (2012) argued that parties, particularly in Mexico targeted loyal supporters to maintain their electoral coalitions within a period. Stokes (2013) and her colleagues provided a distinct emphasis on the argument by stating that the party loyalist strategy is employed neither for systematic vote buying nor for buying turnout, but it is a demonstration of a rent-seeking attitude by electoral brokers. Stokes et al (2013) argued that broker predation is the driver for the likelihood of targeting party loyalists, as this approach allows brokers both to get a greater profit margin from the material resources given to them and to consolidate their status in their patronage circles. According to Desposato (2007), vote-buying can be a greater motivating factor for the vulnerable to vote than electoral incentives of public resources, as the vulnerable are often denied the benefit of public resources. Vande (2020) argued that on average, vulnerable voters should have greater utility for immediate private resources instead of delayed public resources. Besides, unless a voter has another source of income and simply does not require the inducement, it is unlikely that vulnerable voters will therefore be able to avoid vote-buying inducements.

The second debate argued that vote-buying is an integral part of money politics in Nigeria. Studies indicated that vote-buying is carried out at multiple phases of the electoral process and has been perpetuated eminently during voters' registration, nomination time, campaigning, and the day of the election. It is more common on pre-election, election day, and post-election (see figure). Magaji et al (2022) argued that vote-buying is an act of corruption, which is normal

practice in the form of material inducement or bribe given to voters to gain their votes, particularly financial resources or gratuity given to fiduciary actors, etc. Canare et al (2018) studied the harps on the implications of vote-buying and concluded that it causes great loss to society, weakens accountability in governance, and hinders institutional growth needed for democracy. Grindle (2006) put forward the argument that vote buying is a barrier to good governance, as it perpetuates clientelist networks and undermines the provision of public goods and services. In consonance with the above arguments, Agu et al (2013) stated that vote buying hurts democracy. It hampered voters' independence and rights to justly elect candidates into political offices which directly determine the quality of election and governance. Vande (2020) also agreed that vote buying threatens the conduct of quality elections. Hoffmann and Patel (2022) said vote buying merely secures brief, elections-related benefits for a few whiles threatening the long-term destiny of the majority. It helps exonerate politicians for abusing power when elected and hooks vulnerable voters into self-destructive, clientelist relationships with a politician. Nwankwo (2018) dismissed the hypothesis of vote-buying influencing voters' turnout, arguing that it changed voters' choices of candidates in an election. Akwetey (2016), opined that vote buying questioned the reliability of the electoral process. Vote buying hampers the legitimacy of the elected leaders. Vande (2020) asserted that the practice sometimes causes mistrust, and conflicts while denying citizens an opportunity for peace and development.

Baidoo et al (2018) remind readers that every democracy frowns against vote buying. It questioned the quality of democracy. In this regard, several arguments are often against vote buying. Firstly, these arguments hold that vote buying offers wealthier individuals an unfair benefit, it defiles the principle of equality. Secondly, there is an argument that vote buying can encourage inefficiency. This is because the voters' interests are bought by parties before the election, and their interests or needs can therefore be neglected by political representatives after the election. Vote buying is equally frowned upon in many economies. This leads to the fact that when a country becomes inclined to vote buying; it ceases to be recognized by multinational corporations willing to invest in developing economies (Baidoo, et al., 2018).

**Table 2: Dimensions of Vote-Buying**

Pre-Election	Election	Post-Election
Defective registration of voters	Ballot box stuffing	Falsification/alteration of results
Wrongful disqualification of selected candidates	Intimidation by law enforcement agents (in order to favour particular candidates/parties)	Illegal disqualification of elected candidates
Shoddy preparation	Allocation of votes where no voting took place	Wrongful declaration of elected candidates/unauthorised announcement of election results
Party fielding unqualified candidates	Connivance of parties with electoral body for the purpose of falsifying results	Parties who fielded no candidates declared winner
Illegal printing of voters' cards by parties with the aim of using them to rig the election	Over-voting (more votes than registered voters/population)	Inflation of votes
Creation of spurious polling booths in hidden houses in advance of the election date. INEC agents issuing materials, including ballot boxes, to these booths on payment of an agreed sum of money	Physically intimidating voters for the purpose of scaring them away so as to be able to rig elections	INEC says the name of a candidate with the highest votes is not in its file (even when such a candidate has paid the required fees)
Non-display of voter registration by INEC at the appropriate time	Deliberate refusal to supply election materials to strongholds of opponents/opposition parties	A party's victory withdrawn by the electoral body on the allegation that it fielded non-indigenes, although INEC had earlier issued a clearance certificate to the candidate
Deliberate disenfranchisement of eligible voters		Official manipulation of electoral process against a party/some parties
Non-serialisation of ballot papers		A party/candidate wins at election tribunals, but the government refuses to swear in the winner
		Outright cancellation of electoral process, after results have been wholly or partially released

**Source: Danjibo and Oladeji (2007, p. 187)**

The two contrasting perspectives of vote buying in the academic literature offer insight into how the media frames vote-buying. Having demonstrated a comparative analysis, available sources revealed that the print media frames vote-buying from different perspectives. For example, government owned media are known for supporting the ruling party, private-owned media takes a critical position towards the government.

By comparing these divergent framings, researchers can identify underlying motivations, ideological orientations, and vested interests that shape the media's portrayal of vote buying. By considering diverse framing, researchers can uncover variations in framing strategies, identify underlying motivations, and avoid confirmation bias. This approach provides a more comprehensive and insightful understanding of how vote buying is portrayed in the media landscape. Furthermore, it allows for a comprehensive analysis that acknowledges the multiplicity of perspectives within the media landscape. Such comparative analysis aligns with the notions of media pluralism and diversity of opinion, as emphasized by scholars like Curran et al (2010) it provides a more nuanced understanding of how different framing contribute to the public discourse on vote buying, considering factors such as ownership, political alignments, and audience preferences.

### **3.4 Operationalization**

To address the research question which is: “How the Nigerian print media portrayed the 2023 election” an analytical framework is required. The chapter earlier explores the role of media in framing as one that shaped public discourse, being the Fourth Estate of the Realm, and playing a crucial role in elections in Nigeria improvement (Jacob, and Ademefun, 2021). If media is either a platform for framing actors or a framing actor, the outcome will be similar, empirical data for analysing media's framing of Nigeria’s 2023 election. In this thesis, the media is perceived as a platform for analyzing the legitimacy of election- this helps in addressing the research question.

Election legitimacy refers to the extent to which political actors believe that an entire election process is legitimate and binding (Elklit, et al., 2002). Ogundiya (2021) said election legitimacy refers to means political office holders are legally elected within the structure of popular participation. According to Siachiwena et al (2021), election legitimacy can be measured in the following ways: was it accepted as free and fair? Was there widespread political violence before or after the election? Did the loser accept the results?

The confidence of political actors and citizens in commissions charged with the responsibility of conducting elections is crucial. Erlich et al (2016) stated that when a losing candidate accepts the outcome of a legitimate election does not mean that a challenging outcome is rendered invalid. The absence of election legitimacy in Nigeria is sometimes expressed through voter

apathy as evident in poor voter turnout during election campaigns and polling units (Akanle, et al., 2009).

By adopting legitimacy concepts, distinct outcomes can be identified and therefore used legitimacy or illegitimacy of an election. This is insignificant since it provides a background for the comparative analysis.

### 3.5 Analytical Framework

By observing the data collected, the thesis identified the major common overlaying number of themes concerning media framing of an election and then analysed the data. The analytical framework comprised the four elements of Entman's (1993) theory of media framing: defining a problem, the cause of the problem, moral justification, and treatment recommendation. Each element was further categorized to adapt to Entman's (1993) theory of describing media framing in relation to vote-buying during Nigeria's 2023 election. This will simplify and establish a judgment concerning whether an article is framing the legitimacy of Nigerian elections about stomach infrastructure. In addition, each categorization within Entman's (1993) four-element indicators has individual keywords and definitions to easily identify terminologies or sentences in articles that represent framed.

**Table 3: The Analytical Framework**

Entman's Theory	Framing	Stomach Infrastructure	Stomach Infrastructure
		illegitimate	Legitimate
What is the problem?		Corruption, intimidation, etc.	Motivator
What is the cause?		Wealthy politicians buying voters to get into office, corrupt leaders	Fair elections, and due process
What is the moral judgment?		Bad for democracy, bad for governance, making things worse	Strengthening, Effective, and Improving things
What is the solution?		New laws, more enforcement, international observers, etc.	

The first framing indicator presented in the table is the definition of the problem, and to group the article, the problem must be identified, which is what makes the events or issues newsworthy in the report, either legal or illegal. The problem related to vote buying is characterized by corruption and intimidation within the political system. It encompasses



various unethical practices, such as wealthy politicians buying votes to perpetuate themselves in power, and the presence of corrupt political leaders.

## **4. Specified Aim and Research Questions**

This thesis examines how the Nigerian print media framed the legitimacy of the 2023 election in Nigeria in relation to stomach infrastructure for a better understanding of the challenges facing Nigeria's democracy. Based on framing theory, i.e., Entman's (1993) theory in relation to vote-buying, the thesis examines how the media portrays the legitimacy of Nigerian elections through its coverage and framing of the concept of vote-buying.

The research question is: How did the Nigerian print media portray the legitimacy of the 2023 election in relation to vote-buying? Within the context of media framing, the specific questions are:

1. How has the media framed vote-buying in Nigeria's 2023 election as legitimate?
2. How has the media framed vote-buying in Nigeria's 2023 elections as illegitimate?

## **5. Research Design & Methods**

A qualitative descriptive comparative design is adopted in the thesis to address the research questions. The study's how the Nigerian print media portrayed the 2023 election. This is aimed at exploring the media's framing of the election in relation to vote buying. A deductive approach, as well as an analytical framework underpinned in Entman's (1993) framing theory. This approach allows the identification of themes with the data. The scope of the study is limited to Nigeria's 2023 general election. This period is significant as the EU's (2023) reports on the elections described the performance of the media as largely flawed because the media failed to offer unbiased, fair, and informative reports about political parties and candidates contesting in the elections. Media outlets owned by federal and state governments were biased to please political parties and candidates in power (EU, 2023).

This section presents the choice of research design and techniques of data collection and analysis, used in addressing the research question. The research design is also provided in this section using the small-N case studies. In small-N case studies, the selection of case studies is chosen deliberately and is a theory-oriented comparative technique (Ebbinghaus, 2005). The second section described the choice for selecting the case studies. Thirdly, the choice of data, (newspaper publications) and data collection was analyzed. Lastly, qualitative content analysis was presented.

### **5.1 Research Design**

The thesis adopts a single-case study design which is suitable for showing how the Nigerian print media framed the 2023 general election. The rationale for selecting a single-case study design because thesis media framing of Nigeria's 2023 general election and identifying trends and patterns in the articles. The single-case study design is commonly associated with qualitative research, and it helps the researcher to perform a rigorous, in-depth investigation of the content of these articles and answer the research questions. Adopting such a design increases internal validity because the data will have been thoroughly read and analyzed. As a result, the researcher draws valid conclusions concerning our study questions (Rin & Heath, 2004). Patnaik (2019) stated that the case study design is the most suitable technique when "how" or "why" questions about media framing are raised. The case study design focuses on meanings and understanding, the researcher being the primary agent for data collection and analysis, a deductive investigative strategy, and the product being robust descriptive (Merriam et

al, 2016). Unlike a comparative design that compares, the case study design explores a real-life, Nigeria's 2023 general election (a case) or multiple units (cases) within a period, via detailed, wider data collection comprising of multiple data and reports media framings of the election and case themes (Gustafsson, 2017). Greater generality is gained in the case study design. It is important to note that the broader the analysis, validity becomes a major problem (Halperin et al, 2017).

In the case study design, validity is crucial. The validity was strengthened by developing a robust control. The internal validity ensures that the findings of the research are accepted based on the research design. Secondly, external validity is when the findings can be generalized above the selected data, events, and populations (Quintão, et al., 2020). The case study normally has a dual function, that is the case study is a study of its unit, including a case study of a larger unit. The qualitative case study technique needs a tool so that the researcher can study the comprehensive media framing within their contexts. When this tool is effectively use, the technique will be beneficiary (Baxter, et al., 2008).

Qualitative study designs can be used as an alternative to case study designs. Qualitative study designs help in identifying how different print media framed the 2023 general election or their views concerning vote buying. Validity is central in qualitative study designs where the researcher ensures the appropriateness of the instruments, procedure, and data. Concerning the research question, how did the Nigerian print media portray the 2023 election? the qualitative study designs are advantageous in providing unique insights into certain issues or events (Taylor et al, 2006). Whether the above research question is valid for the expected outcome, whether the choice of research methodology is appropriate for addressing the research question, whether the design is valid for the methodology, selection of data and data analysis is appropriate, and finally the findings and conclusions are valid for the selected data and context.

## **5.2 Selection of Data**

The samples were gathered from media reports and/or political/issues columns from Nigerian print media. Editorials, commentaries, op-eds, or business features were not included because of their critical nature and the overall limitations of the study. Therefore, a critical analysis of issues covered during the 2023 election was carried out.

Lexis-Nexis, an online search database for text was used to access news articles concerning Nigeria's 2023 elections. The samples were collected from 9 online newspaper sites: *Business*

*Day, Daily Post, Nigerian Tribune, Premium Times, PUNCH, The Cable, TheGuardian, ThisDay, and Vanguard.*

*Business Day* is a daily business newspaper that was created in Lagos in 2001. The newspaper has a bureau in Accra, Ghana. It is distributed both in Nigeria and in Ghana. The *Nigerian Tribune* is the oldest Nigerian newspaper created in 1949 located in Ibadan by Obafemi Awolowo. The newspaper was used to promote Awolowo's welfare programmes during the colonial periods. *Premium Times* was established in 2011 in Abuja as a Nigerian online newspaper. The media is famous for reporting different issues and events, as well as investigative journalism. The *PUNCH* newspaper was established in 1970. PUNCH publishes newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals. It was established to inform, educate, and entertain readers across the world. *TheCable* is a Nigerian independent online newspaper created in 2014 by the former editor of *ThisDay*, Simon Kolawole. The *Guardian* was established in 1821 as a British daily newspaper and was formerly referred to as The Manchester Guardian. In 1959, the name was changed to Guardian. *ThisDay* was established in 1995 as a Nigerian national newspaper. The Daily has its head office in Apapa, Lagos State. The newspaper was founded by Nduka Obaigbena, *ThisDay* Media Group, and Arise News, chairperson, and editor-in-chief. *Vanguard* was created in 1984 as a daily newspaper in Lagos, Nigeria by veteran journalist, Sam Amuka-Pemu and his colleagues. The paper has online publications.

The aforementioned newspapers were chosen because of their reputable coverage of Nigerian news and their wide readership. These newspapers are among the top ten newspapers in Nigeria in terms of circulation (Emeka, 2023). The samples were collected from the three days before the general election and the three days after the election. For the articles search, a text search of '2023's General Election' in Nigeria newspapers was used together with customized dating to identify the articles.

The newspaper provides a sample of articles for Nigeria's 2023 general election. These newspapers have been in existence for several years with 300,000 audiences (Anthony, 2019). The newspapers combined a circulation figure of less than 500,000 copies daily (Popoola, 2010). 26 articles were collected from the newspapers, mainly *Business Day, Daily Post, Nigerian Tribune, Premium Times, PUNCH, The Cable, TheGuardian, ThisDay, and Vanguard.* The newspapers for their reputable and respected coverage of national issues. Nonetheless, the editorials of the newspapers have been known to focus on topical issues of national concern.

Nigeria operates a democratic system of government where general elections are held after four years, and the print media has been part of the election process. Since the return of democratic rule in 1999, when Nigeria held its first elections in 16 years, marking the Fourth Republic's beginning and a return to civilian rule, newspapers have played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing the perception of political events and processes.

The study's validity is guaranteed by using newspapers that are widely used by two-thirds of Nigerians (66.6%) and considered authentic, and having a high standard (BBG, 2014). These newspapers are among the 100 national and local print media, of which the most famous are: The Nation, The Punch, The Premium Times, The Guardian, and Vanguard (Adeyemo, 2023). These newspapers continue to grow. For example, the usage of the newspaper rose from 28 percent in 2021 to 33 percent in 2022 (Kareem, 2022). In choosing newspapers, this thesis will establish a good media framing of Nigeria's 2023 election. The sources selected for data collection are 2023. During this period, the newspaper was actively involved in the electioneering process.

## 5.4 Methods for Analysis

This thesis adopts a qualitative content analysis. The data was analyzed using the analytical framework to address the research question. The search technique is full-text articles. Full-text articles refer to a technique of searching a collection of a full-text database or a single online material. One benefit of full-text articles is that they offer more information, detailed descriptions of techniques and protocols, and complete study findings. Therefore, full-text articles comprised more named entities and relationships (between the named entries) than abstracts. The texts were found in a digital media database using search terms *defining the problems\* diagnosing causes\* making moral judgments\* and treatment recommendations\**. About 136 newspaper articles were found, and 26 were sampled for the qualitative content analysis. Their inclusion into the study is a result of their potential to address the research questions: How did the Nigerian print media portray the legitimacy of the 2023 election in relation to vote-buying?

In addition, the analysis provides distinct categories, including applying the analytical framework to the data. The analytical framework helps the thesis address the question: how

does the Nigerian print media portray the 2023 election? The thesis adopts this detailed approach to the data to ensure reliability (Halperin, et al., 2012).

The rationale for adopting a qualitative content analysis is to gain a wider understanding of the explanations, value, and relevance of the textual data, and equally to analyze a large data pool by using indicators crucial to the research (Halperin, et al., 2012). Qualitative content analysis refers to “the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of information characteristics (Neuendorf, 2002). Qualitative content analysis is an appropriate tool to analyze the use of occurring language and media coverage of a particular event or issue, specifically the newspaper media (Neuendorf, 2002). The qualitative content analysis was used in organizing, codifying, and summarizing the samples of newspaper articles based on frames during Nigeria’s 2023 election.

In answering the research question: how the Nigerian print media portrayed the legitimacy of the 2023 election in relation to vote-buying, the qualitative content analysis adopted five procedures from Cohen (2007). Firstly, the research question was defined and addressed by employing the qualitative content analysis technique to analyse data from the 26 articles. Secondly, the samples were defined and subsequently analysed with Entman’s four questions. Thirdly, the data was developed by employing context units as the required units of analysis. The context units refer to a textual matter that sets boundaries on the information to be regarded in describing the recording units. Fourthly, the data were organised according to their types, classifications, and meanings. This is carried out by examining the data based on Entman’s four questions. Fifthly, results are presented in an analytical framework to address the research question.

To find the categories, the articles were grouped into distinct categories in the table. The table was marshaled into comprehensive distinct descriptions. The data comprised 26 articles, all of which were examined, to categorize themes. Having identified the themes, the coding commences by searching for certain indicators in the data. The first stage of coding was completed through the structural coding process where the data corpus was labeled. In the structural coding, codes were generated from the data categorized into four labels: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and treatment recommendations. Structural coding was used to label the data to help the researchers quickly access the data. The categorizing of the data based on structural codes allows the researcher to access data more easily at each phase of the process of the research. The Structural coding arranged the data

based on the research question: How did the Nigerian print media portray the legitimacy of the 2023 election in relation to vote-buying? After identifying the themes, some specific indicators were searched in the data such as the name of article, plot, and main themes.



## 6. Analysis

This section is divided into four sub-chapters. The section critically presents the four distinct themes found in the data and analyzed in the analytical framework. By observing the data collected, this thesis has found the most common underlying themes framing Nigeria's 2023 election. 26 articles were collected from *Business Day*, *Daily Post*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Premium Times*, *PUNCH*, *The Cable*, *TheGuardian*, *ThisDay*, and *Vanguard*.

### 6.1 Defining the Problems

This factor is the mainframe, and it discusses how the media framed the problem of vote-buying. The problem of vote-buying is framed differently by the print media. The media framed vote-buying based on existing concepts, beliefs, and norms of any specific society to accomplish these roles. That is, frames are collectively related, and there can be a limited number of news frames if the culture's dominant concepts, beliefs, and norms are equally limited.

Vote-buying is the theme that defines the problem. The media specifically, *Business Day*, *Daily Post*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Premium Times*, *PUNCH*, *TheGuardian*, and *Vanguard* framed vote-buying as an illegitimate practice that involves financial resources, material goods, or promissory inducement or compensation by political actors to influence electorates to vote for a specific candidate in an election. Furthermore, the analysis of Nigeria's 2023 election in the 26 articles revealed two contrasting arguments, those supporting vote-buying as legitimate and those against it as illegitimate practice describing it as fraudulent electoral acts of political actors, political parties, and the electorate. This includes the practice of accepting bribes from political actors and distributing resources to buy votes. *TheGuardian* (2023) defined vote-buying as a problem that significantly contributes to Nigeria's lack of confidence in the electoral system. Making Nigerians susceptible to violence as a method of seeking redress brings out the connection between the abuse of resources in elections, electoral violence, and fraud. Below are some of the excerpts from the articles framing vote-buying.

“the politics of voting, collecting money, and preparing soup (Dibo Kosebe), also known as stomach infrastructure, cannot take Nigeria out of its current problems.” (Adebayo, 2023)

“there have been instances of political party representatives and agents bribing electorates with money to vote for their candidates in prior elections, which has raised concerns for both participants and election observers.” (The Nigerian Tribune, 2023)

“vote buying and selling is consistent with the continued malpractices of political parties. Lower-income earning individuals fall victim to vote-buying by political party, though the rich are equally not left out of the malpractices.” (Daily Trust, 2023)

“vote-buying is an illegitimate practice, caused by the poor economic condition of Nigerians, voters’ intimidation, and any attempt to persuade voters to support a particular candidate or party against the guidelines of Electoral Act 2022.” (Olorokor, 2023)

The problem of vote-buying is perceived with different meanings in distinct historical and cultural contexts. Vote-buying perceived is no longer as an economic exchange between political actors who consider the act as an investment when they gain political power. From the perspective of voters, elections are times when equality and justice are temporarily actualized as political actors fulfil their monetary obligations to assist them. Vote-buying is considered more than just economic exchange; it is a mixture of economic transaction and social ritual. Nigerian custom expects a guest to pay homage with a little gift. Gift-giving demonstrates a sign of respect for the receiver; to give an individual a gift is to give that individual a face.

There is an agreement that the presenting of public goods is not tantamount to “buying” votes in many cases. There is also a disagreement concerning how excludable the gains must be, or how an entire group must be, for the giving to be considered as an attempt at vote-buying. In keeping with the focus of Entman (1993) theory about how the problem of vote-buying is perceived, the media perceive the problem of vote-buying affecting the entire community or provide quasi-public facilities such as roads and boreholes, as examples of vote-buying. The perception of vote-buying by the media is framed as:

“a voter is guilty where, before, or during an election, directly or indirectly, by his or herself, or by any other person, on his or her behalf, receives, agrees, or contracts for any money, gift, loan, or valuable consideration, office, place of employment, for his or herself, or any other person, for voting or agreeing to vote, or for refraining or agreeing to refrain from voting at any such election.” (TheGuardian, 2023)

*“while cash crunch arising from the redesigned naira notes may have reduced the use of cash by desperate politicians and their agents to buy votes, it can be seen from the aforementioned that other ingenious means of vote buying had been devised to induce voters.” (Ojo, 2023)*

“but is vote buying the menace it has been made out to be? If we consider critically the evidence before us and the historical lessons from other countries in their democratic evolution, we may have to conclude, counterintuitively, that vote buying is a good thing and the evidence that our democratic process is maturing and that our elections are becoming freer and fairer.” (Akande, 2023)

“From the historical examples I have given as per presidential elections, it is logically impossible to argue that anyone has been elected president in the last 24 years solely through retail vote-buying.” (Kolawole, 2023).

“There are several factors in the mix when voters make their choices at the ballot. To hold money solely responsible is to ignore a body of evidence from our history.” (Kolawole, 2023).

“True, you can win the presidential ticket of your party by bribing delegates. The numbers are manageable. But I insist that during presidential elections, the role of retail vote-buying is exaggerated. I admit you can induce the INEC and security officials to manipulate things for you — but you don’t need the new naira for that.” (Kolawole, 2023).

ThisDay (2023) framed vote-buying by saying: “If we assume that money always buys votes — as we tend to believe — I do not think President Goodluck Jonathan would have lost the 2015 presidential election.” (Kolawole, 2023)

The above report presented vote-buying attempt to explain that vote-buying does not determine the results of an election, meaning vote-buying cannot make a politician win an election. This view reflects the arguments justifying vote-buying as presented in the literature review. Vote-buying was described as a motivator or influencing factor that drives the decisions of voters.

“the role of “vote-buying” in presidential elections is grossly exaggerated. I would not argue that vote-buying does not play any role at all — that would be disingenuous of me. Some voters only decide who to vote for on election day based on financial and material inducements. But how many are they?” (Kolawole, 2023)

The analytical framework attempts to explain vote-buying as a problem. Vote-buying is a problem associated with political clientelism involving pre-electoral monetary or inducements from political actors to voters. The clientelist transaction can be employed to restrict the supply and availability of distributive items and welfare gains to supporters of the distributing political party or to cajole the support of swing electorates. Vote buying harms broad-based government policies and redistributive programmes. There is a negative link between vote-buying and pro-poor government policies. Clientelism can be employed by political actors to acquire rent. Vote-buying by political actors causes a lower supply of pro-poor public policies. Usage of vote-buying may be specifically pronounced when political actors are not well-organized and find it hard to commit to future redistribution. In this situation, voters’ confidence in campaign promises is low and can lead political actors to increase vote buying to the detriment of post-electoral redistribution. That is to say that patronage, the distribution of jobs in exchange for votes is a good example of clientelist distribution, but equally results in deficits in the distribution of public goods.

Clientelism stressed that political actors sometimes adopt particularistic clientelist distribution to substitute broad-based government policies, voters’ assessment of candidate performance is

equally affected by clientelist distribution. Vote-buying makes the electorate less disposed to punish political actors for rent extraction. Furthermore, the distribution of patronage attenuates the electorate punishment of corrupt public holders. The media framed vote-buying as a problem because it is an act of “clientelist, the payment by political parties of minor benefits (food, clothing, cash) to citizens in exchange for their votes – is a criminal offense in Nigeria nonetheless, it is still predominant in many forms across the country.” (Dapel, 2023).

## 6.2 Diagnose Causes

The factors causing the problem of vote-buying are numerous and complex. They examined who is considered as the participant in vote-buying. The cause of vote-buying refers to “what”, and equally “who.”

Vote buying means using financial resources, material goods, or promissory inducement or compensation by political actors to influence electorates to vote for a specific candidate in an election. Vote-buying made poor voters the major targets of vote-buying by political actors to be re-elected. Vote buying is a last-minute attempt to sway a voter's choice in an election, usually occurring days, or even just a few hours, before a poll, by offering the voter money, products, or some other material reward.

The cause of vote-buying in Nigeria is linked to growing rates of poverty, and hunger, a twin challenge that is considered the major driver of vote-buying in Nigeria. Vanguard (2023) reported that:

“It said the vote-trading was made possible due to increasing rates of poverty amid the current CBN monetary policies, limiting cash circulation.”

“The prevailing economic hardship in the country – 133 million Nigerians were estimated to be multidimensionally poor.” (Raji, 2023)

These twin problems might not be a key causative factor in other countries. When a typical Nigerian household lacks the means to earn a living, the law of exigency takes control, resulting in compromised electoral malpractice such as vote-buying. PUNCH (2023) stated that:

“The increasing rates of poverty and hunger that research has shown as malignant tumors that affect the credibility of Nigeria’s elections are violence and vote buying which I choose to call vote trading as it involves both buyers and sellers.” (Ojo, 2023)

PUNCH (2023) stated that: “many states in Nigeria are notorious for non-payment of workers' salaries, gratuity, pensions, and allowances. This issue causes the irresistible temptation to sell votes among civil servants. Several workers and pensioners find it difficult to meet their domestic responsibilities. For instance, a family that has four eligible voters who are sure of

receiving money after voting would not think twice before selling their votes.” Similarly, ThisDay (2023) stated that the “failure of political actors to fulfil their campaign promises encouraged eligible voters to request for money before voting them.” Several voters are ignorant and believe that one could only have a share of the “national cake” from the political actors during elections where politicians are humble enough to plead for votes. Neglecting rural communities in infrastructural development propels communities to consider selling their votes to avert what they regard as 'double tragedies' in case a new administration abandons them. Personal interests cause leaders to enrich themselves via public resources and; thereby have excess resources to manipulate the electoral process to their favour either as candidates or godfathers. Greed causes political actors to embezzle public resources meant for national development and use the resources for their selfish reasons (Kolawole, 2023). It is equally greed that causes average voters to accept money, foodstuff, and material gifts in exchange for a vote. The introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), an electronic machine used in verifying Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) made rigging difficult. Therefore, politicians resorted to vote buying. In the light of the above analysis from the underpinning theoretical framework, the media framed the causes of vote-buying as:

“the perception that voters make their choices on presidential election day based on financial inducement is not only problematic but also highly debatable. Voters are motivated by more than one factor. Many people vote out of loyalty to a party, an individual, or an alliance — what I call “political affinity”; some because of ethnic, regional, or religious sentiments — which are “primordial”; some because of ideological leanings — they look out for manifestos, personal character, and track record; and some because of material gain — they are only after the cash and the rice. No doubt, more than one factor can also be at play.” (Kolawole, 2023)

The above statement attempts to show that justifying vote-buying during the 2023’s election is debatable because distinct factors determine who the electorates vote e.g., loyalty to a specific political party, ethnoreligious factors sentiments, material rewards, and track records of candidates.

“many need the money; they want upfront dividends from the would-be political billionaires. It is primarily driven by material context and immediate circumstances such as economic hardship.” (Kolawole, 2023)

“buying and selling votes is a moral and attitudinal issue in Nigeria...inadequate voters’ education and relative patriotism fuel these inadequacies.”

“In a section of the country, voters were told by a party to vote for their own (*naka sai naka* or yours is yours) and by another party to vote for the ticket with two Muslims. Another candidate was aggressively marketed by prominent clerics as the candidate of the Church. As said earlier, there were a few mediating factors (like partisan and generational identities and the dissenting nature of urban politics) and instances where one identity marker vetoed the others, but the ethnic and religious underpinning of the votes for the top three candidates cannot be missed by anyone that chooses to peer beneath the glittering

surface. So, while the increased competition in our politics should be celebrated, the regression to the combustible fault lines of ethnicity and religion should get us all worried. It is a dangerous slide.” (Adio, 2023)

Having explored the causes of the problem, Entman (1993) theory suggested that the participants involved as the root cause of the problem need to be identified. The participants can be grouped into two: the political actors (givers) and the voters or electorates (receivers). Vote-buying results from strategic practice by politicians to manipulate the most vulnerable and impoverished voters, leaving them with no choice but to trade their votes to the highest bidder before or during an election. According to Ojo (2023):

“The most vulnerable and impoverished became prey to vote buying by some political parties with as little as N500 or packets of noodles in some places. At Udenu, parties competed for the votes of our people with N2,000, a plate of jollof rice, Okpa, and a bottle of soda.”

“Vote-buying is becoming a norm also because the government has so impoverished the society that people can do anything to get resources to get by, and that includes selling their conscience.” (Sunday, 2023)

Vote-buying has established a partnership because the political actors are sure that there will always be voters to sell their votes. On the other hand, the political actors know that there will always be buyers (voters) during elections because that is the only day and avenue, they can capture the desperation of the vote buyers. It is crucial to sermonize the seller and buyer on the practice's negative impact.

Just like in a typical marketplace, political actors, party agents, and political parties are the vote buyers while potential voters are the sellers. The item to be sold is a vote, while the medium of the transaction can be financial or non-financial items. Ojo (2023) confirmed this statement where he stated that:

“Apart from monetary or cash gifts, many were influenced by gifts such as food items, clothing materials, and sudden acts of charity by the political class.”

“In governorship races, high expenditure on publicity and use of state resources was evident, but in SHoA campaigns, spending was less obvious due to the low-key and less visible nature of campaigns. The ongoing shortage of cash was perceived as reducing the scope for vote buying, but other inducements to voters were observed.” (PUNCH, 2023)

The market force that determines the price or value of a vote is the level of desperation of political actors to win in a community. In validating this statement, Ndujihe (2023) stated that:

“In the past, depending on location, politicians buy votes with ₦5,000, ₦10,000, or even ₦20,000, if there was stiff opposition. Now things have changed. With the scarcity of Naira and worsening poverty, votes may be bought with ₦1000. You have seen what people are going through to survive and how difficult it is to get cash. Some of them may even sell their votes for ₦200.”

“30 percent of respondents who have registered to vote during the election claimed that they would accept gifts or favors from politicians and their cronies. On the type of gifts or favours that the electorate is likely to accept from the political class and their associates, the report revealed that 45 percent of respondents would accept money, 21 percent would accept gifts, ten percent would accept promised jobs or contracts, nine percent would accept food items and two percent would accept clothes.” (Business Day, 2023)

Similarly, Ani (2023) framed the monetary policy, stating that:

“How on earth would a government deny the people access to their legitimate earnings and expect them not to be vulnerable to vote- trading during elections? When people are economically deprived, you are making them vulnerable to all forms of abuse.”

“With the untidy manner the CBN is going about the implementation of its monetary policies, the level of vote-trading in the General Election would be unimaginable.” (Ani, 2023)

“Since the wake of the monetary policy, many lives have been lost while several public infrastructures, including Commercial Banks, have also been destroyed. Angry Nigerians are beginning to regroup to launch massive civil unrest and a government supposedly planning peaceful and credible elections for Nigerians is not seeing the handwriting on the wall.” (Ani, 2023)

Despite money and other valuable items can be used to materialize vote buying, political actors used two main approaches to vote-buying. The first approach is the cash vote. It is comprised of giving or promising potential voters a specific amount of cash before the voter casts their votes at the polling unit. The money is paid before voting time and can be around the polling unit or far away. The inducements are paid secretly or openly. Sometimes, the political actors demand evidence of the ownership of a voter’s card and assurance that the electorate will vote for a specific party or candidate before giving the inducements. In this approach, the contract is based on “trust.” It is equally referred to as the pre-paid practice of vote buying. The vote for cash is the second approach. It is comprised of giving the voter an agreed amount of money or item after the voter shows evidence of voting for a specific party or candidate. There are methods the voter can prove to have voted for the agreed party or candidate. Firstly, is when the voter shrewdly shows his or her ballot paper, evidencing that they had voted for the agreed party or candidate for the party agents standing to see. Ojo (2023) captured the key role of party agents during the 2023’s election arguing that:

“In the North-West, observers in all seven states reported increased reports of vote trading, primarily by political party agents. Money was used alongside other materials such as food items, wrappers, and a ‘credit voucher,’ and those items would be redeemed after the results. Similarly, in the Northeast, political party agents in Taraba infiltrated queues, pretended to be voters, and used the chance to offer cash for votes. In the South-East, there were reports of APGA and LP party agents using materials, phones, and other souvenirs to entice voters in Anambra State. In the South-South, multiple states reported a desire for voters to show proof of their vote before being paid, with party agents reportedly compiling a list of their voters in Esan Central LGA, Edo State.” (PUNCH, 2023)

“In the North-West, observers in all seven states reported increased reports of vote trading, primarily by political party agents. Money was used alongside other materials such as food items, wrappers, and ‘credit vouchers,’ and those items would be redeemed after the results.” (Olorokor, 2023)

“Votes were being traded for between ₦1,000-2,000 in parts of Edo and Benue states for example, with goods of similar value used in many cases in place of cash given the continued currency shortages. Across the region, manifestations of vote buying included the use of fabric, toiletries, ‘I-owe-you-vouchers’ and food items.” (Vanguard, 2023)

Reflecting on the participants as the root cause of the problem, the media portrayed it as: “No politician can pay off 50 percent of Nigeria’s 93 million registered voters. Vote buying strategies work when there are fewer people to pay and when politicians can confirm — or convince voters that they can confirm — whom they voted for.” (Asori, 2023)

The cause of vote-buying is associated with desperation to win elections at all costs. Politicians participate in vote-buying because of the promise of enormous wealth and power they hope to capture after assuming office. There is equally fear among several politicians that when they are not involved in vote-buying, their opponents will still do so and have an edge over them. This misconception has therefore made vote-buying a competition, particularly among the major political parties. Regarding the cause of vote-buying, the print media said:

“Some desperate politicians who want to reap from where they did not sow would try to divide the citizens along tribal and religious lines.” (DailyTrust, 2023)

“the combination of a tight race and the shortage of cash to buy support mean that politicians and their fieldmen are getting even more desperate across the country.” (Business Day, 2023)

“Many of the election polling that have been conducted so far indicate a close race and the desperate search for banknotes is fueling more desperation in the final days of campaigning...” *Business Day*, August 15.



The high rates of poverty in Nigeria have been used to explore the causes of vote-buying. Nigeria is ranked among countries with poverty-stricken populations. Poverty is specifically acute in rural areas and among female-headed households, making several people susceptible to selling their vote for immediate needs. According to DailyTrust (2023):

“There is no doubt that poverty has impacted negatively on the electoral behaviour in Nigeria, as it encourages buying and selling of votes by the electorate, aside other malpractices.”

In tandem with the above, Business Day (2023) provided a statistical report on Nigeria’s poverty rate and its impact on the election:

“84 million Nigerians wrangle in extreme poverty, surviving below \$1.9 per day, while 133 million (63 percent of the country’s population) are multidimensionally poor, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Unemployment bites harder on Nigeria’s youthful population, with 33.3 percent of the labour force unable to find a job at the prevailing wage rate.”

“Poverty, hunger, and economic hardship faced by many Nigerians could threaten the credibility of the 2023 elections. Poverty is axiomatic in Nigeria. It is devoid of gender, religion, or ethnicity.” (Business Day, 2023)

To gain their protection and loyalty, law enforcement is normally the first to be compromised by political actors. Therefore, vote-buying is sometimes done before the presence of law enforcement agents who are not ready, unwilling, or too compromised to prevent vote-buying. Ndujihe (2023) stated that:

“In the past, an officer in charge of some polling units in a Ward may be given ₦500,000 or one million nairas. From the money, he will take care of agents of the other parties, security agents, and INEC officials and we will take charge of the process.”

“While thugs were moving from place to place in the local government and harassing voters suspected not to be for their candidate, agents of the parties were busy soliciting votes with cash...This is even despite the massive deployment of security officials, including police, navy and army.” (Ujumadu, 2023)

Therefore, there is a need for the government and relevant authorities to investigate and prosecute all security agents who are complicit in the act of electoral practices and to arrest and process all those who are engaged in electoral malpractices. This will serve as a deterrent not only to security agents but also to electoral officers.

Vote-buying is associated with the idea of security votes. Security votes are monthly allocations to all 36 states in Nigeria to secure the state. However, not subjecting the funding to any legislative oversight, regulation or independent audit allowed presidents and state governors to treat it as a reserved fund and personal entitlement, such as votes-buying. The absence of transparency and a robust auditing framework causes the problem of vote-buying. The Cable (2023) reported that:

“Because the entire budgeting process and operating mechanics of security votes are shrouded in secrecy, a consequence of the rentier nature of the Nigerian state and its underdeveloped democracy, there is little pressure to justify such expenses and subsequent increases to the electorate. The secrecy surrounding issues of state security and the nature of security votes provide an alibi for state governors in their attempt to evade allegations of corruption and disguise their pilfering from the public purse.”

“The Nigerian states should critically examine how similar units in matured democracies deal with budgeting for emergency expenses that are accountable and legal. The legislature that has been constitutionally granted the oversight role against the executive must reconsider the security vote and either remove this in its entirety or allow a reasonable amount (about 1% of the budget) for emergency security issues. And the governors must account for it.” (The Cable, 2023)

The above analysis indicated that the lack of accountability of security votes causes vote-buying and abuse of political power. Nigeria’s security votes have no constitutional or statutory basis. Security votes often represent contingencies fund, a Nigerian constitutional framework that provides federal and state legislators the authority to provide a separate fund to be used for planned or unexpected expenses that are not stipulated in an annual budget. Therefore, security votes permit or enhance different forms of corruption, including vote-buying.

### **6.3 Make Moral Judgment**

The framing concept stressed justify/present reasons for vote-buying. After defining the problem of vote-buying, and the cause of the problem has been determined, it requires a strong explanation to justify a theory until the problem has been identified and the root of the problem has been found. Entman (1993) theory states that this element evaluates causal agents and their impact.

Since the return of civilian administration in Nigeria in 1999, the electoral system has been characterized by money politics, but it has reached a more glaring dimension during the 2023 general election. Nigeria has been battling with the problem of having quality leaders. In a democratic dispensation, politicians are required to respect the citizens irrespective of their status. Kolawole, (2023) asserted that:

“vote-buying, which I consider to be a serious threat to our democracy. The phenomenon is not new — it’s been with us for over six decades — but we cannot sanitise our electoral system unless we tackle it decisively. Elections should never be won by the highest bidder, otherwise the underlying assumption of “free choice” will be undermined. There is, however, a false belief in Nigeria that only one party or one candidate buys votes. This line of thinking has been propagated by opposition parties since 1999. If they win any election, they will say it was “free, fair, and credible”. If they lose, they will say the ruling party bought the votes or rigged outright.”

Vote-buying is the commercialization of partisan relations between political actors or a politician and voters. In justifying vote-buying during the 2023 election, ThisDay (2023) reported that:

“Voters are motivated by more than one factor. Many people vote out of loyalty to a party, an individual, or an alliance — what I call “political sentiment”; some because of ethnic, regional, or religious sentiments — which are “primordial”; some because of a politician’s manifestos, personal character and track record; and some because of material resources — they are only after the cash and the rice. No doubt, more than one factor can also be at play.”

The above statements indicated that voters looked at several factors before casting their votes for specific candidates or political parties and this is often guided by their sentiments. Voters’ sentiments indicated that vote-buying is not the only illegitimate practice that marred the outcome of Nigeria’s 2023 general election. According to ThisDay (2023), Nigeria’s election since the return to democracy had been characterized by personal sentiments which has been a barn to Nigeria’s democracy. Akande (2023) stated that:

“As a rational Nigerian politician, what do you do when you can no longer rig elections? Do you start to govern well in the hope that your performance will make you and your party attractive? Well, since you cannot rig the vote, you switch to buying the vote. Game, set, match.”

Vote buying is not new to Nigeria’s electoral process or unique to Nigeria. Vote-buying is a problem that is common in several countries, which undermines the legitimacy of elections and is harmful to democratic governance. According to PUNCH (2023), “The problem is also not unique to Nigeria: At least 165 countries have laws against vote trading which means votes are influenced by payments or allurements in many other developing world democracies.” Political actors and voters who are involved in vote-buying justified the act as a global phenomenon, thereby giving a moral judgment to the act. To counter that assertion, TheCable, (2023) opined that:

“If the research showed that vote buying was rampant in the UK and the US in the last century, how come we no longer hear these stories today? How were these societies able to abolish the practice? Susan Stokes tells us the answer: “What, then, killed vote buying in Britain and the United States? The explanation we offer in this chapter focuses on changes in the electorate, changes that were the effects of industrialization and economic growth.”

There are several moral judgments for vote-buying in Nigeria's 2023 elections. Top on the list are recent technological innovations and monetary policies such as the redesigning of Nigeria's ₦200, ₦500, and ₦1000 by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) introduced that limited the circulation of the currency. In addition to this, there is also a cash limit policy of ₦500,000 and ₦5,000,000 per week for individuals and corporate organizations, several politicians were placed on their toes. Similarly, there is also the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), an electronic machine used to verify Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and authenticate voters – scanning the fingerprints and photos of voters to confirm their eligibility to cast their votes in a specific polling station. BVAS was designed to reduce the cases of manual manipulation of electoral results. These innovations and policies made politicians realize that manipulation of elections through manual manipulation is counterproductive. The politicians now resorted to another strategy where Vanguard (2023) captured it as:

“Wike appointed 200,000 aides. We are doing a similar thing on a larger scale. We mobilised over one million people for voter registration and ensured they got their PVCs. The 2023 elections will be different from past elections because of the BVAS and redesigning of the naira.”

“With BVAS, things have changed. But we are politicians, and we know how to play the game. We have mobilized real people, real voters, up to one million in some LGAs. We have started giving them allowances of ₦10,000 every month and it will continue till the end of the election. We transfer the money into their bank accounts.” (Vanguard, 2023)

“The February 25 presidential poll is proving to be unlike the ones before it. It is the first time a presidential election will be this tight, it is the first time that the two major parties are truly being challenged and it is the first time that the election will be held in an environment where access to cash to buy votes has been significantly curtailed, leading to politicians willing to pay a huge premium for the cash when they can lay hands on it.” (Business Day, 2023)

The problem of vote-buying in Nigeria is not spiritual but one that needs to be addressed as a social problem. While reflecting on the moral judgment, Daily Post (2023), stated that:

“Prayer alone will not solve Nigeria's problems. We are one of the most prayerful countries in the world. When you are praying and there is no action, things will not work out as expected. God has given us all that we need to survive and govern ourselves.” (Babajide, 2023)

“Every day, people are proclaiming the call to prayer and the muezzin heralding the beginning of every dawn. And yet the bigger question is: why is Nigeria so religious, so prayerful, and yet so poor?” (Abati, 2023)

One of the potential effects of CBN's monetary policies is on the 2023 electoral process by reducing vote-buying. Vote-buying is a social problem that is prevalent in the electoral process of Nigeria, with candidates and political actors using cash to influence the decisions of voters. Vote-buying sabotaged the integrity and credibility of Nigeria's election and questioned the legitimacy of election outcomes. According to PUNCH (2023), July 22,

“When you have purchased outcomes, it delegitimises the entire political process, and this is what politicians must understand. The fact that you invest in buying votes does confer legitimacy on you; it means you have compromised the choice of the people. So, people are not making that choice based on free will.”

Finally, for the moral judgment, the potential impact of vote-buying is examined. Vote-buying denies the general population from enjoying good governance. Good governance depends on the basic tenets and practice of democracy. A political system that enjoys the support and trust of most citizens must be legitimate. Legitimacy engenders the support and trust of the citizens in government reforms and policies. Ojo (2023) described vote-buying as: “The twin evils that research has shown as malignant tumours that affect the legitimacy of Nigeria's elections are violence and vote buying which I choose to call vote trading as it involves both buyers and sellers.”

## **6.4 Treatment Recommendations**

This is used to explain the preferable solution the media proposes to curtail vote-buying. It provides a detailed approach to be taken to address the problem. The solution is based on how the problem is perceived and who is perceived to be the root cause of vote-buying. Furthermore, it provides and justifies treatments for the problem of vote-buying and presents their potential impact.

The introduction of ₦200, ₦500, and ₦1000 by the (CBN) with certain security features, was believed that it will make it more difficult for politicians to buy votes since the new naira notes would reduce the susceptible to counterfeiting, the lesser amount in circulation and be easier to track their locations when used for vote-buying. The monetary policies were also expected to make it easier for law security agencies to identify and prosecute violators. Similarly, the naira redesign reduced excessive currency circulation banking sector, which is sometimes used to buy votes, thus limiting their financial strengths. Yusuf (2023) stated that:

“The decision of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to redesign naira notes just before the 2023 general election received kudos..., depending on who is doing the talking. In an

ironic twist, governors elected on the platform of the All-Progressives Congress (APC) are against the policy while members and supporters of the opposition parties are in favour.”

“Therefore, we can see that the solution to vote buying lies in increasing the prosperity of Nigerians. Solutions such as currency swaps and restrictions on cash in circulations are blunt tools that can be circumvented by intelligent minds.” (Akanke, 2023)

Security agencies must ensure swift election monitoring and election outcomes. The major goal of every civilized nation is to maintain law and order during the entire process of an election and ensure the lives and properties of citizens are safeguarded. Section 14 (2) of Nigeria’s Constitution, 1999 stressed that the security and welfare of citizens should be the major purpose of government, and the participation by the citizens in their government should be enabled based on the Constitution. In line with the provisions of the Constitution, the Nigerian government has the sole responsibility to ensure the security and welfare of all citizens, and to ensure that citizens participate freely in government. This participation includes the right to vote and be voted. Therefore, any situation that hinders any Nigerian from exercising suffrage based on constitutional provisions must be considered a human rights violation and the right to freedom of expression. The Nigerian government supported the pursuance of allowing security agencies, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to monitor and ensure it aligns monies Money Laundering Act 2011. According to Arogbonlo (2023),

“The massive operation by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to deter vote trading and other financial malfeasance ahead of tomorrow’s presidential and national assembly elections may have begun paying dividends...With the interception in Lagos of the sum of N32,400,000 (Thirty-two Million, Four Hundred Thousand Naira) allegedly suspected to be used for vote buying in Lagos.”

The Nigerian police being the first line of defence for the citizens have a role to play in addressing the problem of vote-buying. According to ThisDay (2023), “The police must move to arrest those individuals and bring them to justice to serve as a deterrent in future elections... Security agencies must play their roles optimally to ensure electoral violence does not remain a tool for election manipulation in the hands of politicians.”

“The Nigeria police, with the support of other security agencies, has perfected plans to deploy in a coordinated and collaborative manner to cover all these locations...Because of the above, the Nigerian police will deploy 310,973 personnel for election security operations. This will comprise of conventional police officers, the mobile police officers, the special counter-terrorism unit, in Special Forces, the intelligence response team, and other sections of the police.” (Angbulu, 2023)

To address the problem of vote-buying, criminal law provisions should be applied as contained in the Criminal Code and Penal Code. When political actors offer inducements to voters in

return for their votes, it translates to bribing them. In addition to the criminal law that can be applied to prosecute violators, there should be sufficient provisions in the Electoral Act for addressing the problem. The political to apply and enforce these provisions is critical. TheGuardian (2023) stressed:

“...the urgent need for the Electoral Act 2022, which mandates that political parties submit their financial reports to INEC at specified intervals.”

“The Electoral Act, 2022, is the legislation that guides the activities involved in the electoral process. It gives life to the voter register as well as its uses in elections. Section 15 is a mandatory provision requiring the certified true copy of the voter register to be made and forwarded to the state, local government, or area council.” (Shittu, 2023)

Concerning the aforementioned provisions, The Cable (2023) stated that: “Even those lawmakers who made the law do not understand it...The law forbids vote buying, but one of the leading topics in Nigeria today is how politicians are struggling to buy votes, through access to old or new notes and how a naira redesign policy on the eve of the elections has frustrated access to cash.” (Abati, 2023).

Another solution to vote-buying is to resort to political awareness so that electorates will know their rights and the power of their votes in electing credible leaders of their choice. The voters need to be enlightened that the power of their votes should not be sold. They need to be educated that selling their votes will sabotage their future and prosperity. Therefore, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and relevant stakeholders need to increase political education. Stressing the role of the citizens in curbing vote-buying, TheGuardian, (2023) stated that:

“INEC equally stressed the need for citizens to play their role in sanitising Nigerian elections by rejecting inducements to sway their votes through vote buying. “They must also engage effectively in stopping the negative use of money in our electoral process by reporting cases to INEC and other agencies. In addition, civil society organisations should make this a major plank of both their pre-election and election observation activities. Financial institutions, religious organisations, traditional institutions, the media, civic bodies, and citizens must also join in this fight.”

“Voting is a part of the democratic process; it is a civic right. Teaching your child about it early will ensure that he/she looks forward to turning 18 so he/she can also take on this civic responsibility.” (The Guardian, 2023)

But vote-buying destroys this incredibly significant feature of democracy. This is a result of the conviction among citizens that those in power rule based on popular consent, expressed freely, is the tonic needed to make the citizens make sacrifices that reforms the political or socio-economic inevitably demand. Therefore, vote-buying has made election outcomes have

little or nothing to do with the politicians' performance in office. Because performance is not key in the electoral outcome, the zeal to perform is very weak. And since vote-buying is highly effective in actualizing electoral victory, the need to buy votes becomes extremely high. Consequently, elected leaders who spend a huge amount to secure victory, there is a great tendency to pursue their interests and business and sometimes that of their political godfathers. In this situation, vote-buying plagued a nation with poor governance. According to Daily Trust (2023):

“Vote buying encourages poor governance and weakens citizens' capacity to hold their 'elected officials' accountable for their actions,” it said, adding, that when political candidates or their sponsors decide to buy the support of the people rather than contest fairly for their votes, there are possibilities that such candidates and sponsors will show a disregard for democratic rules and a disposition to adopt illegal means becomes inevitable.”

“Any meaningful attempt to stem electoral fraud in Nigeria must consider the wide gap between the poor and the rich. There is no doubt that poverty has impacted negatively on the electoral behaviour in Nigeria, as it encourages buying and selling of votes by the electorate, aside from other malpractices.” (Daily Trust, 2023)

The above analysis shows that vote-buying harms Nigeria's democracy because it weakens accountability in governance, and hinders institutional growth needed for democracy. Vote-buying is a barrier to good governance, as it perpetuates clientelist networks and undermines the provision of public goods and services. In addition, this problem can be solved by addressing the problem of economic deprivation, among underprivileged citizens.



## 7. Conclusion

The research question is: How does the Nigerian print media frame the legitimacy of the 2023 election in relation to vote-buying? To address the question, four themes based on Entman (1993) framing theory were designed. In addressing the research questions, 26 articles from 9 newspapers were analyzed. A summary of the key findings from Entman's four questions is presented below.

The first question, *defining the problems*, the media defined vote buying as financial resources, material goods, or promissory inducement or compensation by political actors to influence electorates to vote for a specific candidate in an election. The analysis of Nigeria's 2023 election in the 26 articles has two themes, those supporting vote-buying and those against it. The analysis found that *Business Day*, *Daily Post*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Premium Times*, *PUNCH*, *TheGuardian*, and *Vanguard* described vote-buying as a fraudulent electoral act of political actors, political parties, and the electorate. This includes the practice of accepting bribes from political actors and distributing resources to buy votes. Therefore, vote buying is a problem that significantly contributes to Nigeria's lack of confidence in the electoral system. On the other hand, *TheCable*, and *ThisDay* framed vote-buying differently, stating that giving voters inducements in return for votes does not amount to "buying" votes.

Secondly, when diagnosing the causes, the analysis found that vote-buying in Nigeria is linked to poor economic condition and hunger is a twin challenge that is considered the major driver of vote-buying in Nigeria. These twin problems might not be a key causative factor in other countries. When a typical Nigerian household lacks the means to earn a living, the law of exigency takes control, resulting in compromised electoral malpractice such as vote-buying. The analysis also linked vote-buying to non-payment of workers' salaries, gratuity, pensions, and allowances in Nigeria. Similarly, the failure of political actors to fulfill their campaign promises encouraged eligible voters to request money before voting for them. Several voters are ignorant and believe that one can only have a share of the "national cake" from the political actors during elections where politicians are humble enough to plead for votes. Neglecting rural communities in infrastructural development propels communities to consider selling their votes to avert what they regard as 'double tragedies' in case a new administration abandons them. Lack of patriotism makes leaders enrich themselves via public resources and thereby have

excess resources to manipulate the electoral process to their Favour either as candidates or godfathers. Greed caused vote-buying in Nigerians.

For the third question, make a moral judgment, the recent technological innovations, and monetary policies such as the redesigning of Nigeria's ₦200, ₦500, and ₦1000, cash withdrawal limit from ₦500,000 and ₦5,000,000 per week, including the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). These innovations and policies made politicians realize that manipulation of elections through manual manipulation is counterproductive. The desperation to win the 2023 elections at all costs is another moral judgment for vote-buying. Politicians participate in vote-buying because of the promise of enormous wealth and power they hope to capture after assuming office. More so, accountable security votes funds meant that some incumbents outrightly misappropriate the funds. There is also complicity and complacency of law enforcement agents and electoral officials justified the problem. To gain their protection and loyalty, law enforcement is normally the first to be compromised by political actors.

The fourth question is *treatment recommendations*. *Firstly*, there must be strong and realistic legislation to address the problem from its root. The monetary and innovations must be prioritized to track the activities of vote-buying. *Secondly*, the analysis suggested that Nigerian security agencies have a role to play in addressing the problem of vote-buying. Security must move to arrest those individuals and bring them to justice to serve as a deterrent in future elections. Security agencies must play their roles optimally to ensure electoral violence does not remain a tool for election manipulation in the hands of politicians. *Third*, the Criminal Code and Penal Code must be judiciously enforced. The criminal law should be used to prosecute violators, there should be sufficient provisions in the Electoral Act for addressing the problem. *Finally*, there is a need for political education so that voters will know their rights and the power of their votes in electing credible leaders of their choice. The voters need to be enlightened that the power of their votes should not be sold.

The analysis presented vote-buying as illegal except for *ThisDay* and *TheCable*. Nigeria's electoral act also criminalized vote-buying. According to Article 130 of Nigeria's Electoral Act 2010 (amended), an individual(s) before the commencement of the election who directly or indirectly offers inducements to voters is guilty of an offense and is subjected to be fined ₦100,000 or risk 12 12-month jail term or both.

The thesis has aimed to cover the gap in how the Nigerian print media portrayed the 2023 election. Through critical analysis of 9 Nigerian print media, the thesis has found trends and themes and contributed to the issue of media framing of an election. As stated previously, the Nigerian media molded public perception of issues and events, as well as the opinion of policymakers. Therefore, the relevance of identifying these themes through Entman (1993) framing theory has provided more insight into the present and potential future of framing elections, more particularly, on how Nigerian policies can be affected by media's framings.

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## IX. Appendix

**26 Articles: *Business Day*, *Daily Post*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Premium Times*, *PUNCH*, *The Cable*, *TheGuardian*, *ThisDay*, and *Vanguard*.**

Abati, R., 2023. The menace of prophets and our future, By Reuben Abati. *Premium Times*, [Online] August 8. Available at: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/615160-the-menace-of-prophets-and-our-future-by-reuben-abati.html> [Accessed on August 16 2023]

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