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Re-imagining Vote Buying and Political Cross-Carpeting as Predictors of Insecurity during Elections in South West Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study re-imagined vote buying and political cross-carpeting as perceptual predictors of insecurity during elections in South West Nigeria. The study adopted three objectives, three research questions, and three null hypotheses, and adopted a descriptive survey research design of the correlational/predictive type. The population comprised adult citizens (registered voters) in the six states of South West Nigeria, from whom a sample of 400 respondents was drawn from three purposively selected states (Ondo, Oyo, and Osun) using a multi-stage sampling technique. A researcher-designed instrument titled “Vote Buying, Cross-Carpeting and Election Insecurity Questionnaire” (VBCCEIQ), validated by experts in Social Studies Education and Measurement and Evaluation and yielding Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.85 across subscales, was used for data collection. Three hundred and seventy copies of the questionnaire (92.5%) were retrieved and analysed. Research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation, while hypotheses were tested using simple and multiple linear regressions at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings showed that respondents perceived vote buying (Grand mean = 3.12), political cross-carpeting (Grand mean = 2.98), and election insecurity (Grand mean = 3.20) at a relatively high level; items above the mean of 2.50 were accepted, while those below were rejected, with 2.50 as the mean benchmark. Perceived vote buying significantly predicted perceived election insecurity ($R=0.512$, $R^2 = 0.262$, $F_{(1, 368)}=130.52$, $p<.05$), while perceived political cross-carpeting also significantly predicted perceived election insecurity ($R = .447$, $R^2 = .200$, $F_{(1, 368)} = 91.85$, $p<.05$). Jointly, perceived vote buying and perceived political cross-carpeting significantly predicted perceived election insecurity, accounting for 36.1% of the variance ($R = .601$, $R^2 = .361$, $F_{(2, 367)} = 103.76$, $p < .05$), with vote buying ($\beta = .389$) contributing more strongly than political cross-carpeting ($\beta = .291$). The study concluded that perceived vote buying and political cross-carpeting are significant predictors of perceived election insecurity in the sampled South West states, while recognising the need to triangulate with independent electoral and security data.

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Introduction

Elections remain the most fundamental mechanism through which citizens in a democracy confer legitimacy on those who govern them (Aleyomi, 2013). In Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, however, the electoral process has been persistently undermined by two intertwined malpractices: vote buying and political cross-

carpeting (party defection) (Bratton, 2008). Vote buying, the direct exchange of money or material inducements for votes, has become a pervasive and increasingly brazen feature of Nigerian elections, particularly since the 2019 general elections, while political cross-carpeting, the switching of political allegiance by politicians before or immediately after elections, has become an entrenched strategy for retaining or capturing power (Collier & Vicente, 2014). Beyond their individual implications for democratic consolidation, vote buying and political cross-carpeting are increasingly implicated as triggers of election-related insecurity.

Vote buying often generates confrontations among rival agents at polling units, fuels distrust of the electoral process, and, where it fails to deliver expected outcomes can precipitate violence (Awofeso & Irabor, 2016). Vote-buying can also be understood as an act in which politicians and individuals negotiate with the electorate by buying their voting choice, conscience and voting card to win elections. Stokes (2005) asserted that machines use their embeddedness in social networks to enforce compliance despite the secret ballot, while Nichter (2008) argued that much apparent vote buying is really turnout buying aimed at passive supporters. For Nigeria, Bratton (2008) opined that almost one in five citizens is exposed to vote buying and about one in ten to threats of violence; violence depresses turnout, vote buying strengthens partisan loyalty, and defection from both threats and deals is common. Collier and Vicente (2012) model bribery and violence as alternative strategies, and their Nigerian field experiment found that intimidation lowers turnout and is systematically dissociated from incumbents, who hold an advantage in vote buying and fraud (Collier & Vicente, 2014). Nwagwu et al. (2022) traced the practice to elite politics and found it especially pronounced in the 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections, while Nwankwo (2018) shows that in Ekiti's 2018 election inducement altered voters' choices, with the "see and buy" tactic showing politicians adapting to the secret ballot. This adaptability motivates the term re-imagined vote buying, used here as a working concept for a shift from episodic election-day handouts to a layered repertoire of pre-election inducements, purchase of party agents and delegates, and compliance monitoring. Because Bratton (2008) and the substitution models above treat buying and intimidation as separable, they overlook that inducement can itself become the flashpoint.

Political cross-carpeting, particularly when politicians defect with their structures or supporters shortly before elections, frequently ignites factional clashes, thuggery, and reprisal attacks between aggrieved loyalists and new party structures. South West Nigeria, comprising Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo States, has witnessed recurring incidents of both phenomena across recent electoral cycles, including the 2019, 2023, and off-cycle governorship elections, making the region an appropriate context for re-imagining the relationship between these malpractices and election insecurity (Omilusi, 2021). Political cross-carpeting compounds the problem on variously termed where party switching or decamping; it is most frequent towards and after elections and is driven by personality clashes, power struggles, personal ambition and weak ideology (Awofeso & Irabor, 2016; Ogonnaya & Nwadinihu, 2026). Fashagba (2014) opined that re-election concerns, career ambition and patronage spur senators' defections, at about five a year between 1999 and 2011. Agboga (2024b) asserted that switchers strive to remain within the dominant parties, whose fiercely contested primaries make them both net gainers and losers of defectors. Comparative work on "parties for rent" (Desposato, 2006) and on regulating party switching in Africa (Goeke & Hartmann, 2011) situated the Nigerian pattern more broadly. Madueke (2026) argued that weakly institutionalised parties are active contributors to political volatility and insecurity. Defection reshuffles local power balances and sends aggrieved primary losers and their followers across party lines, which plausibly raises the risk of confrontation at the polls.

However, vote buying, defection and electoral violence are mostly studied separately, leaving their joint influence on election insecurity in South West Nigeria under-tested. This study re-examines vote buying and political cross-carpeting not merely as isolated electoral malpractices but as measurable predictors of insecurity during elections in South West Nigeria, using citizens' own perceptions as the empirical basis.

Statement of the Problem

Despite legal and constitutional provisions governing electoral conduct and political defection, vote buying and party switching remain important concerns in Nigeria's electoral politics. Research has documented vote buying as a recurring feature of election campaigns and has examined its relationship with electoral violence (Bratton, 2008; Collier & Vicente, 2014). Similarly, studies have identified political cross-carpeting as a recurring feature of the Fourth Republic, often associated with strategic or self-interested political calculations (Awofeso & Irabor, 2016; Agboga, 2023; Frank & Oputa, 2025; Ogonnaya & Nwadinihu). However, the extent to which citizens perceive these practices alongside election insecurity, particularly in the South West, requires further empirical examination. The gap is therefore not simply whether vote buying

or political cross-carpeting exists, but whether citizens who report higher levels of these practices also report higher levels of election insecurity. Such evidence can help electoral bodies, security agencies, political parties, civil society organisations, and researchers understand the perceptual patterns surrounding electoral insecurity. However, because the present study relies on self-reports collected at one point in time, its results cannot by themselves establish actual prevalence or causal relationships. Against this background, the study examined the predictive relationships between perceived vote buying, perceived political cross-carpeting, and perceived election insecurity in selected South West states of Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to re-imagine vote buying and political cross-carpeting as predictors of insecurity during elections in South West Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine citizens' perception of the level of vote buying during elections in South West Nigeria;
2. Examine citizens' perception of the level of political cross-carpeting during elections in South West Nigeria;
3. Examine citizens' perception of the level of election insecurity during elections in South West Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is citizens' perception of the level of vote buying during elections in South West Nigeria?
2. What is citizens' perception of the level of political cross-carpeting during elections in South West Nigeria?
3. What is citizens' perception of the level of election insecurity during elections in South West Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the .05 level of significance:

1. **H0₁**: Perceived vote buying does not significantly predict perceived election insecurity during elections in South West Nigeria.
2. **H0₂**: Perceived political cross-carpeting does not significantly predict perceived election insecurity during elections in South West Nigeria.
3. **H0₃**: Perceived vote buying and perceived political cross-carpeting do not jointly significantly predict perceived election insecurity during elections in South West Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to benefit the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), security agencies, political parties, civil society organisations, and researchers in Social Studies and Political Education by providing empirical evidence on the relative predictive strength of vote buying and political cross-carpeting on election insecurity. This can inform more targeted preventive deployment of security personnel and civic education interventions ahead of future elections in South West Nigeria and beyond.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Rational Choice Theory. Rational Choice Theory holds that individuals are purposeful actors who make choices by assessing available alternatives and selecting options they perceive will provide the greatest expected benefit at an acceptable cost (Ogu, 2013). In political analysis, the theory assumes that political actors are not necessarily guided exclusively by ideology, morality or collective interests. Rather, they may pursue personal, political or material interests and make strategic decisions based on the expected consequences of their actions. Political behaviour can therefore be understood as a process in which actors evaluate available alternatives and choose the option they consider most advantageous (Downs, 1957; Becker, 1976; Coleman, 1990). The theory's central proposition is that individuals respond to incentives and constraints. When the expected benefits of an action exceed its perceived costs, an individual is more likely to undertake it. Conversely, where the anticipated costs, risks or sanctions outweigh expected benefits, the individual may refrain from such behaviour (Becker, 1976). Although human beings do not always possess complete information or make perfectly calculated decisions, rational choice analysis remains useful because it focuses attention on the incentives confronting actors at the point at which decisions are made. This is particularly relevant to political competition, where politicians, political parties, voters and political supporters frequently make strategic calculations about electoral outcomes.

The application of Rational Choice Theory to politics rests on the argument that political actors pursue utility maximisation. Downs (1957), for example, applied economic reasoning to democratic politics and argued that political parties seek electoral support because winning elections enables them to obtain political power and pursue their objectives. Voters, similarly, may compare competing alternatives and support the candidate or party they believe will provide the greatest expected utility. This perspective subsequently became influential in explaining voting behaviour, party competition, political bargaining and strategic political decisions (Riker, 1962; Coleman, 1990).

In the context of vote buying, Rational Choice Theory explains why politicians may offer money, gifts, food, employment promises, or other inducements to voters. From the politician's perspective, vote buying may be perceived as an investment in electoral success where the anticipated political benefit of securing additional votes is considered greater than the financial, reputational or legal cost associated with the practice. The politician therefore makes a strategic calculation concerning the probability that inducements will influence voting behaviour and contribute to electoral victory. Vote buying can consequently be interpreted as an exchange in which political actors attempt to transform material resources into electoral support (Bratton, 2008; Vicente, 2014).

From the voter's perspective, Rational Choice Theory suggests that the decision to accept an electoral inducement may also involve a calculation of perceived benefits and costs. A voter experiencing economic hardship may perceive an immediate monetary payment or material gift as more certain and valuable than an uncertain future policy benefit. Consequently, the voter may accept the inducement even when aware that vote buying is legally prohibited or potentially harmful to democratic accountability. This does not imply that voters are inherently irrational or morally indifferent. Rather, it highlights the importance of the economic and institutional circumstances within which electoral choices are made (Bratton, 2008; Vicente, 2014). Vote buying can therefore produce a collective action problem. Although individual voters may perceive short-term personal benefits from accepting inducements, widespread vote buying can undermine the collective interest in free, fair and accountable elections. A voter may reason that refusing an inducement will not prevent other voters from accepting it, thereby creating an incentive to accept the benefit while the broader democratic consequences are distributed across society. This illustrates how individually rational decisions can produce collectively undesirable outcomes (Olson, 1965; Coleman, 1990).

Rational Choice Theory is equally relevant to political cross-carpeting, particularly where politicians change political parties in response to perceived changes in political opportunity. Political cross-carpeting may occur when politicians calculate that moving from one party to another will improve their political prospects, access to resources, likelihood of re-election, or opportunities for political advancement. Such behaviour can therefore be understood as a strategic response to changes in the political environment rather than simply as ideological conversion. The theory also helps explain why political supporters may respond to cross-carpeting in different ways. Supporters who identify primarily with an individual politician rather than with a political party may follow the politician to another party if they believe that doing so will preserve their political influence or access to expected benefits. Conversely, supporters who have strong partisan identification may interpret cross-carpeting as betrayal and withdraw their support. The same political event may therefore produce different responses depending on the perceived costs and benefits of alternative choices.

Empirical Review

Collier and Vicente (2014), using a field experiment in Nigeria, found that anti-vote-buying and anti-violence campaigns reduced both vote buying and voter intimidation, providing experimental evidence of the causal link between vote-buying suppression efforts and reduced electoral violence, which supports a predictive relationship between vote buying and insecurity. Their study, however, focused on the effect of intervention campaigns rather than directly modelling citizens' perception of vote buying as a statistical predictor of insecurity, a gap partly addressed by the present study.

Solomon et al. (2026), examining vote buying and vote selling in contemporary Nigerian elections, concluded that the practice has significant implications for national security, fuelling distrust in democratic institutions and creating conditions conducive to electoral violence. Their study was largely descriptive and qualitative, whereas the present study quantified the predictive contribution of vote buying to insecurity using regression analysis. On the other hand, Oni et al. (2025), studying security challenges and election administration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, found that insecurity has caused disenfranchisement, voter apathy, and destruction of electoral materials, but their qualitative, document-based methodology did not

statistically isolate vote buying or cross-carpeting as distinct predictors of this insecurity, a distinction this study makes empirically.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design of the correlational/predictive type, appropriate for examining the extent to which vote buying and political cross-carpeting, as independent variables, predict election insecurity, the dependent variable, without manipulating any variables.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study targeted a sample of 400 respondents. Using Cochran's formula for a large population at the 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, and $p = 0.50$ and $q = 0.50$, the minimum sample size is approximately 384 respondents; this was rounded up to 400 to allow for non-response. Ondo, Oyo, and Osun States were purposively selected from the six South West states and the reasons for picking the three states were that they share boundaries, cultural beliefs, and norms e.g., languages, food, etc, and two local government areas were selected from each state. Respondents were distributed proportionately across the selected local government areas. The final-stage selection procedure corresponds to the sampling frame actually used in the field where respondents were selected from the polling-unit frame.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26. Research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation, while the three null hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression (Hypotheses 1 and 2) and multiple linear regression (Hypothesis 3), all at the .05 level of significance. Prior to analysis, the retrieved questionnaires were screened for completeness and consistency, and only fully completed instruments were retained. Participation was voluntary, respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, and the information provided was treated confidentially.

Given that the study variables were measured using a single self-report questionnaire administered to the same respondents, Harman's single-factor test was conducted as a preliminary check for common method bias. All 24 measurement items representing vote buying, political cross-carpeting, and election insecurity were entered into an unrotated principal component analysis constrained to a single factor. The first factor accounted for 36.62% of the total variance, which is below the commonly applied 50% threshold. This suggests that common method bias is unlikely to have substantially influenced the relationships observed among the study variables.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents (N = 370)

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	198	53.5
Female	172	46.5
State		
Ondo	125	33.8
Oyo	145	39.2
Osun	100	27.0
Age (in years)		
18–27	74	20.0
28–37	118	31.9

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
38–47	98	26.5
48 and above	80	21.6
Educational Qualification		
No formal/Primary education	30	8.1
Secondary education	120	32.4
NCE/OND	115	31.1
HND/B.Sc. and above	105	28.4

Note. Percentages are computed based on the total number of respondents (N = 370) whose questionnaires were validly retrieved.

Table 1 shows that male respondents (53.5%) slightly outnumbered female respondents (46.5%). Respondents from Oyo State constituted the largest state group (39.2%), followed by Ondo (33.8%) and Osun (27.0%). Respondents aged 28–37 years formed the largest age group (31.9%), while those with secondary education formed the largest educational category (32.4%).

Research Question 1: Perception of the Level of Vote Buying

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Citizens' Perception of Vote Buying during Elections

Item	Mean	SD	Decision
Politicians openly distribute money to voters close to polling units on election day.	3.35	.61	Agreed
Voters in my community are induced with money before deciding who to vote for.	3.18	.65	Agreed
Vote buying is now an accepted, almost normal, part of elections in my area.	3.02	.70	Agreed
Party agents give out food items and other gifts in exchange for votes.	3.10	.68	Agreed
Vote buying disproportionately targets poor and vulnerable voters.	3.28	.62	Agreed
I have personally witnessed vote buying during an election.	2.95	.74	Agreed
Security agencies rarely act to stop vote buying at polling units.	2.85	.77	Agreed
Vote buying undermines the credibility of election results in my community.	3.22	.60	Agreed
Grand Mean	3.12		Agreed

Note. Decision rule: Mean $\geq$ 2.50 = Agreed; Mean $<$ 2.50 = Disagreed.

Table 2 shows a grand mean of 3.12, indicating that citizens perceived vote buying as highly prevalent during elections in South West Nigeria, most strongly in relation to open distribution of money near polling units (mean = 3.35) and its disproportionate targeting of poor and vulnerable voters (mean = 3.28).

Research Question 2: Perception of the Level of Political Cross-Carpeting**Table 3:** Mean and Standard Deviation of Citizens' Perception of Political Cross-Carpeting during Elections

Item	Mean	SD	Decision
Politicians in my area frequently defect to other parties before elections.	3.12	.70	Agreed
Cross-carpeting is usually driven by personal ambition rather than principle.	3.20	.64	Agreed
Supporters of a defecting politician often clash with loyalists of the new party.	2.90	.76	Agreed
Sudden cross-carpeting creates confusion among voters on election day.	2.98	.72	Agreed
Cross-carpeting weakens my trust in political parties generally.	3.08	.68	Agreed
Defecting politicians sometimes mobilise thugs to intimidate former party members.	2.75	.80	Agreed
Cross-carpeting close to elections increases tension within my community.	3.02	.69	Agreed
I find it difficult to trust politicians who cross-carpet frequently.	2.86	.78	Agreed
Grand Mean	2.98		Agreed

Note. Decision rule: Mean $\geq$ 2.50 = Agreed; Mean < 2.50 = Disagreed.

Table 3 shows a grand mean of 2.98, indicating that citizens generally perceived political cross-carpeting as prevalent, particularly regarding its motivation by personal ambition (mean = 3.20) and its tendency to weaken trust in political parties (mean = 3.08).

Research Question 3: Perception of the Level of Election Insecurity**Table 4:** Mean and Standard Deviation of Citizens' Perception of Insecurity during Elections

Item	Mean	SD	Decision
I feel unsafe visiting polling units during elections in my community.	3.15	.66	Agreed
Election-day clashes between rival party supporters occur in my area.	3.30	.59	Agreed
Thugs are commonly used to intimidate voters during elections.	3.25	.63	Agreed
Electoral materials or officials have been attacked in my community.	2.98	.75	Agreed
I know someone who avoided voting due to fear of election violence.	3.35	.58	Agreed
Security presence during elections in my area is inadequate.	3.10	.70	Agreed
Election insecurity discourages full citizen participation in voting.	3.28	.60	Agreed

Item	Mean	SD	Decision
Post-election reprisal attacks occur in my community.	3.18	.67	Agreed
Grand Mean	3.20		Agreed

Note. Decision rule: Mean $\geq$ 2.50 = Agreed; Mean $<$ 2.50 = Disagreed.

Table 4 shows a grand mean of 3.20, indicating that citizens perceived election insecurity as high, most strongly in relation to citizens avoiding voting for fear of violence (mean = 3.35) and election-day clashes between rival party supporters (mean = 3.30).

Hypothesis 1: Vote Buying as a Predictor of Election Insecurity

Table 5: Simple Linear Regression of Vote Buying on Election Insecurity

Predictor	R	R ²	Df	F	p
Vote buying	.512	.262	1, 368	130.52*	.000

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$.

Table 5 shows that vote buying significantly predicted election insecurity, $R = .512$, $R^2 = .262$, $F(1, 368) = 130.52$, $p < .05$, accounting for approximately 26.2% of the variance in election insecurity. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Hypothesis 2: Political Cross-Carpeting as a Predictor of Election Insecurity

Table 6: Simple Linear Regression of Political Cross-Carpeting on Election Insecurity

Predictor	R	R ²	Df	F	p
Political cross-carpeting	.447	.200	1, 368	91.85*	.000

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$. Table 6 shows that political cross-carpeting significantly predicted election insecurity, $R = .447$, $R^2 = .200$, $F(1, 368) = 91.85$, $p < .05$, accounting for approximately 20.0% of the variance in election insecurity. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Hypothesis 3: Joint Prediction of Election Insecurity by Vote Buying and Political Cross-Carpeting

Table 7: Multiple Regression Model Summary and ANOVA for Vote Buying and Political Cross-Carpeting on Election Insecurity

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	df	F	p
Combined	.601	.361	.358	2, 367	103.76*	.000

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$.

Table 8: Regression Coefficients for Vote Buying and Political Cross-Carpeting on Election Insecurity

Predictor	B	SE B	B	T	P
(Constant)	1.021	.142		7.19	.000
Vote buying	.392	.048	.389*	8.21	.000
Political cross-carpeting	.287	.047	.291*	6.14	.000

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$. Tables 7 and 8 show that vote buying and political cross-carpeting jointly and significantly predicted election insecurity, $R = .601$, $R^2 = .361$, $F(2, 367) = 103.76$, $p < .05$, accounting for 36.1% of the variance in election insecurity. Both predictors made statistically significant independent contributions, with vote buying ($\beta = .389$, $t = 8.21$, $p < .05$) contributing more strongly than political cross-carpeting ($\beta = .291$, $t = 6.14$, $p < .05$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The finding that citizens perceived vote buying as highly prevalent (grand mean = 3.12) corroborates Bratton (2008), who found that vote buying constitutes a characteristic dimension of Nigerian election campaigns, and Solomon et al. (2026), who described vote buying and vote selling as having grown steadily in scale and brazenness in Nigeria's electoral space. Similarly, the moderately high perception of political cross-carpeting (grand mean = 2.98) aligns with Awofeso and Irabor (2016) and Omilusi (2021), both of whom documented the recurring, largely self-interested character of party defection within Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

The finding that election insecurity was perceived as high (grand mean = 3.20), particularly regarding citizens avoiding voting for fear of violence, resonates with Oni et al. (2025), who found that security challenges in Nigeria's electoral process have caused systematic disenfranchisement and voter apathy.

The significant predictive relationship found between vote buying and election insecurity ($R^2 = .262$) provides empirical, quantitative support for the largely qualitative conclusions of Solomon et al. (2026) and extends the experimental findings of Collier and Vicente (2014), who demonstrated that interventions targeting vote buying reduced electoral violence, by showing that citizens' own perception of vote buying independently predicts their perception of insecurity.

The significant predictive relationship found between political cross-carpeting and election insecurity ($R^2 = .200$) lends empirical weight to Aleyomi's (2013) and Omilusi's (2021) conceptual observations that defection-related tensions can destabilise the political environment. Consistent with the Rational Choice Theory (Ogu, 2013) underpinning this study, both malpractices appear to reflect self-interested strategic behaviour by political actors, while the significant joint prediction of insecurity ($R^2 = .361$) supports the Frustration-Aggression Theory (Dollard et al., 1939), suggesting that the combined presence of vote buying and cross-carpeting compounds citizens' frustration and heightens the likelihood of election-related aggression and insecurity. Notably, vote buying emerged as the stronger of the two predictors, suggesting that interventions targeting the direct financial inducement of voters may yield a greater marginal reduction in election insecurity than interventions targeting cross-carpeting alone.

Conclusion

The study concludes that, among respondents in the sampled Ondo, Oyo and Osun states, perceived vote buying and perceived political cross-carpeting were statistically significant predictors of perceived election insecurity, both independently and jointly, with perceived vote buying showing the larger standardised regression coefficient. The findings, therefore, should not be interpreted as established causation, actual prevalence, or insecurity, as they re-imagine these electoral practices as measurable perceptual factors associated with citizens' perceptions of election insecurity rather than as demonstrated causal drivers of results.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security agencies should intensify real-time monitoring, surveillance, and prosecution of vote buying at polling units, given its status as the stronger predictor of election insecurity.
2. Political parties should strengthen internal democracy, candidate selection processes, and ideological coherence to reduce the incidence of self-interested, destabilising cross-carpeting close to elections.
3. Civic and security education programmes should be intensified to help citizens recognise and resist vote-buying inducements without resorting to violence.
4. Law enforcement agencies should develop specific, rapid-response protocols for managing tensions arising from politically motivated defections in the lead-up to elections.
5. Further research should be conducted across all six South West states, and should incorporate official INEC and security agency incident data to complement citizens' perception-based findings.

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