

# Vote-selling behaviour and democratic dissatisfaction in Nigeria

## Is democracy really for sale?

### Summary

- Most Nigerians think it is unacceptable for a citizen to exchange their vote for money or a gift. The second household survey by the Chatham House Africa Programme's Social Norms and Accountable Governance (SNAG) project, conducted in 2018, found that more than 78 per cent of respondents held this view.
- Across Nigeria, vote-selling is often an independent, individual decision. As a behaviour, it is primarily driven by material context and immediate circumstances such as economic hardship or a fear of intimidation or violence. Such practical motivations rarely draw social sanctions.
- On the whole, survey respondents believed vote-selling to be highly prevalent in their own community. Vote-selling in Nigeria is a collective action problem because most people disapprove of the practice, even though it is known to be widespread. While individuals personally benefit, the aggregate negative costs of their actions do not often come under scrutiny.
- Sustained information campaigns, community action and locally enforceable public commitments to collectively shun vote-buying strategies are more likely to be successful than moralistic pleas. Such an approach will help change vote-selling from an independent to an interdependent choice and create new voting norms.
- Political actors who buy votes should face stringent consequences. Political financing reform, and ensuring election security and ballot secrecy, will be equally vital in addressing vote-selling.

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## Introduction

The buying and selling of votes harms democracy. It interferes with the independence and rights of voters to fairly assess candidates for electoral offices which directly determine the quality of governance and social contract that citizens will experience. Vote-trading only guarantees limited, elections-bound benefits for a few, while jeopardizing the long-term fortunes of the majority. It contributes to keeping politicians ‘off the hook’ for abusing public office when elected, and traps vulnerable voters in self-sabotaging, clientelist relationships with their political leaders. Vote-trading also discourages and blocks honest people from entering politics, because electoral success becomes associated with dishonest and unethical practices. Because vote-trading mostly relies on government funds, it provides a ready excuse for fraud and embezzlement and can lead to widespread corruption in the public sector.

Despite their negative effects, vote markets are a common – yet difficult to quantify – feature of many democratic societies.<sup>1</sup> The proliferation of such markets is seen as evidence of a young, stalling, or deconsolidating democracy, at the same time reflecting a cynical, disillusioned citizenry at the mercy of self-interested political elites.<sup>2</sup> Due to the influence of vote-trading on electoral outcomes, an evaluation of this practice provides an important lens for understanding democratic development and the relationship between citizens, political leaders and government institutions in a democratic system. This briefing paper examines the nature and drivers of the supply side of vote markets in Nigeria, Africa’s largest democracy. It presents evidence of the social expectations, norms and conditions which sustain vote-selling practices in the country. It also discusses the reasons why these practices are considered acceptable and the reasons for this acceptance. On a broader level, this paper critically reviews the status of electoral democracy in Nigeria and how Nigerians think about their experience of democratic governance.

The Chatham House Africa Programme’s Social Norms and Accountable Governance (SNAG) project<sup>3</sup> adopts an approach based on social norms methodology to systematically test for shared beliefs and expectations that inform individuals’ behaviours and their choices to engage in or refrain from, or to accept or reject, corruption.<sup>4</sup> With a primary focus on Nigeria, and working with methodology developed by our research partners at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Social Norms and Behavioural Dynamics, SNAG implemented its second national

<sup>1</sup> For instance, vote markets have been reported in diverse countries such as Uganda – see Agaba, J. (2015), *Civil society starts campaign against voter bribery*, New Vision, 11 November 2015; the Philippines – see Hicken, A., Leider, S., Ravanilla, N. and Yang, D. (2015), ‘Measuring Vote-Selling: Field Evidence from the Philippines’, *American Economic Review*, 105(5), pp. 352–56; and the Western Balkans – see Bliznakovski, J. (2020), ‘Vote buying/vote selling (Western Balkans)’, Global Informality Project, [https://www.in-formality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Vote\\_buying/\\_Vote\\_selling\\_\(Western\\_Balkans\)](https://www.in-formality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Vote_buying/_Vote_selling_(Western_Balkans)). Transparency International’s Global Corruption Barometer also examined vote-buying across Asia in 2020, and found that nearly one in seven people across Asia is offered bribes in exchange for votes. See Transparency International (undated), ‘Asia’, <https://www.transparency.org/en/gcb/asia/asia-2020>.

<sup>2</sup> Agu, S. U., Okeke, V. O. S. and Idike, A. N. (2013), ‘Voter Apathy and Revival of Genuine Political Participation in Nigeria’, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(3), p. 439.

<sup>3</sup> Chatham House (undated), ‘Social Norms and Accountable Governance (SNAG)’, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/our-departments/africa-programme/social-norms-and-accountable-governance-snag>.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this paper corruption is used in the commonly defined sense of the abuse of entrusted power or public office for private gain: World Bank (1997), *Helping Countries Combat Corruption: The Role of the World Bank*, Washington, DC: The World Bank: p. 8, <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/corruptn/corruptn.pdf>.

household survey in 2018,<sup>5</sup> investigating the social beliefs that motivate different forms of corruption.<sup>6</sup> This is the final briefing paper in a series of three, providing analysis of data from the different survey scenarios on three separate behaviours: the diversion of government funds for religious community use; bribery in exchange for improved grades in national examinations; and vote-selling.

The 2018 survey assessed the role of social beliefs and expectations in the supply side of vote markets in the context of the secret ballot in Nigeria's elections,<sup>7</sup> and focused on people's beliefs about exchanging votes for money or a gift, rather than on the motivations or beliefs of those buying the votes.<sup>8</sup> Notably, it focused on whether people approved or disapproved of vote-selling for practical or moral reasons. It does not discount the powerful role played by the demand side of vote markets; unregulated campaign financing; and the pipeline of government money used to sponsor political parties and candidates through buying up electoral votes.

## **Despite their negative effects, vote markets are a common – yet difficult to quantify – feature of many democratic societies around the world.**

This briefing paper presents analysis of survey data which underscores the critical importance of understanding the social influences of different forms of corruption.<sup>9</sup> It primarily seeks to identify whether people make decisions about selling their votes because of what they think other people in their community think and believe about the practice. The research also shows how the effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions hinges on the proper diagnosis of the factors driving behaviour – is vote-selling an independent decision by an individual based on moral or practical considerations, or does it reflect that individual's interdependence with their community based on descriptive or social norms?

This distinction is important for policymakers and anti-corruption practitioners alike. Independent behaviours do not typically depend on what other people might think or believe. In this sense such behaviours are unconditional of social expectations. Hygiene behaviours such as teeth-brushing, religious rituals like fasting or prayer, and dietary choices such as veganism are, typically, behaviours that most people would engage in regardless of whether other people around them do the same. Such customs and moral rules are typical examples of independent

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<sup>5</sup> The Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey of 2018 was implemented in collaboration with Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission's Anti-Corruption Academy of Nigeria (ICPC-ACAN) and a network of academics and researchers based in Nigerian universities. (See Acknowledgments.)

<sup>6</sup> This survey tested whether and how people engage in corruption because they hold certain beliefs about what others in their community think and believe. The component on vote-selling included vignette-based questions. <sup>7</sup> New directions in research on clientelism are challenging the received theoretical view of vote-sellers as passive participants in vote markets. See, for example, Hicken, A. and Nathan, N. L. (2020), 'Clientelism's red herrings: dead ends and new directions in the study of nonprogrammatic politics', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 23(1), pp. 277–94. Specifically, much of this research focuses on the 'commitment problem' faced by wealthy patrons: why do wealthy patrons buy votes, when it is too costly for them to monitor whether voters follow through with electoral support?

<sup>8</sup> There are different vote transactions – for example turnout buying, abstention buying and persuasion buying. <sup>9</sup> The survey data was triangulated through systematic qualitative interviews and focus group discussions in two federal states – Adamawa and Enugu – as well as FCT-Abuja in February 2022. These qualitative aspects were delayed due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

behaviour. On the other hand, interdependent behaviours are supported or conditioned by the beliefs and actions of others.<sup>10</sup> A typical example of conditional or interdependent behaviour is driving on a road. To avoid oncoming traffic, most drivers would immediately adjust to driving on the left-hand side of a road if other road users (going in the same direction) are also driving on the left-hand side. If vote-selling is an independent practice driven by customs, then interventions to address voters' personal motivations can be effective. However, if it is conditioned by what others think and believe and is thus reflective of an interdependence underpinned by social norms, then interventions would need to target community-wide or shared beliefs.

**What vote-selling practices most clearly reflect is a shared experience of real socio-economic hardship and being short-changed by politicians; a lack of trust in electoral institutions; a disillusionment with the political system; and a shared understanding of the political norms which surround electoral competition in Nigeria.**

The evidence discussed in this paper suggests that vote-selling (despite being practised collectively) falls into the category of corrupt behaviours that are independent decisions but are powerfully driven by socio-economic realities, such as widespread poverty, and beliefs about how other voters and elites behave. So, these behaviours they have a social dimension but are not enforced by sanctions in the way that makes them a social norm. We find that vote-selling seldom reflects an individual's interdependence with their community or a shared culture, beyond the observations people have that most others in their community engage in the practice and the prevalence of informal payments in everyday Nigerian life. What vote-selling practices most clearly reflect is a shared experience of real socio-economic hardship and being short-changed by politicians; a lack of trust in electoral institutions; a disillusionment with the political system; and a shared understanding of the political norms which surround electoral competition in Nigeria. Evidence from the survey data in 2018, focus group data and interviews in 2022 shows that the reasons why voters in Nigeria exchange their votes for cash or a gift are overwhelmingly due to practical considerations and norms tied to certain personal beliefs (i.e. that the cash or gift is the singular benefit they will receive from the electoral process), personal circumstances (such as precarious socio-economic or sociopolitical status) and the powerful prevailing norms of transactional and redistributive politics in Nigeria. This evidence also suggests that there is considerable scope for creating new forms of collective action and norms which reduce vote-selling during elections.

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that behavioural drivers do not exist in neat categories. A pattern of behaviour can be motivated by customs or moral rules in a way that makes them a collective practice – interconnecting personal and shared motivations.

## **Context: Vote markets in Nigeria's electoral system**

There is a sense in which electoral vote markets in Nigeria mirror routine corrupt exchanges and cannot be understood outside the context of socio-economic relations, scarce opportunity, poverty and elite competition. Vote markets exist within the context of economic hardship and political precariousness in Nigeria, and are primarily funded through the abuse of public office. As transactional and redistributive politics has flourished in the country, the development of vote markets has gone largely unchecked. Vote markets are the reflection of bargaining and competition among political elites and parties in Nigeria for political power which is used to accumulate wealth and protect vested interests.

Nigeria's electoral framework, which is anchored by two statutory instruments – the 1999 constitution and the newly signed Electoral Act of 2022<sup>11</sup> – contains provisions to address election-related corruption. These constitutional regulations and provisions have, however, failed to unsettle the political economy of elections in the country. With respect to vote-trading, the previous Electoral Act of 2010 (as amended) and the 2022 Act unequivocally prohibit the buying or selling of voter cards and all voting-related bribery offences, irrespective of when these offences occur.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, vote-trading has been a pervasive feature of recent election cycles in Nigeria: some scholars argue that it has become steadily more pronounced.<sup>13</sup>

Following the conclusion of the 2019 elections,<sup>14</sup> the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD)<sup>15</sup> – along with many domestic and international observation

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<sup>11</sup> On 25 February 2022 a new electoral act was signed into law by President Muhammadu Buhari. The 2022 Electoral Act (Federal Republic of Nigeria (2022), *Electoral Act, 2022*, available at <https://sabilaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ELECTORAL-ACT-2022-for-Nigeria.pdf>), which replaces the substantive law of 2010 (amended in 2018 and 2019), has been described as 'one of the longest-debated laws in Nigeria's history'. See Lawal, S. (2022), 'Analysis: Can Nigeria's new electoral law inspire a new era?', Al Jazeera Features, 2 March 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/3/2/analysis-new-nigerian-electoral-law-inspires-hope-for-fair-polls>. The 2022 Act contains new provisions and innovations to guarantee the early release of funds to the electoral commission; early conduct of party primaries and submission of candidates' lists; judicial reviews of false information; legalization of e-voting and the electronic transmission of electoral results; ineligibility of political appointees for partisan politics unless they relinquish office; participation of people with disabilities, special needs and vulnerabilities; redefinition of overvoting to imply accredited as opposed to registered voters; the review of election results declared under duress; and the early commencement of political campaigning and procedures in the event of the death of a candidate. For a review of these provisional changes, see Ogun, F. (2022), 'Key Provisions of Electoral Act, 2022', *The Cable*, 19 April 2022, <https://www.thecable.ng/review-key-provisions-of-electoral-act-2022>; and Lawal (2022), 'Analysis'.

<sup>12</sup> Please see the relevant sections of Federal Republic of Nigeria (2022), *Electoral Act, 2022*.  
<sup>13</sup> Nwagwu, E. J., Uwaechia, O. G., Udegbunam, K. C. and Nnamani, R. (2022), 'Vote buying during 2015 and 2019 general elections: Manifestations and implications on democratic development in Nigeria', *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1).

<sup>14</sup> The quantitative data which informs this paper was collected three months before the 2019 elections, while qualitative data was gathered in early 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Vote-buying and -selling was observed in parts of Bayelsa, Benue, Enugu, Kano, Kwara and Osun states. In some of these states, prominent party members were arrested by anti-corruption agents for offering money and gifts in exchange for votes. Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) Election Analysis Centre (2019), *Election-Day Preliminary Report on the 2019 Governorship and State Houses of Assembly Elections*, 9 March 2019, <http://www.cddwestafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Election-Day-Preliminary-Report-on-the-2019-Governorship-and-State-Houses-of-Assembly-Elections-.pdf>. Civil society has also advocated for the establishment of a National Electoral Offences Commission and Electoral Offences Tribunal, which were recommended by the Justice Muhammadu Uwais-led electoral reform committee set up by the administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua following the conclusion of the 2007 general elections, which were widely characterized by manipulation and malpractices, but the realization of which has been delayed. (See Electoral Reform Committee (2008), *Report of the Electoral Reform Committee: Volume 1, Main Report*, <https://nairametrics.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Uwais-Report-on-Electoral-Reform.pdf>.) The bill to establish the Commission and Tribunal was, at the time of writing in July 2022, being considered for a second reading in the House of Representatives after it was passed by the Nigerian Senate in 2021. See Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2022), 'House of Reps Set to Pass Electoral Offences Commission Bill', 23 June 2022, <https://placng.org/Legist/house-of-reps-set-to-pass-electoral-offences-commission-bill/>.

missions – reported widespread vote-buying and -selling across several federal states and political party strongholds. Election observers reported that some voters were openly bargaining to exchange their votes for monetary payments ranging in value from 250 to 7,000 naira. In some locations, voters were able to register their names and mobile phone numbers to indicate their candidate choice and receive payment afterwards. Party agents also used the electoral register to target voters with cash and gift offers.<sup>16</sup> In several other locations, election observers reported the violation of ballot secrecy, with voters being able to take photographs of their thumb-printed ballot papers with their mobile phones – evidence often needed to show a vote-buying broker, typically a supporter of a candidate or agent of a political party, that the voter had kept their side of the bargain. (This practice was variously referred to as ‘snap and show’ or ‘snap and collect’.)<sup>17</sup> Interviews showed that incidences of vote-buying and -selling were noted during campaigning, during the ballot itself and after its conclusion.

This observational and anecdotal evidence of vote-trading is reinforced by available survey data. An experience-based survey conducted in 2019 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on patterns of various forms of bribery in Nigeria found that 21 per cent of Nigerian citizens – around one in five – reported having been directly offered money or a favour in exchange for their vote in the last national or state election.<sup>18</sup> The survey also found that 86 per cent of the population thought that electoral fraud happened very frequently or fairly frequently in Nigeria.<sup>19</sup>

While vote-trading is understood to be pervasive in Nigeria, existing research and policymaking has paid insufficient attention to the nature of social influences which shape how citizens respond to offers of bribes in exchange for their votes. To what extent is the decision to sell one’s vote shaped by individual beliefs and social narrative? Is this choice a personal, independent one, or is it part of a wider pattern of collective, interdependent behaviour? Is it sustained by social norms or other underlying causal drivers? More broadly, what do the beliefs that drive vote-selling behaviour in Nigeria tell us about how its citizens engage with electoral democracy?

## **A social norms approach to tackling corruption**

Social norms are ‘shared understandings about actions that are obligatory, permitted or forbidden’<sup>20</sup> which ‘govern many parts of our everyday lives,

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<sup>16</sup> CDD Election Analysis Centre (2019), *Final Election Day Report: 2019 Presidential and National Assembly Elections*, <http://www.cddwestafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Final-Election-Day-Report-2019-Presidential-National-Assembly-Elections.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Interview conducted by Chatham House, Abuja, 2 February 2022.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2019), *Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends: Second survey on corruption as experienced by the population*, Vienna: UNODC, p. 11, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/nigeria/Corruption\\_Survey\\_2019.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/nigeria/Corruption_Survey_2019.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> In the UNODC study (ibid., p. 62), men reported a higher frequency of vote-buying offers (23.1%) than women (18.8%). Fewer residents in urban areas (19.3%) than in rural settings (21.8%) reported vote-buying offers. Nigerian citizens with no formal education experienced slightly fewer vote-buying offers (19.4%), while people with either a primary or secondary education reported higher rates (22%–23%). Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> Ostrom, E. (2000), ‘Collective action and the evolution of social norms’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 14(3): pp. 137–58. Another definition of a social norm is: ‘Most people in the relevant community conform to a certain behaviour; most of the people in the relevant community believe they should conform to that behaviour; and there is a preference to conform with the group.’ See Bicchieri, C. (2016), *Norms in the Wild: How to diagnose, measure and change social norms*, 1st edition, New York: Oxford University Press. ‘Preference’ here refers to the disposition to act in a specific way in a specific situation. Preferences can be conditional or unconditional on expectations about other people’s behaviours and beliefs.

ranging from economic and political decisions to cultural practices and are thus an important element of any social group'.<sup>21</sup> Social norms surveys serve to identify the behavioural dynamics of a collective practice and test whether they are driven by a social norm, practical norm, or other beliefs or factors. The diagnostic tool provided by the approach in this case enhances understanding of people's expectations and judgments of collective practices, as well as of the role of shared beliefs and social pressures in sustaining them. When these practices are detrimental to society, a social norms approach offers insights for designing interventions to promote collective behaviour change.

Informal rules of behaviour such as social norms are driven by the beliefs we have about how people important to us (for example, parents, teachers, friends, colleagues, supervisors, religious leaders and so on) think and behave, and how they expect us to think and behave. Such beliefs inform what we understand as 'normal' and what we think are the behaviours which are acceptable to the people whose opinions and behaviours matter the most to us.<sup>22</sup> This in turn influences the choices and decisions we make. Social norms are particularly 'sticky' and difficult to change<sup>23</sup> because of how they shape collective behaviour; are sustained by mutual expectations;<sup>24</sup> and are reinforced through sanctions.

In social norm literature, distinction is often made between the empirical and normative parts of social norms. The empirical part refers to behaviours that are assumed to be common (i.e. what people observe or think others do), and the normative part suggests behaviours that are considered socially acceptable, or what people believe others should do. In high-corruption contexts such as Nigeria,<sup>25</sup> people are likely to engage in petty forms of corruption because they believe that others in their community do so too, even though they know and believe that what they are doing is wrong and unacceptable.<sup>26</sup> In such situations, corruption is mostly sustained by descriptive norms (i.e. empirical expectations) rather than social norms.

With respect to causation, descriptive norms are often more powerful than normative ones in sustaining behaviour, and can have a compounding effect when overblown narratives of pervasive corruption take root.<sup>27</sup> Evidence from the first national household survey in Nigeria, in 2016,<sup>28</sup> shows that most citizens do not believe corruption to be right – in other words, there is little evidence for

<sup>21</sup> Apfelstaedt, A., Freundt, J. and Oslislo, C. (2021), *Social norms and elections: how elected rules can make behavior (in)appropriate*, ECONtribute Discussion Paper, No. 068, February 2021, retrieved from <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/231493/1/1750745291.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> The group made up of people whose opinions and behaviours matter the most to us, and who influence how we make decisions, is known as our reference network.

<sup>23</sup> Bicchieri, C. and Mercier, H. (2014), 'Norms and Beliefs: How Change Occurs', *The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, 63, pp. 60–82.

<sup>24</sup> Scharbatke-Church, C. and Chigas, D. (2019), *Understanding Social Norms: A Reference Guide for Policy and Practice*, Medford, MA: Henry J. Leir Institute for Human Security, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University.

<sup>25</sup> Both in perception and as a pervasive, everyday practice.

<sup>26</sup> Rothstein, B. (2000), 'Trust, Social Dilemmas and Collective Memories', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 12(4): pp. 477–501.

<sup>27</sup> Bicchieri, C. and Dimant, E. (2019), 'Nudging with care: the risks and benefits of social information', *Public Choice*, 191, pp. 443–64, <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/s11127-019-00684-6>.

<sup>28</sup> Hoffmann, L. K. and Patel, R. N. (2017), *Collective Action on Corruption in Nigeria: A Social Norms Approach to Connecting Society and Institutions*, Chatham House Report, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-05-17-corruption-nigeria-hoffmann-patel-final.pdf>.

a social norm that accepts corruption – but there is nonetheless a widespread perception of corruption that ‘everybody does it’ and that it is an inevitable fact of life in Nigeria. This can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy and ultimately entrench a ‘social trap of corruption’.<sup>29</sup> Vote-buying and -selling are examples of corrupt practices that are considered to be widespread and an inevitable feature of sociopolitical life in Nigeria.

## Sample design

Chatham House adopted a mixed-methods approach using surveys in 2018, interviews, and focus group discussions in 2022 to explore the social beliefs and expectations that support vote-selling in Nigeria.

The survey implementation partner, NBS, developed and recently updated its National Integrated Survey of Households (NISH) frame covering all 36 federal states in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja, with 200 Enumeration Areas (EAs)<sup>30</sup> per state and in FCT-Abuja. This NISH master sample frame was constructed out of the original master frame of the National Population Commission (NPC) for the Housing and Population Census of 2006, which established 23,280 EAs (30 EAs for each of Nigeria’s 768 local government areas – LGAs – and 40 EAs for each of FCT-Abuja’s six Area Councils). The 200 EAs that make up the NISH frame are grouped into 20 independent replicates with 10 EAs in each replicate.

The Chatham House Africa Programme’s Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences survey of 2018 drew the sample for its survey from the NISH frame of 200 EAs. The survey involved a total of 5,600 households<sup>31</sup> across urban and rural areas in FCT-Abuja and in six of Nigeria’s 36 federal states: Adamawa, Benue, Enugu, Lagos, Rivers and Sokoto. Surveys were rolled out from November to December 2018.

Additionally, the programme conducted interviews<sup>32</sup> with elections experts, civil society representatives, citizens’ groups and academics in January and February 2022. During this period, three focus groups and one expert roundtable were convened across FCT-Abuja, Adamawa and Enugu states, using a semi-structured questionnaire format. Each focus group discussion had approximately 20 participants (all eligible voters), selected to reflect a diversity of backgrounds and experiences related to electoral participation in Nigeria. The aim of the focus group discussions was to allow researchers to understand the social and contextual beliefs that influence some voters to sell their votes, as well as judgments people hold towards the practice. Participants were encouraged to discuss their experiences with elections, expectations of democratic governance, views on elected office in Nigeria, levels of trust in the electoral system and political institutions; experiences with vote-buying strategies; and the diverse reasons that might motivate citizens to sell their votes.

<sup>29</sup> Köbis, N. C., Troost, M., Brandt, C. O. and Soraperra, I. (2019), ‘Social norms of corruption in the field: social nudges on posters can help to reduce bribery’, *Behavioural Public Policy*, pp. 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2019.37>.

<sup>30</sup> Enumeration Areas (EAs) are geographic units demarcated for the purpose of data collection.

<sup>31</sup> 800 households were surveyed in each state and the FCT.

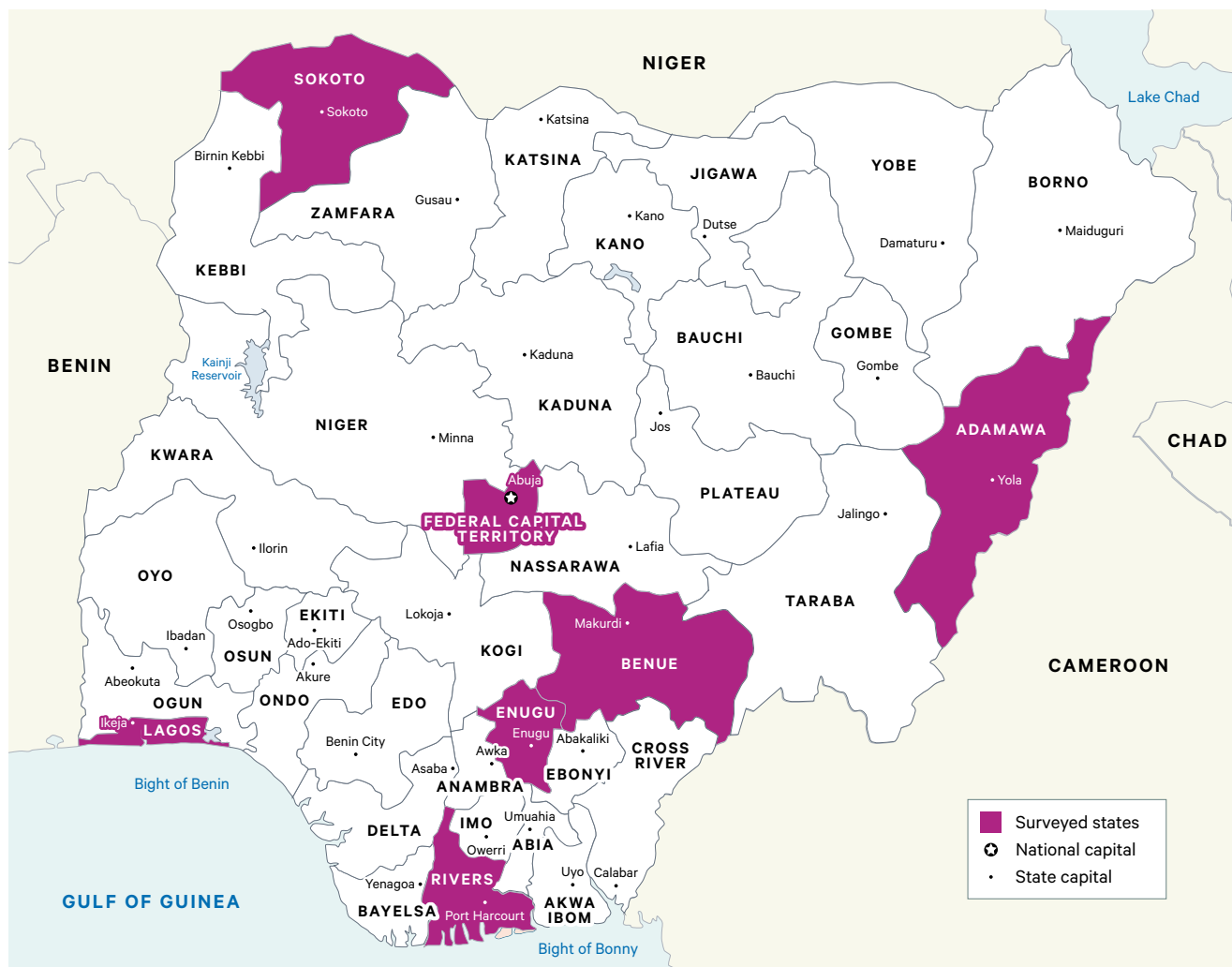
<sup>32</sup> Approximately 15 in-person interviews were conducted during this period.



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The states chosen as survey locations represent a cross-section of Nigerian socio-economic, political and demographic conditions. Lagos state, which includes Nigeria’s largest city, and the FCT are the most ethnically and religiously diverse locations covered in the survey as well as having the largest urban populations. Lagos is Nigeria’s and West Africa’s major commercial centre and has a large private sector and elite. Abuja is Nigeria’s seat of government and the centre of political power and government-resourced patronage networks. Sokoto, Adamawa and Enugu states are Nigeria’s first-, fourth- and tenth-ranking poorest states respectively, and exhibit very low human development indicators. While Benue state is considered to be Nigeria’s ‘food basket’ because of its high agricultural productivity, it shares many similarities with other states that have a predominant labour force in the civil service. Finally, it should be noted that although Rivers is one of Nigeria’s richest oil-producing states, its population suffers low development outcomes in the politically contested Niger Delta region.

**Map 1.** Chatham House Africa Programme Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey, by state, 2018



Source: Chatham House. Note that the boundaries and names shown, and designations used on this map do not imply endorsement or acceptance by Chatham House or the authors.

## Research findings

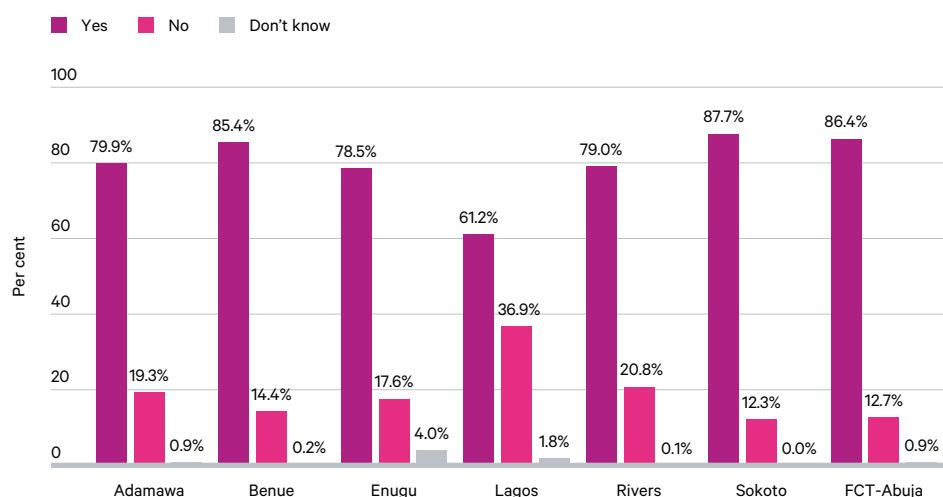
### What is the level of participation in local elections?

Over 80 per cent of households surveyed in Benue and Sokoto states and the FCT, and over 70 per cent of those in Adamawa, Enugu and Rivers, reported that at least one household member had voted in the previous local election, in 2015.<sup>33</sup> Lagos state was the outlier, with just over 60 per cent of households reporting that at least one member had voted. This is consistent with the low turnout in Lagos in the 2015 vote and in the 2019 election which followed the survey. However, overall voter turnout in elections has waned steadily across Nigeria.

**Figure 1.** Household-level participation in previous local election in 2015, by state

**Question:**

Did you or a household member vote in the last local election?



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

### What do people think of the practice of vote-selling?

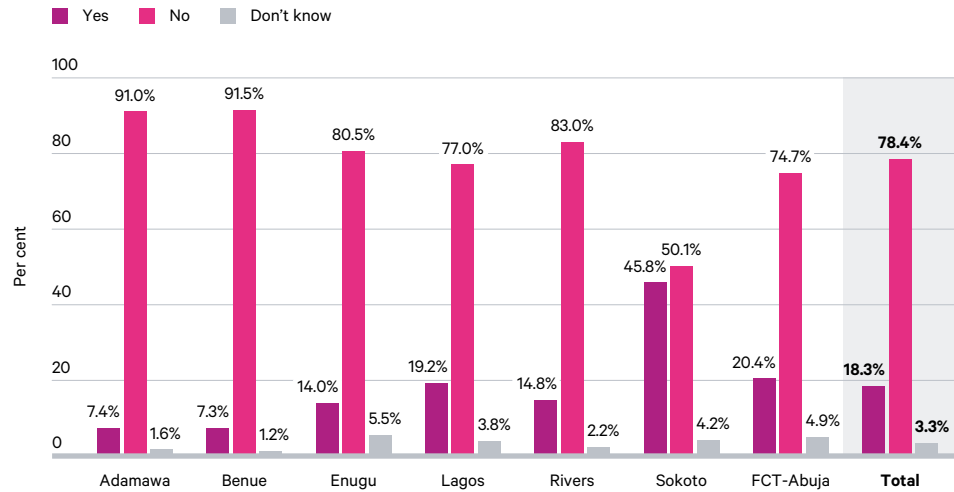
To measure whether people approved of vote-selling, respondents were asked the following questions: ‘Do you think that people should collect money or a gift for their vote?’ and ‘Do you think it is acceptable for people to collect money or a gift for a vote?’. A substantial majority of respondents – 78.4 per cent of all surveyed households – thought that constituents *should not* receive money for their votes, against 18.3 per cent who felt constituents should receive money for their votes. (In other words, most people disapprove of vote-selling, even though – as the survey data also shows – they believe that people in their community frequently engage in the practice.)

<sup>33</sup> As these are household, not individual, voting figures, they cannot be directly compared to other results – but are indicative of a significantly higher turnout than at previous general elections.

**Figure 2.** Personal normative beliefs, by state: should people sell their votes?

**Question:**

Do you think that people should collect money or a gift for their vote?



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

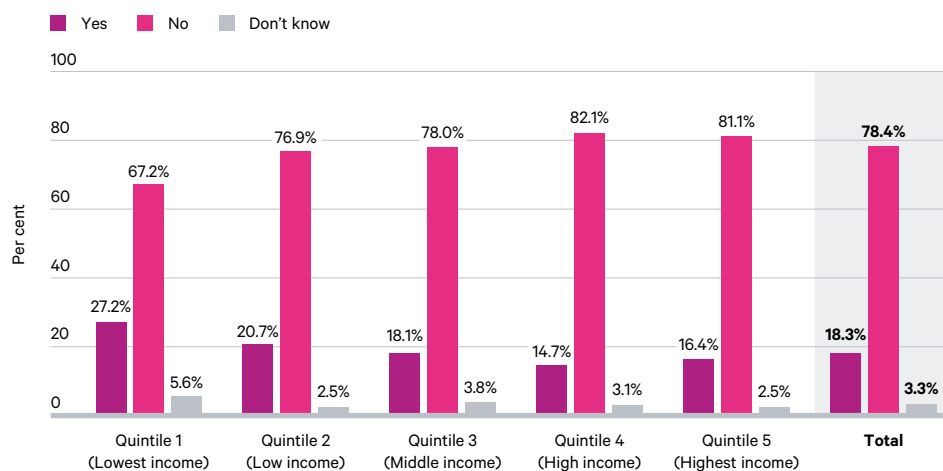
The one exception to this broad picture was found in Sokoto, Nigeria’s poorest state, where more than 45 per cent of the respondents thought that people should collect money in exchange for their vote – possibly reflecting the relatively severe economic realities of most constituents in Sokoto.

With respect to socio-economic status, respondents who disapproved of vote-selling behaviour cut across all income levels, with a majority of more than two-thirds expressing this view in each of the five income quintiles, from lowest to highest. Meanwhile, the approval rate was lowest (14.7 per cent) among the high-income quintile, and highest (27.2 per cent) among those in the lowest income quintile. Overall, this indicates that the poorest households made up the highest number of respondents who think that people should sell their votes.

**Figure 3.** Personal normative beliefs, by income quintile: should people sell their votes?

**Question:**

Do you think that people should collect money or a gift for their vote?



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

**What drives beliefs about vote-selling behaviour?**

After posing each question, we then asked respondents *why* they held these beliefs,<sup>34</sup> differentiating between those who thought people should sell their votes and those who thought they should not. Specifically, respondents were asked whether their views on vote-selling were driven by moral or practical considerations (see Box 1).

**Box 1. Moral vs practical motivations**

Moral justifications for behaviour are grounded in overarching normative principles and deep-seated values. Moral reasons motivate individuals to undertake actions independently of what others do or expect them to do, because they believe they are morally obligated to do so: this applies, for example, with religious practices and some dietary lifestyles. Moral justifications for deciding that selling one’s vote is acceptable may include a lack of confidence in the electoral and political system. Conversely, a refusal to sell one’s vote might be based on strong belief in democracy, personal integrity and a sense of civic duty.

Practical motivations, on the other hand, are grounded in people’s day-to-day realities, such as whether the relevant action will meet an immediate need. Practical personal beliefs and expectations in this context are dependent on material, social or economic realities. Where people’s reality is one of economic hardship, poverty, threats to life, insecurity and poor governance, vote-selling behaviour can be strongly influenced by these factors.

<sup>34</sup> That is, why they thought people should/should not collect money in exchange for the gift of a vote, and why they thought it was acceptable/not acceptable to collect money in exchange for such a gift.

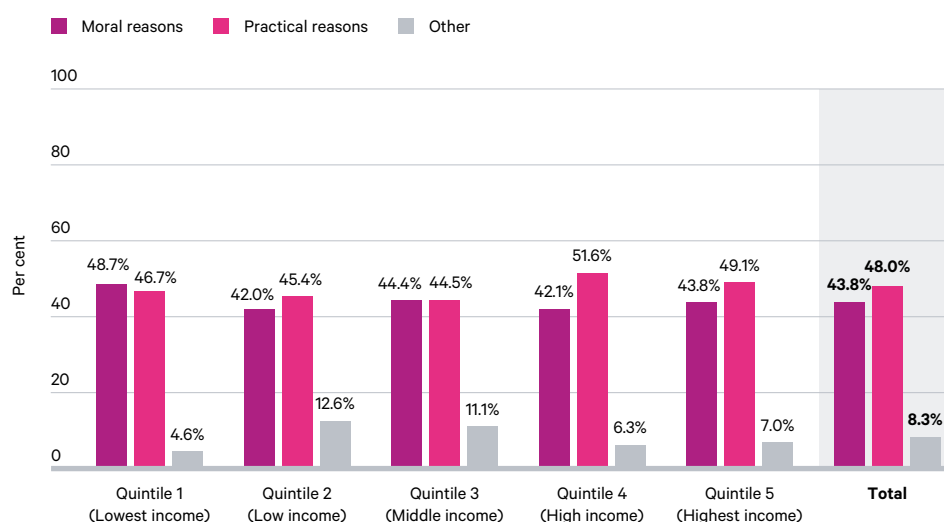
## Why do people disapprove of vote-selling?

Among those who held negative views (negative personal normative beliefs) on vote-selling, respondents were quite evenly divided on the reasons why they held these views, with almost 44 per cent of all respondents who disapproved of vote-selling holding this belief on moral grounds – for example, because of its negative effect on the democratic process, or out of a sense of civic duty – and 48 per cent disapproving for practical reasons, such as the rewards on offer being too small, or the risks – for instance, of violent reprisal by other political actors – being too high. These findings were largely constant across all income percentiles.

**Figure 4.** Reasons why people disapprove of vote-selling, by income quintile

**Question:**

Why do you think that people should not collect money or a gift for their vote?



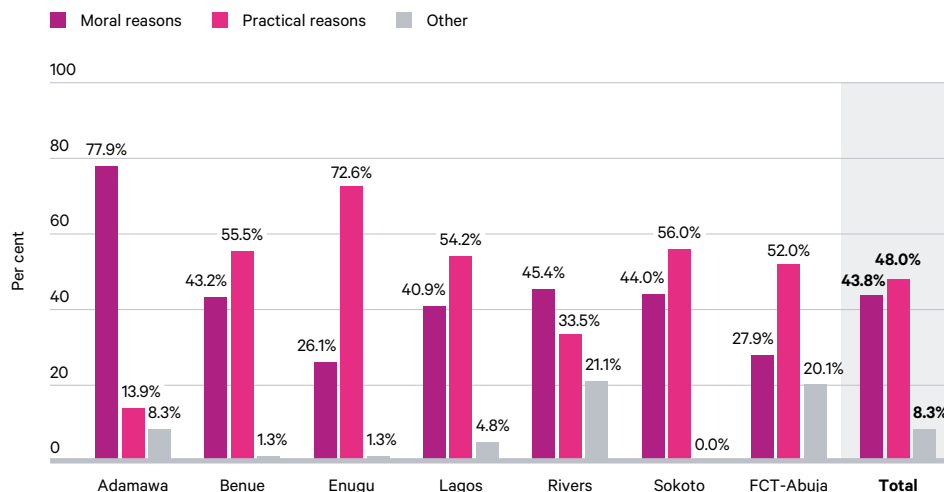
Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

There were, however, significant differences across states. Adamawa, for example, was the only state where most respondents who thought selling votes was wrong were morally opposed to the practice (77.9 per cent), with a small minority considering it unacceptable to sell votes because it was not practical (13.9 per cent). In Enugu, however, a sizeable majority (72.6 per cent) thought that voters should not sell their votes because of practical concerns, with only a minority considering it morally unacceptable (26.1 per cent).

**Figure 5.** Reasons why people disapprove of vote-selling, by state

**Question:**

Why do you think that people should not collect money or a gift for their vote?



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

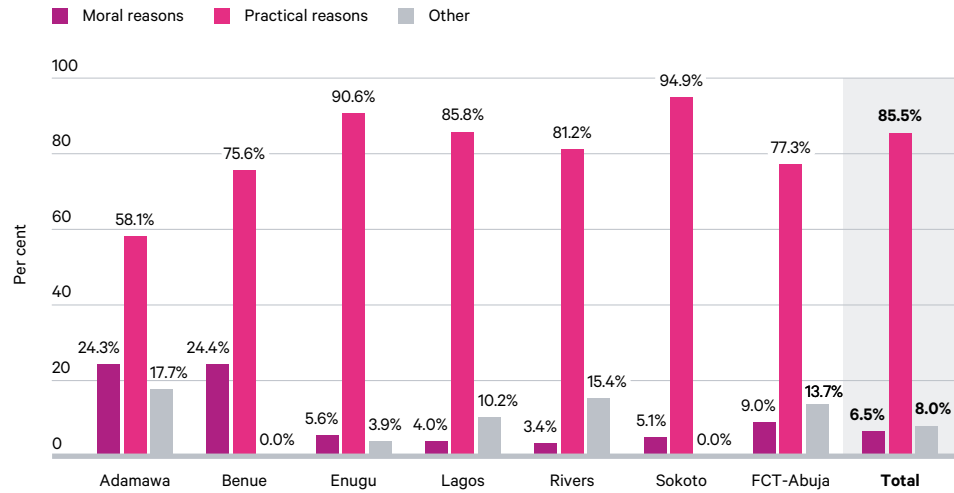
**Why do people approve of vote-selling?**

In contrast, respondents who held positive views toward vote-selling (i.e. who thought that voters *should* sell their votes) overwhelmingly felt that way due to practical considerations (85.5 per cent) in comparison to on moral grounds (6.5 per cent). The only notable variations to this pattern were found in Adamawa and Benue states, where a significant number – more than 24 per cent in both cases – felt that it was morally acceptable to sell votes. This probably reflects some pockets of voter disillusionment in these states, as well as a lack of confidence in the impact of elections on people’s material circumstances beyond the price paid by politicians to gain votes. Across the five income quintiles, the same broad pattern applied, with more than 80 per cent of respondents in each quintile citing practical reasons for approving vote-selling in principle.

**Figure 6.** Reasons why people approve of vote-selling, by state

**Question:**

Why do you think that people should collect money or a gift for their vote?

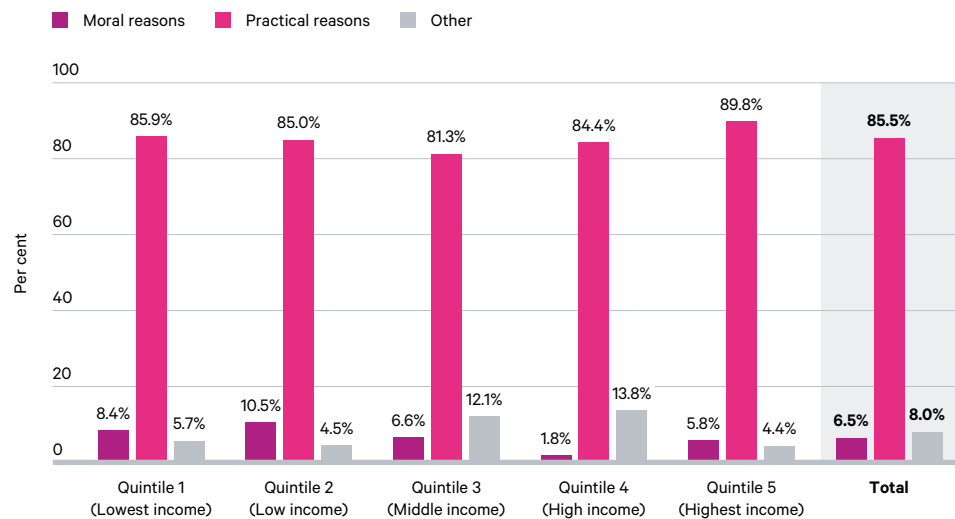


Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

**Figure 7.** Reasons why people approve of vote-selling, by income quintile

**Question:**

Why do you think that people should collect money or a gift for their vote?



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

## **Vote-selling as a practical, not a moral, behaviour**

Taken together, these survey findings indicate that views on vote-selling among the Nigerian population are more commonly driven by considerations of practicality – or, put differently, the practical norms of politics in Nigeria, not morality. This is the case across the whole sample of households that expressed a view (i.e. excluding those responding with ‘other’ and ‘don’t know’). Almost 60 per cent based their view on practical considerations, while just over 40 per cent were driven by moral criteria. This includes both those that approved and those that disapproved of vote-selling.

Thus, though a large majority of those surveyed disapproved of vote-selling, this seems to have been a conditional view for most. The survey data would indicate that the view of these respondents, and therefore their behaviour, could change if the material conditions around vote-selling – an individual’s personal socio-economic circumstances or perceptions of safety, for instance – or the level of reward offered were to change.

## **Measuring social expectations and conditionality of vote-selling behaviour**

A further vital element in understanding how these individual perspectives translate into behaviours is to set them in the context of expectations of how others in the community think and act. We measured whether vote-selling behaviour was conditional on social expectations using four vignettes related to vote-selling behaviour (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Vignettes of vote-selling behaviour

	<b>Community disapproves of vote-selling</b>	<b>Community approves of vote-selling</b>
Vote-selling is rare	Scenario 1	Scenario 2
Vote-selling is common	Scenario 3	Scenario 4

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

Respondents were provided with one of four possible scenarios: (1) where vote-selling was uncommon and widely disapproved of; (2) where vote-selling was uncommon but widely approved of; (3) where vote-selling was common but widely disapproved of; and (4) where vote-selling was both common and widely approved of. The four vignettes were randomized such that respondents had an equal chance of receiving each one of the four during survey administration. Respondents were then asked to assess the likelihood that an individual going to the polling booth in such conditions would sell their vote.



**Figure 8.** Predictive probability of vote-selling under different scenarios, by state



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

Note: Probability is expressed as a number between 0 and 1, where 0 = impossible and 1 = certain.

One central finding from this section of the survey is that vote-selling behaviour need not depend on the actions or judgments of others in the community. Across all states, respondents who were given Scenario 1 – in which very few people sell their vote, and very few people approve of selling votes – thought that the chances of vote-selling behaviour were over 50 per cent (i.e. probability was greater than 0.5); in Enugu, Lagos, Rivers, Sokoto and FCT-Abuja the perceived chances rose to 65–70 per cent. This suggests that vote-selling is often motivated by individual circumstances, such as economic hardship, poverty or fear of intimidation or violence, and not by the wider social context and community expectations; in theoretical terms, it tends towards being an independent behaviour, rather than an interdependent one. This means that the biggest costs of a refusal to sell one’s vote involve economic or security-related sanctions rather than social ones such as a loss of community status or a sense of belonging, public ridicule or becoming the subject of negative talk.

Nonetheless, we found that social expectations do play some general role in influencing vote-selling behaviour, though there was some variation in the degree of influence observed. In both Adamawa and Benue, for example, the likelihood of vote-selling increased by 22 percentage points when moving from Scenario 1, the least permissive of vote-selling, to Scenario 4, where it was most accepted. The likelihood of vote-selling increased in Lagos, Sokoto and the FCT by a relatively more modest 15–16 percentage points when moving from Scenario 1 to Scenario 4.

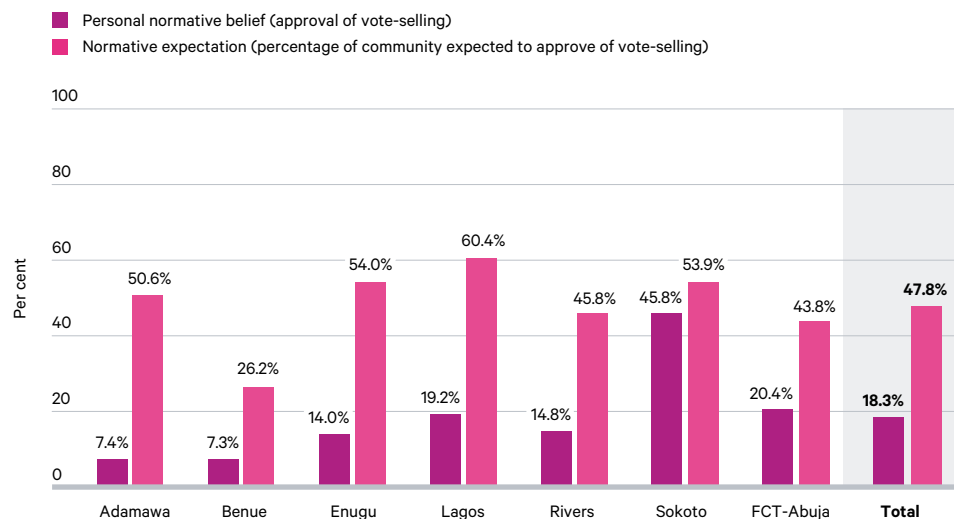
Importantly, respondents predicted the highest chances for vote-selling behaviour under the two scenarios (3 and 4) where vote-selling was commonplace. The implication here is that the *behaviour* of others in the community is more influential than a respondent's and their community's *judgment* in shaping vote-selling behaviour.<sup>35</sup>

### Normative beliefs and expectations surrounding vote-selling behaviour

This relative disconnect between individual vote-selling and respondents' views of/judgment of the community's beliefs was further evidenced by questions designed to measure people's expectations of the behaviour of others (normative expectations). Respondents were asked: 'Think about the people in your community, such as your family, friends, neighbours, and colleagues. Out of 10 in your community, how many of them do you think said people should collect money or a gift for their vote?'

On average, respondents in Lagos expected six out of 10 people in their community to approve of vote-selling, while respondents in Adamawa, Enugu, Rivers and Sokoto felt that closer to half of people in their community would do so. Respondents in Benue state held the lowest normative expectations, believing that an average of just three out of 10 people in their community approved of vote-selling.

**Figure 9.** Consistency of normative beliefs, by state



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

<sup>35</sup> This is also consistent with the laboratory finding that, in cases of incongruence between empirical and normative expectations (i.e. under condition/Scenario 3), empirical expectations (driven by beliefs about what others do) dominate normative expectations (driven by beliefs about what others think). See Bicchieri, C. and Xiao, E. (2009), 'Do the right thing: but only if others do so', *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 22(2), pp. 191–208.

The predominant picture was therefore one of a wide disparity between people's personal views on vote-selling, which as noted above were overwhelmingly negative, and the average expectation that 47.8 per cent of *other* community members would approve of vote-selling.

However, in Sokoto, the survey found mutual consistency between what respondents felt is the right way to behave and what they believe others in their community approve of. Where 45.8 per cent of Sokoto respondents thought that it was acceptable for voters to sell their votes, they also, on average, thought that 53.9 per cent of their community would approve of selling their vote. However, despite this mutual consistency, we found that respondents in Sokoto were amongst the least likely to be influenced by social expectations. In the scenario exercise, respondents in Sokoto predicted that a typical voter would sell their vote 70 per cent of the time, even under Scenario 1, where the least permissive conditions exist.

## Explaining the findings

Taken together, our data shows that a clear majority of survey respondents do not approve of vote-selling and consider it to be practically, rather than morally, unacceptable. Practical considerations are also influential when vote-selling is seen as acceptable. On average, respondents expect half of their friends and neighbours to approve of vote-selling. In addition, the results of the scenario exercise imply that respondents understood vote-selling as independent of the behaviours or beliefs of others. This points to vote-selling as a behaviour primarily driven by material context and immediate consequence – practical and pressing issues that override idealized beliefs related to electoral rights and democracy.

In the context of Nigeria, it is very likely that these findings reflect the circumstances of poverty, deprivation and the urgent unmet material needs that are faced by millions. Unemployment, extreme poverty and its material implications (e.g. food insecurity and hunger) were a central theme in our focus group discussions. In general, participants felt that the precarious political and economic situations of impoverished voters make them particularly vulnerable to vote-selling behaviour. For example, a participant in Enugu, reflecting on the precarious position of poorer voters, said that 'politicians operate on the principle of "make them hungry and give them food to eat"'.<sup>36</sup> Another participant, in Adamawa, suggested that 'despite the level of awareness [of the harms of vote-selling behaviour] [...] the electorates may be influenced by poverty and food insecurity'.<sup>37</sup> Yet another participant, in Abuja, claimed that 'poverty and hunger play a huge role in the act[s] of vote-buying and -selling'.<sup>38</sup>

Further, these findings are consistent with the relevant literature, which also suggests that poorer voters are more likely to be targeted by, and are more susceptible to, vote-buying schemes because it is precisely poorer voters who do not have many options (both in terms of communicating their political

<sup>36</sup> Participant in focus group discussion, Enugu, 28 January 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Participant in focus group discussion, Adamawa, 1 February 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Participant in focus group discussion, Abuja, 25 January 2022.

preferences and in terms of satisfying their most urgent material needs). Moreover, vote-buying schemes also often offer more in terms of financial gain than many in this group would earn from a day's work.<sup>39</sup> Material deprivation, in the context of high levels of unemployment and poverty, can thus be seen as a significant cause of vote-selling behaviour, as political elites exploit conditions of economic hardship and offer private discretionary transfers that are more likely to be accepted in exchange for political support.<sup>40</sup>

**It is well understood that in every country where vote markets thrive, they produce a range of harmful consequences. Vote-trading enables state capture and undermines democracy, as corrupt politicians are likely to be elected, rather than voted out.**

These survey findings, interview data and focus group discussions also reflect a shared understanding of powerful norms of transactional and distributive politics in Nigeria. As is the case in many democracies around the world, unquestioned money in politics, winner-takes-all elections, a lack of consequences for candidates and political parties which engage in vote-buying, and the lack of influence held by citizens in the affairs of political parties and elected governments all contribute to a context where political actors establish and maintain relationships with constituents through distributive electoral politics.<sup>41</sup> These conditions serve to reinforce the relatively weak moral justification for a refusal to engage in vote-selling and the stronger practical incentives people associate with the practice.

**Explaining the paradox of vote-selling**

It is well understood that in every country where vote markets thrive, they produce a range of harmful consequences. Vote-trading enables state capture and undermines democracy, as corrupt politicians are likely to be elected, rather than voted out.<sup>42</sup> It also allows wealthy citizens a stronger voice in the voting booth, while poorer citizens trade their political support for relatively minor payments.<sup>43</sup> In addition, it encourages the diversion of public funds into cronyism by creating incentives for politicians to keep voters dependent on these exchanges.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> For more on the relationship between poverty and vote markets, see, for example, Brusco, V., Nazareno, M. and Stokes, S. C. (2004), 'Vote buying in Argentina', *Latin American Research Review*, 39(2), pp. 66–88; Bratton, M. (2008), 'Vote buying and violence in Nigerian election campaigns', *Electoral Studies*, 27(4), pp. 621–32; Stokes, S. C., Dunning, T., Nazareno, M. and Brusco, V. (2013), *Brokers, voters, and clientelism: The puzzle of distributive politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); and Jensen, P. S. and Justesen, M. K. (2014), 'Poverty and vote buying: Survey-based evidence from Africa', *Electoral Studies*, 33, pp. 220–32.

<sup>40</sup> Jensen and Justesen (2014), 'Poverty and vote buying'; Stokes, S. C. (2005), 'Perverse accountability: A formal model of machine politics with evidence from Argentina', *American Political Science Review*, 99(3), pp. 315–25.

<sup>41</sup> For an overview of Nigeria's political party landscape, see Osori, A. (2022), 'Nigeria's Evolving Political Party Landscape: Emergent and Key Players, Alliances, Challenges, Cultures and Opportunities', *The Republic*, 6(1).

<sup>42</sup> Stokes, S. C. (2009), 'Political clientelism', in Boix, C. and Stokes, S. C. (eds) (2009), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno and Brusco (2013), *Brokers, voters, and clientelism*; Stokes (2009), 'Political clientelism'.

Vote-selling behaviour is therefore puzzling, because all voters, especially poorer voters, are impacted by these harms. All voters have a collective interest in a political system that punishes rather than rewards corruption, that safeguards political equality rather than undermines it, and that facilitates economic development rather than stifles it. And yet, in electoral democracies such as Nigeria, vote markets thrive, and those who sell their votes are primarily the poor – those who are harmed the most.

Our analysis sheds light on this puzzle by calling attention to the structure of costs and benefits voters face. When voters believe that most people in their community will sell their votes, the likelihood of a vote changing the electoral outcome goes down, and the opportunity costs of not selling go up. This creates an economic incentive to sell one's vote to the highest bidder and reinforces a transactional relationship with elected officials which makes post-election accountability less likely. Widespread vote-selling behaviour in turn produces the significant collective political and economic costs outlined earlier in this section, and further intensifies the socio-economic pressures on poorer voters and poor governance context that make vote-selling an attractive option in the first place – a 'social trap' of corruption.

### **Implications for anti-corruption policy**

A central objective of this briefing paper was to highlight how social beliefs and expectations influence vote-selling. The picture that emerges of vote-selling behaviour in Nigeria is one in which a clear majority do not approve of vote-selling but believe that many in their community will sell their vote regardless of what the community – or they themselves – think about the practice in principle. In the context of acute and widespread socio-economic needs, this sets up an incentive structure in which individual voters may as well maximize their short-term gain – from a payment or gift in exchange for selling their vote – as their observations of vote-selling during elections suggest that voting honestly will make no difference and risks leaving them at a material disadvantage compared to the rest of the community.

This has several important implications for policy. The first is that moralistic pleas asking voters to vote according to their conscience rather than sell their votes may be ineffective, as this will not alter the practical incentive structure driving the behaviour.<sup>45</sup> Instead, targeted information campaigns and other forms of persuasive political communication<sup>46</sup> that expose the costs that vote-selling imposes on communities and political institutions might be a more fruitful way to help individuals break out of the social trap of vote-selling. Such campaigns should

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<sup>45</sup> Schaffer, F. C. (2007), 'Lessons learned', in Schaffer, F.C. (ed.) (2007), *Elections for Sale: The Causes and Consequences of Vote Buying*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

<sup>46</sup> For example, there is evidence that a persuasive messaging campaign reduced the incidence of vote-selling in India and Uganda. See Schechter, L. and Vasudevan, S. (2021), *Persuading Voters to Punish Corrupt Vote Buyers: Experimental Evidence from a Large-scale Radio Campaign in India*, Cambridge, MA: Bureau for Research in Economic Analysis of Development (BREAD), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3929558>; and Blattmann, C., Larreguy, H., Marx, B. and Reid, O. (2019), *Eat widely, vote wisely? Lessons from a campaign against vote buying in Uganda*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 26293, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w26293>. For an overview of the experimental literature on persuasive political communication, see DellaVigna, S. and Gentzkow, M. (2009), *Persuasion: Empirical Evidence*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 15298, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w15298>; Strömberg, D. (2015), 'Media and Politics', *Annual Review of Economics*, 7(1), pp. 173–205.

be designed with a long-term, post-election view of linking the narrative of poor governance outcomes and personal deprivation to vote-trading practices.

Strategies should involve raising awareness of the long-term negative consequences of vote-selling and locally specific, collective costs of weak governance and corruption. This can be done through facilitated community discussions, locally coordinated public commitments to not sell votes, and voter education using visual and social media, as well as radio and TV publicity campaigns<sup>47</sup> which communicate new expectations of behaviour. This means that work must be done to move the decision to sell a vote away from an immediate and seemingly inconsequential calculus of short-term individual or household gain to one that is linked to wider community views, needs and aspirations – in other words, to change vote-selling from an independent choice to an interdependent one and set new voting norms. For example, in recent state and local elections in Ekiti and Anambra states, there is evidence that some communities were successful in collectively rejecting vote-buying strategies. Such evidence suggests communities can establish interdependent, social expectations that disapprove of and sanction vote-selling.

## **Strategies should involve raising awareness of the long-term negative consequences of vote-selling and locally specific, collective costs of weak governance and corruption.**

There may also be opportunities to weaken the reciprocity component of vote-trading in these contexts, as demonstrated in a large anti-vote-buying intervention in Uganda prior to the 2016 election. Multipronged, grassroots-focused campaigns can be effective in influencing voter behaviour by weakening the reciprocity norm (expectations of reciprocity) that characterizes vote-trading arrangements.<sup>48</sup>

It should be clear, however, that the effectiveness of any intervention depends crucially on the local conditions on the ground. In the case of the Philippines, for example, interventions have only been shown to be effective in local or subnational elections<sup>49</sup> – thus it would appear that the higher the stakes, the less effective they are likely to be. This is particularly relevant for vote markets because no

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<sup>47</sup> Such publicized commitments and campaigns also signal to political candidates and their agents that new standards of behaviour (i.e. social expectations) have been endorsed by the community, and that vote-buying schemes are unlikely to work in that area.

<sup>48</sup> In this highly relevant intervention, a civil society campaign targeted villages in an experimental sample covering 1.2 million people registered to vote in the 2016 Ugandan general election with the objective of introducing a refusal norm of vote-buying and weaken the reciprocity norm associated with the practice. The campaign included five elements: (i) a leaflet drop; (ii) three village meetings organized by local activists to build awareness of and opposition to vote-buying; (iii) a public village-wide resolution against vote buying; (iv) posters reminding voters about this resolution; and (v) an automated call reminder on the eve of the election. While vote-buying offers – especially by challenger candidates – increased, voters ‘were less willing to reciprocate them with their votes and voted for their preferred candidate instead’. In the qualitative work of the study, respondents shared that they were motivated by the campaign to ‘eat widely, but vote wisely’. Blattmann, Larreguy, Marx and Reid (2019), *Eat widely, vote wisely?*.

<sup>49</sup> Hicken, Leider, Ravanilla and Yang (2015), ‘Measuring Vote-Selling’.

amount of information exposure will curb vote-selling if, for example, individuals hold the belief that selling their votes is the only way to insulate themselves from political violence – and if that belief is, in fact, correct.<sup>50</sup> Thus, effectiveness also hinges on other pressing contextual issues, such as the level of transparency in the electoral process, the exposure and consequences faced by political actors who buy votes,<sup>51</sup> and the degree to which election security and ballot secrecy are guaranteed.

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<sup>50</sup> Nigeria's 2019 presidential elections were marred by widespread political violence. See, for example, Human Rights Watch (2019), 'Nigeria: Widespread Violence Ushers in President's New Term', 10 June 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/10/nigeria-widespread-violence-ushers-presidents-new-term>.

<sup>51</sup> Brazil was able to introduce an innovative anti-vote-buying law in 1999 which resulted in the ousting from office of over 1,000 politicians between 2000 and 2011. Brazilian civil society and the judiciary played instrumental roles in the enactment and implementation of Law 9840, which classified clientelism as an electoral infraction. This step accelerated the judicial process and allowed for the immediate removal of guilty politicians. For more on the Brazilian approach, see Nichter, S. (2021), 'Vote Buying in Brazil: From Impunity to Prosecution', *Latin American Review*, 56(1), pp. 3–19, <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.412>.

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Cover image: People cast their ballots in the presidential and parliamentary elections at a polling station in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, on 23 February 2019.

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