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Implications of Vote-Selling on Ghana's Democracy: Evidence from Bantama Constituency

Jennis Benewaa Gyasi¹, Leonard Atsu Torsu^{1*}

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ABSTRACT

Vote-selling has detrimental implications for Ghana's democratic process and principles. The study aimed to examine the implications of vote-selling on Ghana's democracy. A qualitative approach and case study design were adopted. The convenience sampling technique was used to select 14 participants for the study. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis shows that voters sell their votes because of unfulfilled campaign promises, the readiness of politicians to spend on campaigns, and the voters' willingness to use elections to get their share of the national cake. Vote-selling transactions start with convincing voters, followed by the process of channeling incentives, conveying voters to voting stations, and ending with proof of voting. Also, the findings show, that the inability to select competent leaders, corruption, tyranny, inability to initiate good policies and the inability to hold politicians accountable are the implications of vote-selling on Ghana's democracy. The study concludes that vote buying and selling are a contract where both politicians and voters, that is sellers and buyers profit while ignoring the aftermath consequences of such an action. The study also concludes that vote-selling has detrimental implications for Ghana's democracy. We recommend that NGOs, electoral commissions, civil societies, and non-state actors should spearhead and strengthen democracy by mounting vigorous campaigns to educate the electorates not to accept financial or material benefits before they vote for a particular candidate. Moreover, the consequences of vote-selling and buying should be included in high school curricula to educate Ghanaians on its implications

INTRODUCTION

The political stability of both democratic and emerging democratic regimes has been significantly shaped by elections. Boafo-Arthur (2006) posits that elections are significant to nation-building and the electorates because they perform the role of a litmus test for democratic institutions. As a result, it is a crucial procedure for allocating authority and realizing representative democracy (Baidoo *et al.*, 2018). Uwa and Emeka (2022), however, argue that development will remain a mirage and that the very foundation of citizens' constitutional rights to freely exercise their freedom of choice and equality in a democratic society may be called into question if money and power influence become the primary factors in determining elector choices.

According to Nugent *et al.* (2009), the idea that Ghana's elections have been successful is "a convenient myth". Kramon and Posner (2013) argued that political campaigns in Ghana frequently include cash and other giveaways, also known as "chop money." There is no shortage of proof that vote buying occurs in Ghana and is not fictitious. The practice is so popular in Ghanaian politics that it can be seen everywhere from schools and universities to local internal party elections, to the point where certain voters occasionally receive gifts from many parties. Since politicians and political parties are accused of giving voters electoral incentives every election year, civil institutions and stakeholders in Ghana's elections, including the Coalition of Domestic Observers (CODEO), Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), and

Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD, Ghana), continued to warn of the threat the phenomenon poses to Ghana's democratic process (Baidoo *et al.*, 2018). According to reports, voters who get electoral incentives may occasionally be forced to swear in the name of a deity in order to force them to uphold their end of the bargain. Additionally, before receiving payment for their cooperation, it is said that certain voters are required to reveal which candidate they supported by snapping a picture of their ballots (Agyepong *et al.* 2021). These actions violate Ghana's constitution and election regulations' protection of ballot confidentiality (Baidoo *et al.*, 2018). According to Lindberg (2013), Ghanaians largely base their voting decisions on economic considerations and expect political favoritism. There is tremendous pressure on politicians to give presents in return for votes. Politicians in Ghana are under pressure to give voters private benefits, frequently at significant personal cost (Agyepong *et al.* 2021). Voters anticipate receiving gifts in abundance as proof that the politician truly cares about the needs of the community, according to Nugent (2007). But failing to do so gives voters the wrong impression.

According to Mensah (2007), there are still certain democratic inequalities that exist at all governmental levels, making Ghana's democratic transition still very much a work in progress. This study therefore sought to find out why voters in the Bantama constituency sell their vote, how the selling is done, and the implications of vote-selling on Ghana's democracy. Vote-selling in

¹ Department of Social Studies Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

* Corresponding author's e-mail: leonardatsu@gmail.com

this study is defined as the practice of voters or citizens offering their vote in exchange for cash or other tangible things, either individually or in small groups, to politicians or their agents in exchange for support in an election (Vincente & Wantchekon, 2009). The concept of vote buying is highlighted in this study since a buyer cannot exist without a seller, and vice versa.

Literature suggests that there have been numerous researches done in Ghana about voting behaviour (Boafo-Arthur, 2006; Paolo & Gyampo, 2019; Gyimah-Boadi 2008; Kramon & Posner, 2013; Baidoo et al, 2018; Nugent, 2007). However, these earlier studies were interested in vote buying due to the neglect of vote-selling. This current study was therefore designed to bridge the existing gap by exploring the implication of vote-selling on Ghana's democracy. At the heart of the study, we asked the following questions; Why do voters sell their votes? How is the vote-selling transaction conducted? What are the implications of vote-selling on Ghana's democracy? This study is useful to electoral administrators, particularly the Electoral Commission of Ghana (ECG) and other organizations or institutions involved in electoral issues, namely the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) Ghana, and the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE). Such information will aid in the development of more effective methods for campaigning against and dealing with electoral process violators. This research will act as a guide to policymakers on the need to design methods to curtail the trend of vote-selling and its future ramifications for electorates and politicians.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study was the Economic Theory of Democracy. This is Anthony Downs' (1957) work that highlights information, choice, rationality, and uncertainty. This concept is sometimes referred to as the rational choice theory. The idea is simple: if assumptions about rational choice can account for market behavior, then they can likewise account for political action. It makes a comparison between voters and consumers and between political parties and businesses. We can hypothesize that whereas consumers aim to maximize utility and firms strive to maximize profits, voters attempt to maximize the utility of their vote, and political parties aim to maximize electoral gains from their programs.

The main contention is that, in a market where profits are sought after, political parties are comparable to profit-seeking businesses. Just as firms develop whatever goods they believe would bring in the most money for the same aim, politicians create policies they feel will win the most votes in order to accomplish their own objectives (Downs, 1957). Downs proposed three fundamental hypotheses: (1) All decisions made by voters and political parties are rationally guided by self-interest and implemented in accordance with the maximization of action utility principle; (2) the democratic political system implies

a level of consistency that supports predictions about the consequences of decisions made by voters and political parties, and the government is responsible and trustworthy, which makes it possible to make predictions about the consequences that result from different choices, and (3) the democratic system assumes despite the consistency stated in the previous point a level of uncertainty, sufficiently important to allow different options.

The important point to note is that vote choice is mostly influenced by intrinsic values and the expected punishment, should it be detected, rather than by the size of the incentive offered by the party. This is justified by the fact that payments are provided for one-time encounters regardless of what is done. According to Downs' rational choice model of voting behavior and in the context of a secret ballot and voluntary voting, they (voters) would be better off accepting the bribe or present but staying at home on election day (Downs, 1957). The majority of ordinary citizens oppose attempts by political elites to sway voter behavior illegally. But other people have no choice but to obey, especially the most vulnerable and impoverished members of society. When faced with erratic carrots or sticks during an election campaign, their only other choice is to seem to comply while actually rejecting. This approach, known as defection, is a frequent weapon used by the weak (Scott, 1969).

This theory helps us understand why people sell their votes during elections. In addition, Down's ideas about how rationality works in making choices, the stability of democracy, and uncertainty being there or not being there could be used as a framework for looking at the consequences of vote-selling on Ghana's democratic processes. The theory reveals the intricate relationship between electoral credibility, political engagement, and socio-economic factors within the Ghanaian democratic context.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was carried out using interpretivism as a lens. Interpretive researchers may embrace an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological conviction that reality is socially created because they hold that reality is made up of people's subjective perceptions of the outside world. The qualitative technique was used in the study in accordance with interpretivism. According to Cropley (2019), the goal of qualitative research is to learn more about how individuals create reality—that is, how the world is seen, organized, and understood by people in the course of their daily lives. In this study, a case study design was used. A case study is an attempt to investigate a current phenomenon within its actual setting, particularly when it is difficult to draw clear distinctions between the phenomenon and its context (Yin, 2010). It was necessary to use a case study design, since it investigates a phenomenon in its natural setting holistically, in order to uncover the problem of vote-selling from voters' subjective experiences.

The targeted population for this study constituted all eligible voters in Bantama Constituency who engage in vote-selling. We sampled 14 eligible voters who sold their votes through convenience sampling technique. This number was reached as a result of data saturation. Convenience sampling is selecting participants because they are often readily and easily available. Typically, convenience sampling tends to be a favored sampling technique as it is inexpensive and an easy option compared to other sampling techniques (Taherdoost, 2016). Convenience sampling often helps to overcome many of the limitations associated with research. The main instrument for data collection was interview guide. The kind of interview done on the field was the face-to-face interview. Interviewing is typically done in a face-to-face encounter (Marvasti, 2004, Rubin & Babbie, 2005). We first made a familiarization visit to participants. This method helped us to establish a warm atmosphere between ourselves and the participants in facilitating smooth and trustworthy data collection. After a familiarization visit with participants, we scheduled a date for data collection with each participant. During the day of data collection, participants were briefed about the purpose of the research. A total of 14 interviews were conducted with each interview lasting between 30 to 35 minutes. The data collection process took two weeks with multiple schedules since some participants in the study had busy schedules. In line with ethical issues, we sought permission for the interviews to be recorded. The interviews were recorded using a voice recorder on a mobile phone. These were later transcribed for analysis.

The trustworthiness of the qualitative field data collected was ensured through credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. For instance, the idea of confirmability in trustworthiness was instituted by ensuring that the researchers' prejudice did not affect the ideas provided by the participants who were interviewed as a created story during the transcribing phase. Data from this study was analyzed using thematic analysis, i.e., using themes developed from the data collected based on the research questions. Thematic analysis is considered the most appropriate for any study that seeks to discover using interpretations. Halai (2006) opines that there are laid down principles and guidelines for conducting studies in an ethically appropriate manner which require researchers to obtain approval from the participants. In this study, we considered all research directives, which included maintaining confidentiality, honesty, openness, and responsibility. All names used for the interviewees are pseudonyms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background Details of Participants

This section of the study focused on the background of participants in the constituency used for the study. The background information collected includes; gender, age, occupation, range of income, and number of times voted. These background data are represented in Table 1.

Table 1: Background of Participants

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 9 | 64.3 |
| Female | 5 | 35.7 |
| Total | 14 | 100 |
| Age | | |
| 20-30 | 2 | 14.3 |
| 31-40 | 7 | 50 |
| 41-50 | 3 | 21.4 |
| 51-60 | 2 | 14.3 |
| Total | 14 | 100 |
| Occupation | | |
| Banker | 2 | 14.3 |
| Business | 3 | 21.4 |
| Professional Teacher | 7 | 50 |
| Student | 2 | 14.3 |
| Total | 14 | 100 |
| Range of Income of voters | | |
| 500-1000 | 1 | 7.1 |
| 1000-1500 | 2 | 14.3 |
| 1501-2000 | 2 | 14.3 |
| 2001-2500 | 3 | 21.4 |
| 2501-3000 | 2 | 14.3 |
| 3000 and above | 2 | 14.3 |
| None | 2 | 14.3 |
| Total | 14 | 100 |
| Number of Times Voted | | |
| 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 2 | 14.3 |
| 3 | 2 | 14.3 |
| 4 | 2 | 14.3 |
| 5 | 5 | 35.7 |
| 6 | 2 | 14.3 |
| 7 | 1 | 7.1 |
| Total | 14 | 100 |

Source: Authors' Field Data, 2022

From Table 1, the majority (9) of participants representing 64.3% were males while 5 representing 35.7% were females. Although the majority of the participants were males with females being the minority, it did not have any negative influence on the findings of this study since this research did not focus on gender dimensions of vote-selling and its implications on Ghana's democracy thus, the gender information provided was only to give general information of participants involved in the study. Again, Table 1 shows the age of participants involved in the study. The results show that 2 participants representing 14.3% were in the age range of 20-30 years, 7 participants representing 50 % were in the age range of 31-40 years, 3

participants representing 21.4% were in the age range of 41-50 years, while 2 participants representing 14.3% were of the age range of 51-60 years. The age results indicate that the majority of participants are mature. This explains that they probably have engaged or witnessed national elections several times and are aware of the resultant effects aftermath.

Moreover, Table 1 showed the occupation of the various participants involved in the study, the results revealed that 2 participants representing 14.3% were bankers, 3 participants representing 21.4% were involved in business, 7 participants representing 50% were professional teachers and 2 participants representing 14.3% were students. The data on the occupation of participants was very essential to the study since it indicates their level of education. The data indicate that the majority of the participants were literate which indicates that these people are deemed enlightened on the consequences of their electoral behaviors and decisions.

The table also revealed the range of income of voter participants, the Table indicates that 1 participant representing 7.1% had his income ranging between GH¢500-1000, 2 of the participants interviewed representing 14.3% had their income ranging between GH¢1000-1500, GH¢1501-2000, GH¢2501-3000 each. The table also indicates that 3 of the participants representing 21.4% had income ranging between GH¢2001-2500, 2 participants representing 14.3% had income ranging from Gh¢3000 and above while 2 participants representing 14.3% had no substantive income. This is due to the fact that these participants were students and did not engage in any economic activity. The range of income was relevant to the study because most of the participants earned above GH¢2000. Thus, it will be surprising if these voters are influenced by the manipulation of politicians prior to elections.

Furthermore, the table showed that no participant has voted once in all eight national elections since 1992, 2 participants representing 14.3% have voted two, three, four, and six times in national elections, 5 participants representing 35.7% have voted 5 times, and only 1 participant representing 7.1% voted seven times. From the findings, the majority of the participants have voted in most national elections since the beginning of the fourth republic (1992). This finding has an influence on the study in the sense that persons who have voted several times in national elections have adequate knowledge about issues relating to elections or voting before, during, and after.

Research Question One: Why Do Voters Sell Their Votes?

Interview with participants indicates that they do engage in vote-selling for many reasons. Broadly, these reasons are rooted on the aftermath behaviors of politicians who sought their vote prior to elections. The themes that emerged from the study included; to engage in business, unfulfilled campaign promises, and the readiness of politicians to spend on campaigns.

To Engage in Business

One of the main points that emerged as the reason for some voters selling their votes was the need for business capital. The participants expressed skepticism about politicians' promises. One voter explained this by noting that:

Because they will promise you heaven on earth, even Assembly Members will promise you a road interchange. They can even promise markets and factories. Immediately they win elections, you hear them saying an Assembly Member does not work in this and that capacity. MP does not do this and that. So, I think all they do is trick us. Yeah, so, I collect money from them to start a small business [Emmanuel]

This finding indicates that voters see elections as bait used by politicians to gain power. The electorates seek immediate monetary gain due to a lack of trust over repeated broken promises. Thus, they have conditioned themselves to use the electoral system as business to their advantage. Appiah (2018) concluded that vote-selling influences voting behavior. It motivates voters to go to polling stations and vote for candidates they sold their vote to as a way of honoring the contract.

Unfulfilled Campaign Promises

A second theme that emerged from the data analysis was the matter of unfulfilled campaigning promises by politicians. The participants expressed that politicians use persuasive language but disappear post-victory. This emerged in several unanimous comments:

Just that here in Ghana, the politicians cannot be trusted. So, you have to collect your share and eat before they come to power. Because after voting and they come to power, you do not see them again. [Serwaa]

Oh, thank you. Frankly speaking, the very first time I took money from a politician was 2020 elections. And the reason is that these politicians come with sugar-coated words to convince you. But, when they win elections, they would do absolutely nothing. So, I think the best for me is to collect money as a supply from them. Cause at the end of their four years, when they take their ex gratia, mine will be the money I collected from them. [Emmanuel]

I did that because they promised us that when they come into power, we'll be offered job opportunities, but at the end of the day, the story doesn't reflect that way. They will promise you good hospitals, and good roads. By the end of the day, we realize that things are still the same. So, I have made up my mind to always sell my votes. [Frimpong].

The result indicates that the major reason why people sell their votes was to get the money or items they can get from politicians before they (politicians) become unavailable; as they refuse to honor their campaign promises as revealed in the findings of Appiah (2018). The finding shows that vote-selling is a rational strategy to gain immediate economic benefits because of a notable pattern of unmet commitment by politicians. Indeed, this result confirms the work of Baidoo *et al.* (2018) that major items used in buying votes include money and clothes.

Readiness of Politicians to Spend on Campaigns

The third theme that emerged was the readiness of politicians to spend on campaigns. In this case, the participants reported that the readiness of politicians to spend on campaigns (through direct outreach and conditional gifting) also drives their vote-selling behavior. A typical comment was that:

I didn't choose to sell my votes. I was in my house when they came and they talked and offered the gift - clothes. And the condition was that when you take it, you vote for them. I didn't want it, somehow, I took it. But what should I say? They are liars. If you don't take it after the vote, you'll not see them again. [Serwaa]

This explains the desperate nature of politicians ready to spend to win elections because of the wealth they will amass when they come to power. The interview shows that economic incentives and distrust in political promises converge to influence voting behavior. Appiah (2018) indicates that politicians come to beg voters for them to win power. Akpo and Akah (2023) argue that vote buying and selling is a weapon used to change the psychology of the electorates. The interviews show that voters have varying reasons why they engage in vote-selling. For politicians, they become vote-buyers to gain political office.

Research Question Two: How are Vote-Selling Transactions Conducted?

Overall data on vote-selling transactions indicate that the process starts with convincing voters by finding charismatic individuals who can influence and gather eligible voters for them. This is followed by the process of channeling incentive that is, distributing material benefits to voters, followed by conveying them to voting stations, and ends with proof of voting.

Convincing Through Meetings

One of the forms vote-selling takes is voter convincing. This appears to happen through meetings. The participants reported that the initial phase of the vote-selling transaction involves persuasive force through organized meetings. It was seen that interviewees complied because they expected immediate benefits. This was highlighted in particular statements that:

When they came, the first thing they did was to convince me. [Serwaa]

Oh, first of all, they tell lies to convince people when they organize their meetings. That is what they have been doing. These politicians, you can't trust anything they do. But I give in because, at the end of the day, I also know that I have something to enjoy. [Emmanuel]

The findings show that vote-selling transactions often begin with politicians persuading and manipulating voters. This suggests that voters were made to have a change of decisions when it comes to voting for their preferred candidates. This confirms the findings of Bryan (2005) who stated that voters are given money and other items to influence their decisions or choices at the polls. However,

the findings do not resonate with Bryan (2005) when he again stated that voters are given these direct benefits and may be expected to abstain from voting.

Channeling Incentives

Another form of vote-selling that emerged was channeling incentives. The incentives appear to take various forms including giving out particular items such as money and clothes. However, some participants shared that their voting decisions are based on policies rather than financial incentives. Some participants said that:

I am an agent. If they channel money for the organization, I organize our sisters, the poor, and give them something for business. So, they can also benefit. [Kojjo]

The vote-selling process also involves distributing money or any item before the voting day. Some people I know take clothes. I do take money which includes the transportation fare to the place. Yeah, that is my motivation to vote. But that doesn't mean I should vote for the person I took money from. I vote on policies, not money. [Frimpong]

The findings indicate that political parties in the nation have been offering incentives to buy votes from electorates. However, some electorates prioritize their political beliefs over immediate financial benefits. This means that although incentives are common, they do not necessarily dictate voter choices. Evidence from pre-election surveys conducted by CDD Ghana towards the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections as well as other elections in Ghana suggest that a great deal of vote-buying occurs in the days and weeks leading up to the elections (Baidoo *et al.*, 2018).

Conveying to the Voting Place

One form of vote buying was the practice of transporting people to the voting place. The interviewees expressed that transport fares are sometimes provided as part of the incentives. Once there; the voters feel grateful to the candidate who transports them to the place and they can decide who to vote for. Some participants expressed in the following comments:

The day the voting was supposed, they came and took me to the voting place. [Serwaa]

Sometimes, they organize buses for those who are willing to sell their vote to the voting center. They do it to make the turnout very high. Sometimes too, you are paid transport fares. [Kojjo]

The findings show that since being present at the voting centers counts for voting to take place, conveying voters to the voting centers becomes a key component of vote-selling. This explains that vote-selling is a transaction whereby candidates distribute private goods such as cash and gifts in exchange for electoral support or higher turnout. This process ensures that the financial investments made translate to actual votes. The focus here is for voters, especially party supporters and swing voters to turn out in their numbers and vote for the party (Brusco *et al.*, 2004).

Proof of Voting

Another form or process of vote-selling involved voters showing proof of voting. They (voters) must show photographic evidence they voted for the candidate. The proof of voting guarantees that the individual has voted for the candidates. Some participants expressed the following:

Oh, sometimes they'll make sure say, when you are going to vote, you can just take a picture of it for then you know that, you voted for him or, Hey, that's credibility. That would be the assurance for them to know that when you took the money, you did the job. So that's what I did. So, for me, I collected the money and showed evidence of voting [Emmanuel]

OK. The first one is about taking pictures of your vote and then the second one also comes in the form of an announcement of cases when you fail to vote on their behalf. So, those are the things that they will make sure are done before and after hours prior to giving you the money. In short, make sure you do that. If you don't, then they will come for you. Or else if you don't take a picture of it means that you didn't vote for them. So these two are always from their end to ensure that justice is done by the voter. [Kwame]

The interviews show that demanding proof of voting is an enforcement mechanism to ensure actual vote support. Combining incentives and verification for voting helps politicians to control the voting process. The discussion shows that there are four main forms or processes of vote-selling. These include convincing through meetings, channeling incentives, conveying to the voting place, and proof of voting. Again, the findings agree with Lindberg (2003) because the impression created by participants in the study suggests that they are entitled to goodies from politicians thus confirming the caption, "It's our time to chop".

Research Question Three: What are the Implications of Vote-Selling on Ghana's Democracy?

Interviews with participants indicate that they are aware of the implications of selling their votes. However, they had no choice but to yield to the demands of politicians. The inability to select competent leaders, corruption, tyranny, inability to initiate good policies and the inability to hold politicians accountable came out as the implications of vote-selling on Ghana's democracy.

Inability to Select Competent Leaders

The first theme that emerged from the data includes the inability to select competent leaders. The interviewees shared that vote-selling prevents electing worthy and capable leaders who are unable to deliver responsibilities and promote good governance. Typical comments illustrating this include:

Engaging in selling your vote is not good. That is why we don't have good people to rule the country. since it's not a good practice, I would not encourage the younger generation to do that. You want someone trustworthy,

and who can rule the country. [Serwaa]

I think democracy is to seek someone who has the capacity and ability to deliver when it comes to governance. But selling votes makes us select incompetent leaders over competent ones. When it happens like that, the person will get to a position he or she cannot deliver. So, at the end of the day, citizens will suffer. [Kwaku]

Vote-selling may lead to a decline in governance quality and ineffective administration. The findings show that vote-selling leads to the inability to select competent leaders who fail to use public office to the benefit of a community. Jensen and Justesen (2014) noted that vote-selling leads to governmental and economic inefficiencies. Vicente (2013) also noted that vote-buying occurs where there is high political competition, and it invariably results in poor public welfare.

Corruption

A second theme that emerged from the analysis was corruption. The argument is that corruption makes individuals vulnerable to financial inducement. Also, leaders who get elected through vote buying and selling seek to loot state money to replace their loss. Some typical comments include:

Vote-selling is not good because it leads to corruption. That's why from the top, national, regional, and branch levels, you see now that even in our tertiary, the school level, everywhere is corrupt. Meanwhile, we want the intellectuals. We want people who are capable of doing the work, but nowadays without money, everything is tough. [Emmanuel]

Yes. Regardless of how the person is, capable of delivering or not, he or she will end up making sure that you pay back what he has spent. So instead of channeling the resources in development, he or she will channel it to restore what he or she has lost before they even think of what they will do. I think it's wrong. [James]

Where financial incentives to get votes are prioritized, corruption in public office becomes obvious. This is because once elected in office, resources meant for public goods may be diverted to personal reimbursement rather than community welfare, increasing corrupt behaviors. The results confirm the findings of Baidoo *et al.* (2018) that one of the major implications of vote buying and selling is that it can trigger corruption by politicians after they are voted into power. This is because they would want to get the return on money invested during election campaigns. They stated that it can lead to the abuse of state resources. A study by Torsu (2024) shows that corruption has become rampant to the extent that it disproportionately affects the governance of local communities in Ghana.

It Leads to Tyranny

Another point that emerged was that vote buying leads to tyranny-suppression of freedoms and arrests, etc. A typical comment includes:

Well, it's not good. That's why we are in this mess. Because

if the person becomes a tyrant, you can't challenge his abuse. You can't challenge his ideas, whatever he does, but if you have to follow reality, it is a good thing. Look, some people don't come to you. We vote on whatever we hear at times. So, you vote for the one who entices you. [Kojo] This suggests that even though vote-selling leads to tyranny, eligible voters vote in exchange for material benefits. This is in line with the findings of Nugent (2007) that failure to distribute material resources while on the campaign trail is perceived that the candidate (whose wealth and lifestyle are often different than his constituents) is out-of-touch and does not understand the needs of the poor constituents.

Inability to Initiate Good Policies

A third theme that emerged from the analysis was that vote-selling leads to the inability to initiate good policies. The participants reported that this practice prevents effective candidates who have good plans for the community. Some participants shared that:

I think vote-selling is bad because it makes the people we voted for unable to initiate good policies for our community's development. We want somebody competent. So, if you end up selling your vote to someone incompetent, the person cannot bring policies and the development you need. It is as simple as that. [Eric]

I believe vote-selling is bad because it doesn't make us choose the right person. You rather disallow the right person who has good plans for your community to come to power. [Akosua]

A situation where communities elect leaders because of financial incentives rather than the ability to deliver may lead to the inability to achieve development and progress because development hinges on well-initiated policies. This situation is not only detrimental to the quality of leadership but also prevents positive change and development in society. Consequently, this undermines democracy's broader objective of getting competent leaders who can meet public needs through sound policy decisions. The results resonate with the findings of Vicente (2014) who stated that worse public policies and public services were a consequence of vote-buying and selling. Uwa and Emeka (2022) note that if power and money influence take centre stage in determining the elector choices, the very essence of the constitutional rights of the citizens to freely exercise their freedom of choice and equality in a democratic society may be called to question while such good governance and development will remain a mirage.

Inability to Hold Politicians Accountable

Interviews with participants highlight that the inability to hold politicians accountable was a consequence of vote-selling. One participant commented that:

Oh sure. Selling your vote means you cannot hold the person you sold your vote for accountable. There is no way you can hold them responsible if they fail to deliver what they promise you. To me, that is what I think is

affecting the democracy we have as a country. [Frimpong] The sale of votes by voters denies them an opportunity to put pressure on politicians for better performance and transparency when they assume office. Consequently, corrupt politicians may be less inclined to fulfill their promises since it was not the mass support that secured their election but monetary payments. This undercuts democracy's grounding principle like responsibility thereby rendering the political system impotent and crooked while resulting in public distrust of elected officials. This finding is in line with Leight *et al.* (2015) who pointed out that vote-selling may stifle electoral accountability by the failure of voters to hold incumbent politicians accountable by trading their votes for money during elections. Mohammed (2020) also pointed out that vote buying enables poor governance and undercuts citizens' ability to hold their elected officials accountable. If a candidate believes all they need to do to be elected is pay off voters and government officials, they will have no incentive to be responsive to issues their constituents care about issues as water and sanitation, education, and unemployment. Therefore, it can be argued that vote-selling has different dimensions with attendant consequences that threaten to erode democratic development.

CONCLUSION

Vote-selling has far-reaching implications for Ghana's democratic process. The findings show that vote-selling is a transaction where both politicians and voters, that is, sellers and buyers, profit while ignoring the aftermath consequences of such conduct. Vote-selling in Ghanaian society is rooted in three main reasons including engaging in personal business, unfulfilled campaign promises, and the readiness of politicians to spend on campaigns. In addition, vote-selling undergoes a process to guarantee that both parties are completely satisfied with the transaction process. This includes convincing voters through meetings, channeling incentives, conveying voters to voting centers, and proof of voting. We found that vote-selling has detrimental consequences for Ghana's democracy. The major ones are corrupt leadership, unfulfilled campaign promises, inability to initiate good policies, and political unaccountability.

We recommend that NCCE and EC should conduct more voter education and sensitization awareness of the consequences of vote-selling. NGOs, civil societies, and non-state actors such as teacher unions should spearhead and strengthen democracy by mounting vigorous campaigns to educate electorates not to embrace financial or material inducements before voting for a specific candidate or party, as this amounts to selling one's conscience. The consequences of vote buying and selling should be included in high school curricula to alert and conscientize Ghanaians about the threat. An effort should be made to inform constituents/voters that the primary function of MPs is to legislate rather than to undertake development projects in their communities. This would help take off the burden of making campaign promises

that aspirants do not know how to fulfill in the run-up to elections. Religious organizations can re-instill morality in their congregations, which include the voting populace.

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