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Political Corruption and Electoral Process in Nigeria: A Study of the 2023 Election in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

The paper examined the causes, and effects of political corruption in Nigeria with specific reference to Akwa Ibom State (AKS). The main purpose was to identify obstacles to effective electoral process with the aim of providing remedial measures for curbing political corruption. Elite Theory of politics was adopted as theoretical framework while secondary and primary data were used for the study. Descriptive and Survey research methods were employed, and three research questions guided the study. Krejcie and Morgan table of 1970 was used to determine the sample size of 384 out of the projected population of 2,447,438 registered voters in AKS as at November, 2022. Multi stage sampling techniques (including simple random, stratified random and Cluster sampling) were adopted for the study. A 19 item structured questionnaire containing variables of political corruption and measures to curb electoral frauds were designed as instrument of the data collection for the study. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by three experts before administration and its reliability was estimated through test-retest method. The data were analyzed using frequency count, tabular chart and simple percentage. The study findings revealed among others that: there is significant and negative direct relationship between vote buying and the conduct of free and fair democratic election in 2023 in AKS; there is negative and indirect relationship between bribery of electoral officials' and election results; Godfatherism in Akwa Ibom State politics resulted in low voters turn out (30%) which hindered popular participation in 2023 election in AKS. The study concluded that most electoral corrupt practices were sponsored by political elites in a bid to win the 2023 election in AKS. It recommended political education for electorate to curb vote buying while electoral officials/politicians found guilty of bribery and other electoral frauds should be punished by imprisonment

Keywords: Election, Electoral Process, Godfatherism, Political Corruption, Vote buying.

Introduction

The prevalence of political corruption in Nigeria has become very alarming and these corrupt practices hampers democracy, good governance and development in the country. Political corruption is a global issue which call for serious concern. It takes place in all human societies both developed and developing economies, but corruption rate varies from one state to another. To

this effect, the content and mode of expression of corruption are culture specific and, peculiar to different states.

Indeed, systematic corruption has eaten deep into various sectors of Nigerian economic and political life, its persistent nature depicts a problem that 'manifests an indictment of something fundamental about the society' (Odekunle 1986, as cited in Yagboyaju, 2011). In line with this, the role played by

political actors in electoral process seem to enhance the capacity of the state and the endemic political corruption in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria and this explains the fragile nature of public institutions and other agencies of the state.

Obviously, the conceptualization of the term political corruption makes it adaptable to such practices as: Ethnic and personal misuse of office for accumulation of wealth, unauthorized sale of government property, illegal hoarding of essential and critical commodities, favouritism, nepotism, purchase of loyalty by an illegitimate or out rightly illegal regime through inducement for supporters and victimization of opponents and critics, election rigging, falsification of election results, all forms of rent-seeking, kleptocracy, state capture and the manipulation of lobbying by the political class and election malpractices among others (Yagboyaju, 2011, Gbadamosi and Ajogbeje, 2018; Kasali, 2020, Atakpa and Akpan, 2023; Ekpo, 2023).

Electoral corruption extend to granting favours, irregularities in campaign financing and electoral fraud. It is an illegal act by an office holder in relation to his official duties; done under the guise of law and trading in influence (Damania & Bulte, 2003, as cited in Oluwatusin, Daisi and Oluwatusin, 2020).

Furthermore, this study identified political corruption such as rigging, falsification of figure, Godfatherism, Thuggery and vote buying perpetuated by INEC and AKISEC officials as well as the electorates as major problems to democratic consolidation and this widen the gap between credible election and development in Akwa Ibom State,

Nigeria. Hence, the study of this nature became necessary to identify the causes of political corruption, its influence on the state's development and ways of providing remedial measures to close the gap between political corruption and the electoral politics in Akwa Ibom State. Hence, the study will further review related literature, provide theoretical framework of analysis, adopts descriptive and survey methods for data collection and analysis in order to arrive at findings, conclusion and recommendations.

Statement of Problem

The problem of political corruption often posed threats to the stability and security of the state and the society at large. To be specific, political corruption affects the political system in Nigeria negatively by undermining the institutions of democracy, ethical values and justice as well as jeopardizing sustainable development and the rule of law to mention but a few. The implication of corrupt practices result in high rate of poverty, inequality, hunger, decay of infrastructure and unemployment in the state.

Unfortunately, the electoral process in Nigeria has been characterized with election malpractices which are majorly perpetuated by the ruling elites who want to remain in power at all cost and by all means. This manifest itself in form of vote-buying, Godfatherism and bribing of electoral officials to manipulate election results, ballot stuffing, ballot boxes snatching, intimidation of voters to mention but a few. Electoral corruption keeps increasing from one election to the other thereby leading to the incidence of electoral violence in the state, increase

tension and anxiety during and after elections is bound to occur and the resultant effect is frequent political instability in the state.

However, the credibility of elections in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria has always been in doubt because of the incidences of electoral corruption which have characterized our electoral politics. This study proxied election process in terms of laws guiding election, peoples' participation and voting etc. Thus, political corruption manifest in ballot boxes snatching, vote-buying, buying of party agents for rigging of elections, bribing of security personnel and electoral officials to alter results and rigging of election results etc. Hence, political corruption has effects on democratic polity, economic development, insecurity, electoral mal-practices, poverty, weak support for anti-corruption agencies, lack of commitment to the state/national interest, election as an investment, lack of political will and societal inequalities in the state.

To this effect, data revealed low voters turn out of about (30%) out of 657,959 vote casted in 2023 Governorship election (INEC report, 2023 cited in Premium Times, May 7, 2023). Therefore, the study is concern with how to combat political corruption and strengthen the electoral process to encourage popular participation, free and fair democratic election for improved socio-economic development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the effect of political corruption on the electoral process in

2023 election in Akwa Ibom State and by extension Nigeria.

Other Specific objectives

They include to:

- i. Investigate vote buying as it's affected the conduct of free and fair democratic election in 2023 in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. Find out ways that the bribery of electoral officials affected election results in 2023 election in Akwa Ibom State.
- iii. Examine whether Godfatherism in Akwa Ibom State politics affected popular participation in 2023 election of the State.
- iv. Make policy recommendations on how to combat electoral corruption in Akwa Ibom State and by extension Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions would be answered:

- i. How has vote buying affected the conduct of free and fair democratic election in 2023 in Akwa Ibom State?
- ii. How has the bribery of electoral officials' affected election results in 2023 election in Akwa Ibom State?
- iii. What are the ways Godfatherism in Akwa Ibom State politics affected popular participation in 2023 election of the State?

Significance of the Study

The study findings will be useful to the students, politicians, public policy makers and the general public in the following ways:

To the students, the theoretical and empirical facts derived from the study can help to broaden their knowledge and understandings on the effect of political corruption on the electoral process in

2023 election in Akwa Ibom State and by extension Nigeria. Also, the information/data provided by the study provides a reference material to future researchers in the subject area or other related field. To electorates, it will equip them with the various techniques and strategies for advocating for their rights, and encourage active participation in election in their State.

It would also provide policy makers with the basic ideas, tools and techniques for making vibrant electoral laws and other policies that can help to educate the people on ways of curbing with vote buying, godfatherism and bribery of electoral officials which are drawback to free and fair election and human development in the state. To the public, it will make available various techniques and strategies of holding elected officials accountable and responsive to their yearnings and aspirations while electoral officials/politicians found guilty of bribery and other electoral frauds can easily be reported to the appropriate authorities for sanction.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Corruption

Corruption means ‘the misuse or abuse of public office for private and personal gains’ (World Bank, 2017). Furthermore, Transparency International states that corruption erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social division and the environmental crisis (TI, 2019). Therefore, political corruption entails public officials’ abuse of office for personal enrichment through bribery, extortion, embezzlement of government

resources, violation of campaign laws and electoral fraud (Ogundiya, 2009, cited in Ita, Udoaka and Ekpo 2024).

Concept of Democracy

Kelechi, Eca, Chinonye and Samuel (2020), argues that democracy is fast becoming a global phenomenon with more economies sharing and adhering to the ideologies, principles and practices of governance based on democracy. This becomes possible since democracy preaches people/popular participations, rule of law, impartiality, respect for fundamental human rights, equality, freedom of information, periodic and competitive elections in leadership recruitment and equitable representation, transparency and accountability, etc. While democracy enjoys different definitions, the one offered by Abraham Lincoln, a former US president is most revered, though, not universally accepted. He defined democracy as “the government of the people by the people and for the people” (Lincoln, 1858, as quoted in Kelechi, Eca, Chinonye and Samuel, 2020).

Concept of Vote-Buying in Election

Vote-buying has different meanings to different people or states depending on the people’s history, culture, and political experience, and election models. The concept of vote-buying does not have a conventional single universally accepted definition. Etzioni-Halevy (1989) and Bryan and Baer (2005) as quoted by (Ita, et al, 2024), the former sees it as “the exchange of private material benefits for political support”; while the later conceptualized vote-buying as “the use of money and

direct benefits to influence voters”. The two definitions emphatically stressed the objective of vote-buying which is to earn direct socio-economic benefits for political support of voters in return. The basic underscore of the abstraction “vote-buying” is the emphasis of exchanging voters’ political rights for material benefits.

Concept of Godfatherism

Igwe (2005, Ita et al, 2024) referred to godfatherism as patronage politics involving the personalization of power and subordination of the freedom and rights of the individuals in favour of personality cults, while the ultimate casualty is a democracy.

In the opinion of Imukkuede (2004, cited in Ikpe, 2015), godfatherism occurs when an individual (godfather) uses his overwhelming influence or tremendous resources to sponsor into public office a candidate which then allows the godfather not only to control the government but the incumbent as well. In the context of this study, Godfatherism connotes a form of political corruption in which the wealthy person or group of influential persons (Elites), handpicks and imposed on the people their preferred choice of candidate for personal gains and at the expense of the well-being of generality of people in the state.

According to Human Right Watch (2007, cited in Ita et al, 2024)), Godfatherism is both a symptom and a cause of the violence and corruption that together permeate the political process in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Public officials who owe their position to the efforts of a political godfather incur a

debt that they are expected to repay without end throughout their tenure in office.

Godfathers are possible because of the increase poverty in the state which make it easy for politicians to deploy young men as thugs to cause violence, intimidates oppositions, rigs election with impunity to compete for office in contests without any regards to Akwa Ibom voters’ and their expression of will through votes. Hence, most often the votes of the electorates do not count. Hence, godfathers makes it even more difficult for people with integrity to win elected office as they always resort to the illegal tactics to achieve their objectives.

To summarize, some of the causes of political corruption identified by scholars include:

Low salary/wages; Low job opportunities(Unemployment); Lack of strictness and severe punishment of the defaulters; Lack of sanctions as corrupt politically exposed persons are celebrated and sometimes given prominent positions, such as Members of Parliament or higher positions, instead of being banned and defamed. Also, ***Lack of unity among people in the society*** – Akwa Ibomites are fond of openly criticizing corrupt officials, but they lack unity to stop corruption. Public unity against corruption can stop corruption; ***Lack of an independent investigation agency*** – Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria lack adequate independent investigation agency that can investigate with full power and freedom to expose corrupt practices.

The existing agencies, such as the EFCC and ICPC, are often argued of biased and being used in witch-hunting

against the members of opposition party. Hence, convicted criminals can always join the ruling party to escape criminal prosecution; ***Lack of an independent judicial system*** - The judiciary is not totally independent, as judges are appointed by the president; therefore, the government exercises undue political influence on judicial matters and can derail or delay judicial process (Imhonopi et al., 2016, Gonzalez, 2016, Josephson, 2017, Abubakar and Yahaya, 2018, as cited in Dandison, 2020; Udoaka, 2023; Ita, Udoaka and Ekpo, 2024).

Consequently, effective electoral democracy depends on certain enabling conditions. At least four of such conditions as identified by World Bank (2015, cited in Ekpo, 2023), include: (1) peaceful competition for power (the rule of law); (2) effective citizen representation and participation in politics (participation/representation); (3) stable government and effective lawmaking (stability of economy); and (4) political accountability of government (accountability).

Frau (2008, as cited in Dandison, 2020) argues that for free, fair and equitable elections to be achieved, certain acceptable elements must be put in place and these include: an equitable and fair electoral framework; a professional, neutral and transparent election administration; a generally accepted code of ethical behaviour in political and press freedom; accountability of all participants; integrity safeguard mechanism and the enforcement of the electoral laws and other relevant laws.

Political Corruption and Consolidation of Democracy in Akwa Ibom State

Corruption has posed serious challenges to the consolidation of democracy in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria where corruption seem to thrive. It undermines democracy and good governance by flouting or even subverting formal processes. "Corruption in elections and in legislative bodies reduce accountability and distorts representation in policy making; corruption in the judiciary compromises the rule of law; and corruption in public administration results in the unfair and inefficient provision of services" (Aiyede, 2006, cited in Ita et al, 2024).

Aiyede states further that, "more generally, corruption erodes the institutional capacity of government as procedures are disregarded, resources are siphoned off, and public offices are bought and sold. Thus corruption undermines the legitimacy of government and democratic values of trust and tolerance. Akwa Ibom State democratic consolidation since the inception of uninterrupted democracy in 1999 has been a problematic endeavour because elections and the electoral process have been bereft of democratic ideals (Dandison, 2020; Udoaka, 2023; Ita et al, 2024).

Electoral Process in Akwa Ibom State

Ikpe (2015) defined **election** as the procedural processes upon which the people or the electorates choose a candidate out of many other candidates to speak for or represent them in given position, preferably, a political one. On the other hand, **electoral process**

connotes the activities or the totality of the activities that is carried out before, during and after election. These activities include the delimitation of electoral constituencies, registration of voters, electoral campaigns, voting, votes counting, votes compilation, release or announcement of election result as well as pre and post- election litigations (Ikpe, 2015; Dandison, 2020).

Electoral process can be viewed as the way or method by which elections are conducted in a political system in order to choose those who will occupy elective positions. The common elements of electoral processes include the legal framework for elections, an accurate and complete voters' register, campaign period, voting process, counting of votes and collation of results, announcement of results, election petitions and presentation of certificate of return to winners (Dandison, 2020). The electoral process in Nigeria is being handled by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) while at the state level is Akwa Ibom State Independent Electoral Commission (AKISEC) (Ita, Udoaka and Ekpo 2024).

Africa Policy Conversations (2022) opined that election is a procedure by which members of a community or organization choose representatives who will hold office and represent them as leaders, policy makers, change makers, influencers and public servants. Credible elections are generally accepted as an authentic platform for determining the outcome of a democratic process. The quest for free and fair elections is a major requirement for sustaining and preserving an enduring democracy in any state. Therefore, the pursuit of a result oriented

electoral process characterized by free and fair elections has been a challenging task in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria due to rising cases of insecurity, vote buying, vote rigging, violence, voters' harassment and intimidation among others. As such, there is need to address the causes of electoral malpractices in Akwa Ibom State and by extension Nigeria and proffer innovative and lasting solutions in order to preserve our democracy for future generations.

Ogbette, Idam, Kareem and Eke (2019) examines "Money politics in Nigeria: Causes, effects and management". The source of information for this study was secondary source. The study shows that money politics in Nigeria started immediately after independence but became glaring during the 1992 campaign exercise and the major causes were: poor level of discipline in political party, poverty of the pocket and corruption, undefined party goal and godfatherism, and major effects were: It perverse justice and creates problems for good governance, it takes away competence and creates room for looters, it creates way for "who is who" in a party and in government, and masses interests are not assured. Findings revealed that Nigerian wealthy politicians takes advantage of level of poverty and unemployment in the country to achieve their personal interest. It was also discovered that, Nigerians don't exhibit societal values anymore and that is why they are easily manipulated. As a result of the above findings, it recommended that: Governments at all level should ensure that rule of law stands at all-time irrespective of who is involved and by so doing the people will build their trust on government. The government should

ensure that societal values are restored in our society and make sure civic education is taught in schools all over the federation.

Ebegbulem (2020) examined the impact of corruption on the consolidation of democracy under the prevailing socio-economic challenges in Nigeria. The study opined the installation of multi-party democracy in Nigeria, the era of military authoritarian regimes were over as Nigerians were looking forward to a free society characterized by social justice, economic growth and free, fair and credible electoral process. But today, democracy sits on the horn of a dilemma in Nigeria due to massive political corruption by the leaders. Free and fair election which is one of the features of true democracy has eluded Nigeria since the advent of the country's nascent democratic dispensation. The behaviour of the political leaders has cast doubt on any consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The study gave a comprehensive definition of political corruption and democratic consolidation, and highlights the nature of political corruption in Nigeria. It concludes with the advice that for there to be democratic consolidation, there must be massive investment in the provision of the basic needs of the Nigerian people.

Nwagwu, Uwaechia, Udegbonam and Nnamani (2022) opined that vote-buying is a contentious issue in contemporary discourse on the sustainability of democratic development in Nigeria. To them, the menace is gradually crippling electoral processes and undermining the efforts of the electoral umpire in conducting competitive, free, fair, and credible

elections for the sustenance of democratic development in Nigeria. The study investigated the effects of vote-buying on the sustainability of democratic development and good governance in Nigeria. It argues that vote-buying compromises the well-being of the populace by entrenching bad governance and poor service delivery. The study adopts reciprocal determinism theory to illustrate how the political environment and bad governance are stimuli to consolidating the commercialization of Nigerian electoral processes. The study adopts the documentary method for gathering data from secondary sources and recommends institutionalization of a strong electoral management body to enforce a stiff penalty for commercialization of the electoral system in Nigeria.

Atakpa and Akpan (2023) investigates the annals of administrative corruption, *vis-à-vis*, their impacts on administrative development in Nigeria. Adopting the qualitative approach, the study utilized the Market-Centred perspective as an analytical guide and considered corruption, not just as the epicenter of the problems of administrative development in Nigeria but also as the bane of the nation's development processes. The study called for the blockage of corruption loopholes and the institution of a more robust reward system for corrupt-free administrative officials, and it recommended stringent measures to restrain systemic corruption, by making it a high-risk activity where perpetrators must be apprehended, severely punished and dispossessed of corruptly earned monies and property.

Theoretical Framework

Elite Theory

This study adopts Elite Theory as the framework of analysis and it was developed by Gaetano Mosca, Wilfredo Pareto, Robert Michel and Ortega Gasset as being deep-rooted in classical Sociology. Elite theory is very much concerned with structures, especially authority structure in the state. The concept of elites is based on the notion that every society holds a ruling minority, a group that controls and disputes the most important power sources. However, elite theory limits elites to a necessary minority, who can effectively manage democratic institutions, accumulate the privileges that come with power, orchestrate mass support and protect their positions by controlling access to the top. Thus, the elites though, few are left to dominate the decision making process while the masses though large in number are apathetic.

Summarily, according to Mosca, elite theory points to the concentration of political power in the hands of a minority group which “performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings” (Eminue, 2009; Oluwatusin, Daisi and Oluwatusin, 2020). Thus, public policy may be viewed as the value and preferences of governing elites and this is why they want to remain in power by all means. The elite theory is relevant in understanding corruption as it is being used by the elites to manipulate the electoral process in order to remain in power (Eminue, 2009; Oluwatusin, Daisi and Oluwatusin, 2020).

Applicability of the theory, in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, ‘money politics’, ‘vote

buying’, ‘godfatherism’, ‘share the money’ have become regular household phrases and slogans in the state to portray the moral decadence of politicians. These usages adequately describe the rent-seeking behaviour of politicians, political parties and voters. Such include the practices of accepting bribes from patrons and distributing money to buy votes. This has implication for governance process including political participation (Ita, Udoaka and Ekpo 2024).

Ikpe (2015) states that a comparison of elections from the First Republic to the present Fourth Republic reveals that the focus of policy strategies are on the conduct and administration of elections without an attempt to change the objective of seeking political offices through elections. He observed that electoral violence in Nigeria has continued to defy every policy put in place to check it. This objective, which is using political office to accumulate private wealth, is the reason politicians employ ruthless means to win elections. While immediate and short-term policies should continue to focus on eliminating rigging and thuggery during elections, medium and long-term policies should seek to reduce the material attractiveness of political offices, political corruption, and the capacity of politicians to accumulate private wealth from state offices.

Indeed, the undue influence of political money on voters’ behaviour and electoral outcome highlights one of the central dilemmas of representative democracy. Money is central to the organization of political activity, yet its uncontrolled and unregulated use can undermine the central value of liberal democracy underpinned by the logic that the political market place should decide who

holds public power on behalf of the people (Dandison, 2020, Oluwatusin, Daisi and Oluwatusin, 2020).

Empirical Literature

Gbadamosi and Ajogbeje (2018) examines the causes, and effects of political corruption in Nigeria and how Social Studies Education can serve as a measure for curbing political corruption. The study employed descriptive survey research design which was guided by three research questions. The population for the study comprises of all secondary schools teachers in Osun State; while purposive sampling technique was used to select one hundred and fifty Social Studies teachers as a sample for the study. The instrument for the data collection was a constructed thirteen items structured questionnaire related to the causes, effects of political corruption and measures to curb political corruption were designed for the study. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by the Social Studies experts and validated two weeks before administration and its reliability was estimated through test-retest method which yielded a co-efficient of 0.74.

The data collected was analyzed using frequency count, simple percentage and mean score. The results revealed that god-fatherism and ethnicity are among the major factors responsible for political corruption in Nigeria and political corruption has a serious effect on peoples' standard of living and democratic polity in Nigeria. The study concluded that politicians should be re-orientated that politics is a call to service and not an investment.

Ita, Udoaka and Ekpo (2024) examines the phenomenon of godfatherism within Nigeria's two major political parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC), and its impact on internal party democracy, as well as its implications for party stability and governance in the country. The paper assumed that godfatherism has become deeply rooted as a sub-political culture within Nigeria's party system. Data were collected through survey and analysed using the framework of elite theory in politics. Simple Linear Regression conducted within the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) at a significance level of 0.5 was employed to test hypotheses. The findings indicated that the influence of godfathers within Nigeria's political parties has had adverse effects on their internal democracy, leading to dwindling support from party loyalists who perceived the parties as unstable and lacking direction especially when controversies are left unresolved or poorly managed.

Furthermore, internal party crises fuelled by godfather politic has led to frequent changes in party leadership and citizens' dissatisfaction which jeopardised their prospect of winning elections. Consequently, the study recommended that political parties curtail their reliance on party elites (godfathers) for funding to avoid being manipulated and prone to crises. Additionally, it suggested incorporating the principle of internal democracy into the political parties' constitutions as well as proactive resolution of grievances by political leadership.

Methods and Materials

This research adopts qualitative and quantitative research method. In the qualitative/descriptive research data were obtained from secondary source while Survey questionnaire was used to elicit primary data from the projected population of about 2,447,438 registered voters in Akwa Ibom State according to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reports as at November, 2022, with sample size of 384 determined using Krejcie and Morgan table (1970).

Multi-stage sampling (simple random, stratified random and cluster sampling techniques) were used to administer a 19 item questionnaire on the

respondents. Simple percentage and tabular presentation were adopted for data presentation and analysis. Secondary data from textbooks, Government publications, Journals and internet materials etc. were analyzed contextually. The study area was Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, data obtained from literature (secondary) and survey (primary) methods were presented in tables, while simple percentage were used to determine the degree of relationship among variables, and to analyze the research questions that guided the study as thus:

Table 1: Questionnaire responses of three hundred and seventy two respondents to questions 1 – 7 in Likert format

Questions in appendix	SA	A	SA+A= Yes(x)	SDA	DA	SDA+DA = No(y)	No Idea	Total
1	80	120	200 (53.76%)	34	129	163 (43.82%)	9	372
2	50	82	132 (35.48%)	90	143	233 (62.63%)	7	372
3	122	101	213 (57.26%)	47	106	153 (41.13%)	6	372
4	95	130	225 (60.48%)	48	92	140 (37.63%)	7	372
5	80	90	170 (45.70%)	86	112	198 (53.23%)	4	372
6	92	106	198 (53.23%)	54	115	169 (45.43%)	5	372
7	100	122	222 (59.68%)	44	102	146 (39.25%)	4	372
Total	609	751	1360	403	799	1202	42	2604

Source: Computed by the researcher using field data (2024)

Table 1 shows that 53.76% of respondents agreed that elections can never be free and fair, and governance cannot be accountable and transparent under the politics of vote buying in Akwa Ibom State while 43.82% stated they disagreed. Also, 35.48% of respondent agreed that the 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria was free from violence, fraud and rigging despite vote buying by the ruling class (Elites) and imposition candidates mostly during primaries while 62.63% stated that they disagreed. 57.26% of respondents stated

they agreed that election is one of the finest tools for democratization, which presents a viable platform for periodic, credible and competitive contest for leadership recruitment whereas 41.13% stated that they disagreed.

On the issue of the electorate having faith in electoral process, 60.48% of respondents agreed that Akwa Ibom State electorate have lost faith in the electoral process due to the vote buying and other fraudulent processes of producing election results different from

the one people voted while 37.63% stated they disagree.

Also, 53.23% of respondents agreed that money politics contributes to electoral abuse, corruption and the restriction of popular participation in politics and governance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria while 45.43% disagreed. 39.25% disagreed.

59.68% of respondents agreed that good governance predicated on rule of law, due process, accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs are compromised as a result of electoral corruption in the state, whereas

Table 2: Questionnaire responses of three hundred and seventy two respondents to questions 8 – 12 in Likert format

Questions in appendix	SA	A	SA+A= Yes(x)	SDA	DA	SDA+DA = No(y)	No ideas	Total
8	95	120	215 (57.80%)	25	130	155 (41.67%)	2	372
9	100	121	221 (59.41%)	30	118	148 (39.78%)	3	372
10	27	149	176 (47.31%)	75	118	193 (51.88%)	3	372
11	62	87	149 (40.05%)	73	147	220 (59.12%)	3	372
12	102	116	218 (58.60%)	35	117	152 (40.86%)	2	372
Total	386	593	979	238	630	868	13	1860

Source: Computed by the researcher using field data (2024)

In table 2, data shows that 57.80% of respondents agreed that, bribery, money politics and rigging during the 2023 election were major setback to free and fair election in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria while 41.67% stated they disagreed, 59.41% agreed that, electoral processes that are marred with manipulations, frauds and poor management of election is a real and prolific source of conflicts, violence, insecurity and instability in the state while 39.78% stated that they disagreed. 47.31% of respondents stated they agreed that the 2022 Electoral Act provisions on the regulation of party campaign expenses, party primaries, and monitoring of party activities was inadequately implemented and this contributed to electoral corruption in Akwa Ibom State, whereas 51.88% stated that they disagreed.

Concerning the issue of party ideology, 40.05% of respondents agreed that the political parties' structures, ideologies, constitutions and electoral laws seem to discourage bribery and corruption in politics of Nigeria and by extension Akwa Ibom State while 59.12% said they disagree, and this implies that 59.12% of respondents believed political parties' structures, ideologies, constitutions and electoral laws seem to encourage bribery and corruption in politics of Nigeria and by extension Akwa Ibom State. Also, 58.60% of respondents agreed that Individuals' participation to determine electoral outcomes by voting was undermined by corrupt officials who collected bribes to manipulate results in favour of highest bidder in 2023 election in Akwa Ibom State whereas 40.86% indicated they disagreed.

Table 3: Questionnaire responses of three hundred and seventy two respondents to questions 13 – 19 in Likert format

Questions in appendix	SA	A	SA+A= Yes(x)	SDA	DA	SDA+DA = No(y)	No Idea	Total
13	102	117	219 (58.87%)	27	123	150 (40.32%)	3	372
14	30	95	125 (33.60%)	56	184	240 (64.52%)	7	372
15	97	103	200 (53.76%)	25	145	170 (45.70%)	2	372
16	91	125	216 (58.07%)	2	148	150 (40.32%)	6	372
17	80	121	201 (54.03%)	17	153	170 (45.70%)	1	372
18	94	126	222 (59.68%)	20	132	152 (40.86%)	-	372
19	40	75	115 (30.91%)	49	201	250 (67.20%)	7	372
Total	537	762	1296	196	1086	1282	26	2604

Source: Computed by the researcher using field data (2024)

Table 3 shows that 58.87% of respondents indicated that politics of Godfatherism often leads to the exploitation of public position, resources and power for private gain and it promote unequal representation in politics of Akwa Ibom State while 40.32% stated they disagreed. Also, 33.60% of respondents agreed that Godfatherism limits culture of impunity and other forms of electoral violation by politicians and electoral officials during 2023 election that led to manipulation of governmental powers to the detriment of the citizens while 64.52% stated that they disagreed and maintained that Godfatherism was the main source of impunity, electoral violence and exploitation of the citizens by the politicians in 2023 election in Akwa Ibom State.

In addition, 53.76% of respondents stated Godfathers often use state funds to purchase political power either through electoral malpractices or abuse of court processes in Akwa Ibom state, whereas 45.70% stated that they disagreed. Also, 58.07% of respondents agreed poverty, unemployment, weak political institutions, nepotism and tribalism in the administration of justice and inadequate transparency and

accountability in governance are attributed to Godfatherism in AKS, Nigeria, while 40.32% stated they disagree, 54.03% of respondents agreed that Godfatherism prevents the selection of competent and qualified candidates for elective positions but enthrone mediocrity in governance in Akwa Ibom State whereas 45.70% indicated they disagreed.

Also, 59.68% maintained that Godfatherism is one of the biggest dangers to democratic consolidation as it promotes the exclusion and denial of legitimate entitlements of the electorate, while 40.86% of respondents disagreed. As a result, 30.91% maintained that electoral laws in Nigeria adequately addresses issue of Godfatherism which pose negative threats to the rule of law, transparency and accountability in governance in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria whereas 67.20% disagreed.

Major Findings

The major findings include:

- There is significant and negative direct relationship between vote buying and the conduct of free and fair democratic election in 2023 in Akwa Ibom State.

- ii. There is significant but indirect relationship between bribery of electoral officials' and election results in 2023 election in Akwa Ibom State.
- iii. The practice of Godfatherism in Akwa Ibom State politics had significant and direct relationship with low popular participation in 2023 election in the State

Discussion of Major Findings

In this study, the first finding shows that there is significant and negative direct relationship between vote buying and the conduct of free and fair democratic election in 2023 in Akwa Ibom State and this is supported by studies conducted by Nwagwu, et al (2022); Atakpa and Akpan (2023) and Ita, Udoaka and Ekpo (2024) as they found out that vote buying affects negatively the conduct of free and fair democratic election in any State. The implication this findings manifested in Akwa Ibom State rated among the states with least vote cast. INEC reports shows total eligible voters was 2,198,628 who collected Permanent Voters Card (PVC) while only 587,417 participated in voting (Premium Times, March 19, 2023). Also, only 30% of voters turned out for 2023 Governorship poll, out of which the total votes cast was 657,959 (INEC, 2023 cited in Premium Times, May 7, 2023). Scholars also opined that election is one of the major elements of democracy through which individuals and political parties acquire power. The acquisition of power is not an end in itself but a means towards an end, where such end is about the socio-economic development of the people for whom the elected hold power in trust (Ita, et al, 2024).

In fact, average Akwa Ibomites expected more improvement in the electoral process than what was obtainable in 2019 due to two significant development, the signing of the electoral bill into law by president Buhari prior to the general election, and the introduction of new naira note redesign policy of the Central Bank of Nigeria which led to scarcity of cash for money politics and vote buying. Nevertheless, these issues which contributed immensely to cash crumb, hardship and poverty in the state, making the masses to be unhappy with those in power and prepared to express it by voting out such government. But in reality, the politicians still device means to trick massive to still support those leaders the viewed as their problems through electronic transfer for votes buying in their support, some parties paid cash and even paid with foreign currencies such as dollars and pounds. To this effect, the rate of vote buying, money politics and electoral manipulation of politics in Akwa Ibom State which we thought will be less was rather high in 2023 general election.

Second finding shows that, there is significant but indirect relationship between bribery of electoral officials' and election results in 2023 election in Akwa Ibom State this was supported by studies conducted by Ikpe (2015); Nwagwu, et al (2022); Atakpa and Akpan (2023) and Ita, Udoaka and Ekpo (2024). Certainly, everyone saw the level of indifferent attitudes and practices exhibited by electorates in the various political parties mostly during primaries elections. The godfathers manipulated the electoral system and processes in the

favour of their preferred candidates against the popular will at all cost, The idea of do or die adopted by some political actors and their supporters during the last election in 2023, sponsored by political elites was the cause of high wave of conflicts and political crises in the state which in turn threaten peaceful coexistence and democratic consolidation in the state. For instance, during the 2023 general election in Akwa Ibom State, there were several cases of party APC supporters intimidating and assaulting supporters of PDP, likewise Labour party, Young people's party and so on.

Third finding revealed that the practice of Godfatherism in Akwa Ibom State politics had significant and direct relationship with low popular participation in 2023 election in the State and this finding is supported by (Ita et al, 2024). In reality, electoral violence were recorded more in area where major political parties with political elites (godfathers) who paid boys to protect and secure votes for them. For instance, the Ibiono Ibom area where YPP candidate was popular, likewise Ikot Ekpene senatorial which was a stronghold for APC in Senate election. Also, Onna, Eket and majority of LGAs in Eket senatorial district where the former Governor came from and Nsit Ubium where his preferred candidate came from were no go area for other political parties. Also, people's opinions in implies that electoral laws in Nigeria does not adequately address issue of Godfatherism which pose negative threats to the rule of law, transparency and accountability in governance in Akwa Ibom state and as such more reforms is required in this area with stringent

punishment on those found guilty of godfatherism by court should be sentenced to jail term.

Indeed, the activities of our political elites who form cabal of godfather across the major political parties such as PDP, APC, YPP, LP and NNPP were very obnoxious especially in the areas of imposition of their preferred candidates popularly known as 'political sons or anointed candidates', intimidations of political opponents' through their connection to government in power at both the federal and state levels, their financial muzzles, judicial links and the use of inciting words and thuggery to gather support this finding was supported by (Igwe, 2002 and Aiyede, 2006, cited in Ita et al, 2024; Dandison, 2020).

Consequently, both elites and the electorate have become indifferent to electoral malpractices. This state of affairs has created fertile ground for electoral corruption. Corruption at the electorate level emanates mostly because of poverty and ignorance occasioned by illiteracy, this findings is supported by (Frank, 2009; Onuoha & Okafor, 2020, Nwagwu, et al, 2022; Atakpa and Akpan, 2023; Ekpo, 2023).

Additionally, the implication of this is that, most of the wards and communities where there were reported cases of political violence and crises in the state, the causes were traceable to political thugs sponsored by the power brokers, elites and godfather of the major contending parties during the election. These thugs were paid by their godfathers to intimidate voters and electoral officials, rig election in their

favour or for their parties, snatch ballot boxes and papers and falsify result of election despite the use of Bimodoel Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and subsequent uploading results to INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), electoral frauds were still high in the state. As a result, the outcomes of the INEC result was highly contested by Nigerian including in Akwa Ibomites. Some people even argued that INEC used technology deployed for the election to rig in favour of their preferred candidate at the detriment of the will of the populace, and the conduct of the 2023 was seen by some scholars as the worst election in the history of Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Political corruption has greatly eroded the fundamental values and the essential principles of democracy which promote government that anchors on popular participation, representative and accountable to the people. When political leaders are perceived to be pursuing their personal interests excessively, the people become disenchanted, questioning the legitimacy of such leaders in the state, and even the legitimacy of the process and the system that produced them. Political corruption has greatly eroded the basis of the authority of the state, and has challenged the legitimacy of democracy as the best form of government.

To this effect, the study findings revealed among other that: there is significant and negative direct relationship between vote buying and the conduct of free and fair democratic election in the 2023 in Akwa Ibom State;

there is significant but indirect relationship between bribery of electoral officials' and election results in 2023 election in Akwa Ibom State; the practice of Godfatherism in Akwa Ibom State politics had significant and direct relationship with low popular participation in 2023 election in the State. The study recommended the followings:

- Introduction or launching of national/state re-orientation programmes to educate people on the negative impacts of political corruption, bribery, vote buying and Godfatherism to the development of the state, and also the need to eradicate corruption in all facets of public life through attitudinal change among citizens and residents in Akwa Ibom State.
- The government should strengthen institutions such as EFCC and ICPC with necessary laws and finances to fight corruption in all sector of the state economy and penalize defaulters by act of imprisonment, and possibly educate the people on the effects of political corruption in the society. To have a free and fair election entails the provision of a well-coordinated and non-partisan electoral and security personnel, adoption of a practicable legal framework which includes legal and electoral reforms, as well as the political goodwill to implement recommended action plans by law enforcement agencies, also, the use of electronic voting should be legalize and adequate training of election staff in line with the new electoral laws should be given top priority.
- There is a need for government to ensure that rule of law and electoral laws are strictly followed at all-time, and defaulter should be penalize irrespective of who is involved and

by so doing the people will build their trust on the government and electoral process in the state.

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Appendix 1

Sample of Questionnaire in 5 point Likert Format

S/n	Questions	SA	A	U	D	SD
1	Elections can never be free and fair, and governance cannot be accountable and transparent under the politics of vote buying in Akwa Ibom State?					
2	The 2023 elections in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria was free from violence, fraud and rigging despite vote buying by the ruling class (Elites) and imposition candidates mostly during primaries?					
3	Election is one of the finest tools for democratization, which presents a viable platform for periodic, credible and competitive contest for leadership recruitment?					
4	Akwa Ibom State electorate have lost faith in the electoral process due to the vote buying and other fraudulent processes of producing election results different from the one people voted?					
5	The electorate were trick into selling their votes by wealthy politicians to compromise the electoral process and this can contribute to bad governance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?					
6	Money politics contributes to electoral abuse, corruption and the restriction of popular participation in politics and governance in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?					
7	Good governance predicated on rule of law, due process, accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs are compromised as a result of electoral corruption in the state?					
8	Bribery, money politics and rigging during the 2023 election were major setback to free and fair election in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?					
9	Electoral processes that are marred with manipulations, frauds and poor management of election is a real and prolific source of conflicts, violence, insecurity and instability in the state?					
10	The 2022 Electoral Act provisions on the regulation of party campaign expenses, party primaries, and monitoring of party activities was inadequately implemented and this contributed to electoral corruption in Akwa Ibom State?					
11	The political parties' structures, ideologies, constitutions and electoral laws seem to discourage bribery and corruption in politics of Nigeria and by extension Akwa Ibom State?					
12	Individuals' participation to determine electoral outcomes by voting was undermined by corrupt officials who collected bribes to manipulate results in favour of highest bidder in 2023 election in Akwa Ibom State?					
13	Politics of Godfatherism often leads to the exploitation of public position, resources and power for private gain and it promote unequal representation in Politics of Akwa Ibom State?					
14	Godfatherism limits culture of impunity and other forms of electoral violation by politicians and electoral officials during 2023 election that led to manipulation of governmental powers to the detriment of the citizens?					
15	Godfathers often use state funds to purchase political power either through electoral malpractices or abuse of court processes in Akwa Ibom state?					
16	Poverty, unemployment, weak political institutions, nepotism and tribalism in the administration of justice and inadequate transparency and accountability in governance are attributed to Godfatherism in AKS, Nigeria?					
17	Godfatherism prevents the selection of competent and qualified candidates for elective positions but enthrone mediocrity in governance in Akwa Ibom State?					
18	Godfatherism is one of the biggest dangers to democratic consolidation as it promotes the exclusion and denial of legitimate entitlements of the electorate?					
19	Electoral laws in Nigeria adequately addresses issue of Godfatherism which pose negative threats to the rule of law, transparency and accountability in governance in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria?					