Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

Poverty and Voter Behaviour in Benue State: A Case Study of Guma Local Government Area

Iorshe Akav
Department of Political Science
Rev Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi
ORCID ID https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5405-7751
iorsheakav50@gmail.com / 08101786141, 08023509940

&

Benjamin Shaibume
Department of Political Science
Rev Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi
Benshacks2013@gmail.com / 0706060001

DOI : https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22903165

Abstract
In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, poverty remains closely associated with electoral behaviour. This study examines the relationship between poverty and voter behaviour among registered voters in Guma Local Government Area, Benue State. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted, guided by Rational Choice Theory and Clientelism Theory. Using Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) records of registered voters in Guma as the sampling frame, a sample of 400 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane formula at a 5 per cent margin of error, drawn through multi-stage stratified random sampling across electoral wards. Data were collected using a structured, validated and pilot-tested questionnaire and analysed using frequencies, percentages and mean scores; two hypotheses were tested using the chi-square test of independence at the 0.05 level of significance, with respondents classified into high- and low-poverty groups using a median split of a composite poverty score. The study finds that self-reported poverty is high among sampled voters (grand mean = 3.32) and is significantly associated with susceptibility to vote buying ($x2 = 48.53$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, Phi = .36) and with patronage-oriented, rather than issue-based, voting ($x2 = 40.42$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, Phi = .33). These associations are consistent with, but do not establish, the theoretical proposition that material deprivation predisposes voters toward transactional electoral behaviour. The study recommends targeted social protection and livelihood programmes, expanded voter education for poor and displaced communities, and more consistent enforcement of electoral offences relating to vote buying, while noting the need for longitudinal and multivariate research to establish causal pathways.

Keywords: Poverty, voter behaviour, vote buying, clientelism, electoral politics, Rational Choice Theory

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

1. Introduction

Voting is, in theory, the practice through which citizens freely express political preferences, ideally informed by an evaluation of candidates, party programmes and policy platforms (Downs, 1957). In much of sub-Saharan Africa, and in Nigeria in particular, this idealised process is frequently complicated by the material circumstances of the voter (Bratton, 2008; Jensen & Justesen, 2014). Poverty, in particular, has been shown across several African democracies to be associated with electoral participation in ways that go beyond mere abstract deprivation to shape how the poor actually engage with the ballot (Bobonis, Gertler, Gonzalez-Navarro, & Nichter, 2022; Weitz-Shapiro, 2012).

National data lend context to this pattern. A 2022 survey by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), conducted in collaboration with the National Social Safety-Nets Coordinating Office, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, found that 133 million Nigerians, or 63 per cent of the population, were multidimensionally poor, with the North Central zone, home to Benue State, among the most affected zones (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The World Bank (2023) separately estimated that 56.2 per cent of Nigerians lived below the national poverty line in 2023. Where deprivation of this magnitude is widespread, elections may plausibly be experienced less as a contest over national policy and more as an opportunity to address immediate, personal economic needs, consistent with pocketbook or egotropic patterns of voting (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1979).

Benue State illustrates this concern directly. Long referred to as Nigeria's "food basket", the state has experienced recurrent violent clashes between farming communities, predominantly of the Tiv ethnic group, and nomadic herders, notably in Agatu from around 2011 and more recently in Guma Local Government Area. Guma hosts one of the state's largest concentrations of internally displaced persons (IDPs), centred on Gbajimba, with the broader Benue IDP population estimated at approximately two million by 2024, many of whom have lost farmland, income and other livelihoods (National Population Commission, 2006; International Organization for Migration, 2024). Registered voters in Guma therefore approach elections against a backdrop of compounded economic hardship.

Against this background, this study examines the relationship between poverty and voter behaviour in Guma Local Government Area, specifically the extent to which material deprivation is associated with voters' self-reported susceptibility to vote buying and with a preference for patronage-based over issue-based voting. Because the study relies on a cross-sectional survey and a chi-square test of independence, its findings speak to statistical association between poverty and these dimensions of voter behaviour rather than to causal effect; establishing causality would require experimental or longitudinal designs of the kind used by Bobonis et al. (2022). Existing Nigerian evidence on vote buying and clientelism has concentrated disproportionately on urban and semi-urban contests, most notably the 2018 Osun State governorship election (Irabor & Onwudinjo, 2023), leaving conflict-affected, predominantly rural local government areas such as Guma comparatively under-examined. This study addresses that gap by generating original, questionnaire-based evidence directly from Guma's registered voters, contributing local, survey-based data to a literature that has so far relied largely on national-level or non-Benue-specific sources.

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

1.1 Statement of Problem

Vote buying and clientelism are widely cited by election observers as contributing to poor governance outcomes in Nigeria, particularly in low-income and rural constituencies. Cross-national survey evidence indicates a robust association between household poverty and the likelihood of being offered, and accepting, material inducements for one's vote (Jensen & Justesen, 2014), while experimental evidence suggests that it is economic vulnerability specifically, rather than poverty in a broad or abstract sense, that sustains clientelist relationships between patrons and voters (Bobonis et al., 2022). This study treats vulnerability, understood as household exposure to livelihood shocks such as displacement and loss of farmland, as a dimension of poverty that may be particularly consequential for electoral behaviour, and it examines both alongside one another rather than treating them as interchangeable. In the 2023 Nigerian general elections, ethno-religious explanations dominated public discourse, yet quantitative analysis of the presidential results found that socioeconomic deprivation measurably shaped voting patterns across states (Madukpe, Ugoala, Wokoma, & Nwachukwu, 2025), suggesting that material conditions deserve more systematic attention than they typically receive in Nigerian electoral analysis.

Notwithstanding this evidence, empirical research on vote buying and clientelism in Nigeria remains concentrated on relatively visible, urban or semi-urban elections, such as the 2018 Osun State governorship contest, while conflict-affected rural local government areas have received comparatively little direct, survey-based attention. Guma presents a particularly instructive case because it combines high rural poverty with substantial conflict-induced displacement, conditions under which the relationship between poverty and electoral behaviour, if it exists, might be expected to be especially pronounced. In the absence of directly collected, quantitative evidence from areas such as Guma, policies intended to strengthen electoral integrity risk being designed around assumptions that do not reflect the material realities of the voters they are meant to protect. This study addresses that gap by generating primary survey data from registered voters in Guma, examining the extent to which poverty and vulnerability are associated with self-reported susceptibility to vote buying and with patronage- rather than issue-based voting.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The general aim of this study is to examine the relationship between poverty and voter behaviour among registered voters in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. The specific objectives are to:

i. examine the level of poverty among registered voters in Guma Local Government Area;

ii. examine the relationship between poverty and voters' susceptibility to vote buying and material inducement in Guma;

iii. examine the relationship between poverty and patronage- versus issue-based voting in Guma; and

iv. draw evidence-based policy recommendations, from the study's findings, on strategies for addressing the influence of poverty on voter behaviour in the area.

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

1.3 Research Questions

i. What is the level of poverty, as measured by self-reported material deprivation, among registered voters in Guma Local Government Area?

ii. What is the relationship between poverty and voters' susceptibility to vote buying and material inducement in Guma?

iii. What is the relationship between poverty and patronage- versus issue-based voting in Guma?

iv. What strategies, based on the study's findings, could help address the influence of poverty on voting behaviour in the area?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The study formulates the following null hypotheses for statistical testing:

Ho1: There is no statistically significant association between poverty and voters' susceptibility to vote buying and material inducement in Guma Local Government Area.

Ho2: There is no statistically significant association between poverty and the type of voting (issue-based or patronage-based) in Guma Local Government Area.

For the purposes of these tests, respondents were classified into "high-poverty" and "low-poverty" groups using a median split of a composite score derived from the five poverty items in Section B of the questionnaire (see Section 3.7).

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings are relevant to the Independent National Electoral Commission and similar bodies in designing voter education programmes sensitive to the economic circumstances of displaced and rural communities. They are also relevant to policymakers and social protection agencies concerned with the relationship between economic hardship and democratic quality, and to civil society organisations working on electoral integrity in Benue State. Academically, the study contributes Guma-specific, survey-based evidence to a literature on poverty, clientelism and electoral behaviour that has so far paid comparatively limited attention to Nigeria's North Central region relative to the South and to Osun State in particular. Because the study is descriptive and cross-sectional, its findings should inform these audiences as evidence of association requiring further investigation, rather than as demonstrated causal impact.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study is restricted to registered voters in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. It examines two dimensions of poverty, self-reported material deprivation and conflict-related economic vulnerability, and two dimensions of voter behaviour, susceptibility to vote buying and the relative weight given to patronage as opposed to policy considerations in vote choice. Data were collected once, between the periods specified in Section 3.1, and findings are accordingly bounded to that period and to Guma's registered voter population; they are not intended to

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

generalise to other local government areas, to unregistered residents, or to actual voting behaviour beyond respondents' self-reports.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 The Concept of Poverty

Poverty is conventionally understood through both monetary and multidimensional lenses. The monetary approach defines the poor as those falling below a defined income threshold; the World Bank (2023) classifies Nigerians as poor if they live on less than $2.15 per day. The Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, working with the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, instead applies a multidimensional approach that assesses deprivation across health, education, living standards, security and unemployment, finding 63 per cent of Nigerians multidimensionally poor in 2022 across indicators including cooking fuel, sanitation, health, food security and housing, with deprivation more severe in northern and rural households (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). For the purposes of this study, poverty is operationally defined as self-reported material deprivation, specifically, difficulty meeting basic food, healthcare, livelihood, water and electricity needs, measured through the five Likert-type items in Section B of the questionnaire (Table 3). This operational definition is narrower than a full multidimensional poverty index; it captures respondents' subjective experience of deprivation rather than an independently verified poverty status, a distinction discussed further as a limitation in Section 3.7.

2.1.2 Voter Behaviour

Voter behaviour, as used in this study, refers collectively to the factors shaping citizens' decisions to participate in elections and their choices once participating. It is useful to distinguish several related but analytically separate constructs that are often conflated in the literature: electoral participation (whether a citizen votes at all); vote choice (which candidate or party a citizen supports); vote buying (the acceptance of a material inducement in direct exchange for a vote); patronage voting (support for a candidate based on an ongoing relationship of material exchange rather than a single transaction); and voter behaviour in the broader sense used here, which encompasses the relative weight voters give to material inducement and patronage as against policy considerations. This study is concerned specifically with the latter three constructs, vote buying, patronage orientation and issue-based orientation, rather than with participation or vote choice as such.

The classical Michigan School treated the vote as an expression of longstanding partisan identification (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960), while Downs (1957) modelled the voter as a rational actor comparing the expected utility of available choices. Economic voting scholarship distinguishes sociotropic voting, evaluation of the national economy, from pocketbook or egotropic voting, evaluation of one's personal circumstances (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1979); material hardship is theorised to increase the relative salience of the latter, a proposition this study examines empirically in the Guma context. In the Nigerian context, ethnic identity, incumbent performance and material inducement have been argued to matter more than ideology (Bratton, 2008), while more recent quantitative work finds that socioeconomic deprivation also has an independent association with voting patterns at the presidential level (Madukpe et al., 2025).

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

2.1.3 Vote Buying and Clientelism

Clientelism and vote buying are related but distinct concepts, and this study does not treat them as interchangeable. Clientelism refers to an ongoing, unequal exchange relationship in which a political patron provides material benefits, cash, food, jobs, or protection, to a client in return for sustained political loyalty (Scott, 1972; Stokes, 2005), documented in African contexts including Benin (Wantchekon, 2003) and São Tomé and Príncipe (Vicente, 2014). Vote buying is more specific: a direct, largely transactional exchange of a material good for a single vote at a particular election (Jensen & Justesen, 2014), and can occur without the ongoing relational character that defines clientelism proper. This study accordingly treats vote buying (Table 4) and patronage orientation (Table 5) as related but separate outcome variables rather than as a single construct.

Weitz-Shapiro (2012) finds that clientelism is most entrenched where poverty is high and political competition is low, and recedes only where both poverty falls and competition rises, a conditional relationship that this study's cross-sectional, single-LGA design cannot itself test. Bratton (2008) reports that in the 2007 Nigerian elections, inducements as modest as four United States dollars were, in some contexts, sufficient to influence voting behaviour, though the generalisability of this specific figure to Guma in the 2020s has not been independently verified and is treated here as illustrative rather than definitive. Using questionnaire-based methods comparable to those adopted in this study, Irabor and Onwudinjo (2023) found that a majority of surveyed voters and INEC ad-hoc staff believed vote trading significantly affected both individual voting decisions and the broader electoral governance process in the 2018 Osun State governorship election.

2.2 Empirical Review

Cross-national survey evidence broadly supports an association between poverty and susceptibility to vote buying, though the strength and mechanisms of this association vary across contexts. Jensen and Justesen (2014) found a statistically significant correlation between household poverty and whether Afrobarometer respondents across several African countries had been offered, and accepted, an electoral inducement. Using an anti-poverty programme in the Philippines as a policy-driven source of variation in household vulnerability, Bobonis et al. (2022) provide experimental evidence that reduced vulnerability causally lowers susceptibility to clientelistic vote buying, offering stronger causal identification than the correlational evidence available from most surveys, including the present one. Examining electoral participation across forty-four countries, Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita (2019) found that economic insecurity depresses participation among poorer and less-educated citizens more severely where welfare protection is weak, a moderating condition plausibly relevant to Nigeria's limited social safety net. Not all evidence points uniformly in the same direction, however: Weitz-Shapiro's (2012) finding that clientelism recedes only when poverty declines and competition rises simultaneously suggests that poverty alone may be an incomplete predictor of clientelist outcomes, and this study is accordingly cautious about attributing sole explanatory weight to poverty in the absence of measures of local political competition.

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

Nigeria-specific evidence points in a broadly similar direction. Chatham House (2022) reports that vote-selling in Nigeria is substantially driven by respondents' material circumstances, even where such behaviour is normatively disapproved of. In a field experiment, Collier and Vicente (2014) found that both material and coercive electoral tactics were closely tied to the economic vulnerability of targeted communities. Consistent with these findings, Irabor and Onwudinjo (2023) report that a majority of sampled voters and INEC ad-hoc staff in the 2018 Osun State governorship election believed vote trading substantially affected both individual decisions and the broader electoral process, a finding this study's Guma sample was designed to test in a different, rural and conflict-affected setting.

Benue-specific, survey-based evidence remains scarce, which is the central empirical gap this study addresses. Reporting on displacement in the state indicates that Benue's IDP population, concentrated in Guma, Logo and Makurdi, exceeded two million by 2024, with displacement disrupting farming livelihoods, schooling and household earnings (International Organization for Migration, 2024). Similarly, journalistic coverage of the 2023 governorship election described rural and semi-urban Benue communities as facing acute poverty and deprivation. Such accounts are descriptive rather than survey-based and cannot themselves establish a statistical association between poverty and voter behaviour; they are used here only to motivate, not substitute for, the present study's original questionnaire-based evidence from Guma.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two complementary theories, Rational Choice Theory and Clientelism Theory, from which it derives specific, testable propositions rather than treating existing findings as having already established the mechanisms linking poverty to voter behaviour in Guma.

Rational Choice Theory (Downs, 1957) conceives of the voter as a utility-maximising individual who weighs the costs and benefits of available electoral choices under conditions of imperfect and costly information. Applied to conditions of material poverty, the theory implies that voters facing pressing short-term needs may rationally discount the expected value of long-term programmatic commitments, since the marginal utility of an immediate material benefit is plausibly higher for materially poor households than for wealthier ones. Kinder and Kiewiet's (1979) pocketbook-voting framework supports the related proposition that material hardship increases the salience of personal, egotropic economic considerations in voting. From this, the present study derives the testable proposition that higher self-reported poverty will be associated with greater self-reported susceptibility to vote buying (Ho1).

Clientelism Theory (Scott, 1972; Stokes, 2005) posits an unequal, ongoing exchange in which a political patron supplies material resources in return for a client's political loyalty. The theory implies that where poverty is high and formal institutions of accountability are weak, citizens will rely more heavily on informal patronage networks, of which the vote is one of few tradeable assets. From this, the present study derives the testable proposition that higher self-reported poverty will be associated with a greater orientation toward patronage-based, rather than issue-based, voting (Ho2). Bobonis et al.'s (2022) experimental finding that reduced vulnerability lowers clientelistic vote buying, and Weitz-Shapiro's (2012) finding that clientelism recedes only where poverty is low, lend theoretical plausibility to this proposition, though, as noted in Section 2.2, they do not by themselves establish that the same mechanism operates in Guma. Together,

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

these two propositions, rather than an assumed prior confirmation of the underlying causal mechanism, form the empirical basis tested by Ho1 and Ho2 in this study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive, cross-sectional survey design, appropriate for describing the self-reported perceptions, experiences and behaviour of a defined population at a single point in time, without manipulating any variable. Consistent with this design, the study tests statistical association, through the chi-square test of independence, rather than causal effect; language implying that poverty "causes," "creates," or "produces" changes in voter behaviour is avoided in favour of language describing statistical association, in line with what a cross-sectional design can support. Data were collected exclusively through a structured questionnaire directly administered to sampled registered voters; no interviews, focus group discussions or other qualitative instruments were used.

3.2 Area of Study

The study was conducted in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, North Central Nigeria. Guma, headquartered in Gbajimba, covers approximately 2,882 square kilometres and is populated predominantly by the Tiv, alongside smaller Jukun, Hausa and other minority communities (National Population Commission, 2006). For electoral purposes, INEC divides the area into ten registration wards and 160 polling units (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2015). The area is predominantly agrarian and has experienced significant farmer-herder conflict and internal displacement, particularly in communities such as Daudu and Abinsi, hosting some of Benue State's largest IDP camps since the early 2010s (International Organization for Migration, 2024).

3.3 Population of the Study

The population of the study is the total number of registered voters in Guma Local Government Area, rather than the local government's total resident population. State-level INEC data indicate that Benue State had 2,777,727 registered voters across its 23 local government areas ahead of the 2023 general elections (Vanguard, 2022). An LGA-specific registered-voter figure for Guma is not publicly available in the sources consulted for this study; in its absence, this study uses an estimated figure of 130,000 registered voters for Guma, derived proportionately from the state total and Guma's relative population share, as its sampling frame, rather than the LGA's total projected population. This estimate should be treated as provisional: researchers seeking to replicate or build on this study should obtain the exact, current registered-voter figure for Guma directly from INEC's Continuous Voter Registration portal or the INEC office in Benue State before finalising a sampling frame.

3.4 Sample Size Determination

The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula, n = N / (1 + N(e)^2), where n is the sample size, N is the estimated registered-voter population (130,000, see Section 3.3), and e is the margin of error, set at 0.05 (5 per cent) for a 95 per cent confidence level. This yields a sample size of approximately 399 respondents (n = 130,000 / [1 + 130,000(0.05)^2] =

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

130,000/326 ~ 399), rounded to 400 for administration, which was adopted as the target sample for this study. A 5 per cent margin of error was selected as a conventional standard for descriptive social survey research balancing precision against the practical constraints of primary data collection in a conflict-affected rural area.

3.5 Sampling Technique

A multi-stage stratified random sampling technique was used. At the first stage, Guma's ten registration wards were stratified into two categories, displacement-affected wards (including Daudu and Abinsi) and relatively less-affected wards, using IOM displacement tracking data to classify each ward. At the second stage, the sample of 400 was proportionately allocated across all ten wards based on each ward's share of the total registered-voter population, ensuring that both displacement-affected and less-affected wards were represented in proportion to their actual population weight rather than in equal fixed shares. At the third stage, individual registered voters were selected at random from each selected ward's polling-unit voter registers, using a random-number procedure applied to register entries, until the ward's allocated quota was reached.

3.6 Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was the sole instrument used for data collection, comprising three sections. Section A collected demographic data (sex, age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation). Section B measured household poverty status using five items adapted from the National Bureau of Statistics' multidimensional poverty framework (covering food security, healthcare access, livelihood stability, and access to water and electricity), rated on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 4 to Strongly Disagree = 1). Section C measured electoral attitudes, specifically susceptibility to vote buying and the relative weight given to material inducement versus policy considerations, using the same four-point scale.

3.6.1 Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation. A draft was reviewed by the project supervisor and two independent reviewers with expertise in electoral studies and survey methodology, who assessed each item for clarity, relevance to the study's objectives, and alignment with the constructs of poverty, vote-buying susceptibility and patronage orientation described in Section 2.1. Their comments were used to revise item wording and remove or reformulate ambiguous items prior to piloting.

3.6.2 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with 30 registered voters in Makurdi Local Government Area, an area with socio-economic and agrarian characteristics broadly comparable to Guma but excluded from the main study sample. The pilot exercise assessed the clarity of item wording, the appropriateness of the four-point response scale, and the time required for completion, and informed minor revisions to two items in Section B and one item in Section C prior to the main data collection exercise.

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

3.6.3 Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951), calculated on the pilot sample's responses to the Likert-scaled items in Sections B and C. The instrument yielded an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81, with subscale coefficients of 0.79 for the poverty items, 0.83 for the vote-buying susceptibility items, and 0.80 for the patronage-orientation items, all exceeding the conventional acceptability threshold of 0.70 and indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages and mean scores, were used to analyse and present data according to the study's research questions. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used to describe items and grand means as reflecting comparatively higher or lower levels of self-reported agreement on the four-point scale; this criterion is used descriptively, to summarise response patterns, and is not treated as a validated clinical or absolute threshold for classifying individual respondents as objectively "poor" or "not poor." For the chi-square analyses reported in Section 4.6, respondents were instead classified into "high-poverty" and "low-poverty" groups using a median split of each respondent's composite score across the five poverty items in Section B; this is a simplified, non-validated approach adopted in the absence of an independently administered multidimensional poverty index, and is acknowledged as a limitation of the study (Section 5.1). The chi-square (x2) test of independence was used at the 0.05 level of significance to test Ho1 (poverty group by vote-buying susceptibility, itself dichotomised at the median of the Section C vote-buying items) and Ho2 (poverty group by voting orientation, dichotomised at the median of the Section C patronage items). Prior to testing, expected cell frequencies were checked to ensure all exceeded the minimum threshold of five required for the validity of the chi-square test; this condition was satisfied for both hypotheses (Section 4.6). Phi coefficients were computed alongside each chi-square statistic to indicate effect size.

4. Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion

Data obtained from the questionnaire are presented in tabular form, organised around the study's research questions, followed by the hypothesis tests and a discussion of findings in relation to the literature and theoretical framework reviewed in Section 2.

4.1 Questionnaire Administration and Response Rate

Of the 400 questionnaire copies distributed to sampled registered voters across Guma's wards, 390 were returned and 380 were correctly completed and usable, giving a valid response rate of 95.0 per cent. All tables and calculations in this section are based on these 380 valid responses (N = 380).

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

Table 1: Questionnaire Administration and Response Rate

Description	Number	Percentage (%)
Copies administered	400	100.0
Copies returned	390	97.5
Valid copies used for analysis	380	95.0
Invalid/discarded copies	10	2.5

4.2 Bio-Data of Respondents

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the 380 sampled registered voters whose responses were analysed.

Table 2: Bio-Data of Respondents (N = 380)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	210	55.3
Sex	Female	170	44.7
Age (years)	18-25	60	15.8
Age (years)	26-35	120	31.6
Age (years)	36-45	110	28.9
Age (years)	46-55	60	15.8
Age (years)	56 and above	30	7.9
Marital Status	Single	90	23.7
Marital Status	Married	250	65.8
Marital Status	Widowed/Divorced	40	10.5
Educational Qualification	No formal education	70	18.4
Educational Qualification	Primary	90	23.7
Educational Qualification	Secondary	150	39.5
Educational Qualification	Tertiary	70	18.4
Occupation	Farming	190	50.0
Occupation	Trading/Business	90	23.7
Occupation	Civil/Public Service	40	10.5
Occupation	Unemployed/Others	60	15.8

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

Table 2 shows that male respondents (55.3 per cent) slightly outnumbered female respondents (44.7 per cent), and that most respondents (60.5 per cent) fell within the economically active 26-45 age bracket. Married respondents constituted the majority (65.8 per cent), a pattern consistent with household-headship norms reported for rural Tiv communities in prior demographic assessments of the area (National Population Commission, 2006). Educationally, 57.9 per cent of respondents had no formal education or only primary education, while farming was the dominant occupation (50.0 per cent), reflecting Guma's largely agrarian economy and providing face validity for the poverty indicators examined in Table 3.

4.3 Level of Poverty Among Registered Voters (Research Question i)

Table 3: Level of Self-Reported Poverty Among Registered Voters in Guma LGA (N = 380)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Difficulty affording three square meals daily	210	110	40	20	3.34	High
Lack of reliable access to healthcare	180	130	50	20	3.24	High
No stable/regular means of livelihood	200	120	40	20	3.32	High
Lack of access to potable water/electricity	190	125	45	20	3.28	High
Insecurity/displacement worsened household finances	230	100	35	15	3.43	High
Grand Mean					**3.32**	**High**

Table 3 shows that all five poverty items recorded mean scores above the descriptive criterion mean of 2.50, with a grand mean of 3.32, indicating a high level of self-reported material deprivation among registered voters in Guma. As noted in Section 3.7, this grand mean describes the pattern of agreement with the five deprivation statements; it is not, by itself, a validated poverty classification. The highest-scoring item (mean = 3.43) concerns the worsening of household finances by insecurity and displacement, consistent with documented displacement in the area (International Organization for Migration, 2024). This finding answers Research Question i.

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

4.4 Poverty and Susceptibility to Vote Buying (Research Question ii)

Table 4: Self-Reported Susceptibility to Vote Buying in Guma LGA (N = 380)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Offered money/gifts in exchange for my vote	150	140	60	30	3.08	High
Would accept money/gifts for my vote	120	130	90	40	2.87	High
Politicians target poor communities with cash handouts	200	120	40	20	3.32	High
Poverty makes inducements harder to resist	180	140	40	20	3.26	High
Grand Mean					**3.13**	**High**

Table 4 shows that all four vote-buying susceptibility items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, with a grand mean of 3.13, indicating a high level of self-reported susceptibility to vote buying and material inducement. This descriptive finding answers Research Question ii; the association between poverty and this susceptibility is tested formally under Ho1 in Table 6.

4.5 Poverty and Patronage- Versus Issue-Based Voting (Research Question iii)

Table 5: Patronage- Versus Issue-Based Voting Orientation in Guma LGA (N = 380)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Vote based on personal benefit, not policies	170	130	55	25	3.17	High
Favour financially-assisting candidate over better plan	160	140	55	25	3.14	High
Policy promises matter less than material help	150	135	65	30	3.07	High
Depend on political patrons outside elections	140	130	70	40	2.97	High
Grand Mean					**3.09**	**High**

Table 5 shows that all four items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, with a grand mean of 3.09, indicating that respondents self-reported a stronger orientation toward patronage-based than issue-based voting. This descriptive finding answers Research Question iii; the association between poverty and this orientation is tested formally under Ho2 in Table 6.

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

4.6 Test of Hypotheses

Respondents were classified into high-poverty (n = 260) and low-poverty (n = 120) groups using a median split of the composite Section B poverty score, as described in Section 3.7. This classification was cross-tabulated separately against vote-buying susceptibility (dichotomised at the median of Section C vote-buying items into "susceptible," n = 250, and "not susceptible," n = 130) and against voting orientation (dichotomised into "patronage-oriented," n = 240, and "issue-oriented," n = 140).

Table 6a:
Observed (Expected) Frequencies for Poverty Group by Vote-Buying Susceptibility

Poverty Group	Susceptible	Not Susceptible	Total
High-poverty	201 (171.1)	59 (89.0)	260
Low-poverty	49 (78.9)	71 (41.1)	120
Total	250	130	380

All expected cell frequencies in Table 6a exceeded the minimum threshold of five, satisfying the assumptions of the chi-square test. The chi-square test of independence indicated a statistically significant association between poverty group and vote-buying susceptibility, $x2(1, N = 380) = 48.53$, $p < .001$, Phi = .36, a medium-to-large effect by conventional standards. Ho1 is therefore rejected: poverty is significantly associated with voters' self-reported susceptibility to vote buying and material inducement in Guma.

Table 6b: Observed (Expected) Frequencies for Poverty Group by Voting Orientation

Poverty Group	Patronage-Oriented	Issue-Oriented	Total
High-poverty	192 (164.2)	68 (95.8)	260
Low-poverty	48 (75.8)	72 (44.2)	120
Total	240	140	380

All expected cell frequencies in Table 6b likewise exceeded five. The chi-square test indicated a statistically significant association between poverty group and voting orientation, $x2(1, N = 380) = 40.42$, $p < .001$, Phi = .33, a medium effect. Ho2 is therefore rejected: poverty is significantly associated with a patronage-based, rather than issue-based, voting orientation in Guma.

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

Table 6c: Summary of Chi-Square Tests of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Calculated x2	df	p-value	Phi	Decision
Ho1: Poverty and vote-buying susceptibility are independent	48.53	1	< .001	0.36	Rejected
Ho2: Poverty and voting orientation are independent	40.42	1	< .001	0.33	Rejected

Both null hypotheses are rejected, indicating a statistically significant association between respondents' poverty classification and both dimensions of self-reported voter behaviour examined. Consistent with the cross-sectional design described in Section 3.1, these results establish statistical association between the categorised variables; they do not, by themselves, establish that poverty causes vote buying or patronage voting, since alternative explanations (Section 4.7) were not controlled for in this design.

4.7 Discussion of Findings

The results in Tables 3-6 indicate that poverty is significantly associated with both dimensions of voter behaviour examined among Guma's registered voters. The high grand mean for self-reported poverty (3.32, Table 3), read alongside the farmer-herder conflict and mass displacement documented in Section 3.2, suggests that conflict-related economic vulnerability may compound the baseline hardship captured by the poverty items, though this study's design cannot isolate the independent contribution of displacement from that of poverty more generally.

The association underlying the rejection of Ho1 is consistent with Rational Choice Theory's proposition that materially vulnerable voters may rationally weight immediate, certain material benefits more heavily than uncertain long-term programmatic gains, and aligns with the experimental finding of Bobonis et al. (2022) that reduced household vulnerability is associated with reduced susceptibility to vote buying, as well as with Irabor and Onwudinjo's (2023) questionnaire-based findings from Osun State. The association underlying the rejection of Ho2 is consistent with Clientelism Theory's proposition that patronage networks become more salient where formal accountability institutions are weak, and is broadly compatible with Weitz-Shapiro's (2012) finding that clientelism persists where poverty remains high, and with Madukpe et al.'s (2025) finding that socioeconomic deprivation is associated with voting patterns in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. Together, these results are consistent with, without individually confirming, this study's central proposition, that greater self-reported poverty among Guma's registered voters accompanies greater self-reported susceptibility to material inducement and greater reliance on patronage-oriented, rather than issue-based, voting.

These associations should nonetheless be interpreted cautiously. As Weitz-Shapiro (2012) and Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita (2019) suggest, factors such as local political competition, institutional welfare protection, ethnicity, party identification, education and, potentially, direct coercion may independently shape both poverty and voter behaviour, and none of these were statistically controlled for in the present bivariate analysis. The cross-sectional design further means that poverty and voter behaviour were measured at a single point in time, precluding any

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

claim about the direction or temporal sequence of the observed association. The findings should accordingly be read as evidence that poverty and the two dimensions of voter behaviour examined are statistically associated in Guma, consistent with the theoretical mechanisms outlined in Section 2.3, rather than as demonstration that poverty independently causes vote buying or patronage voting.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between poverty and voter behaviour among 380 registered voters sampled from Guma Local Government Area's registered-voter population. Self-reported poverty was found to be high among sampled voters (grand mean = 3.32), and was significantly associated both with self-reported susceptibility to vote buying (Ho1 rejected, $x2 = 48.53$, $p < .001$) and with a patronage-oriented, rather than issue-based, voting orientation (Ho2 rejected, $x2 = 40.42$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that poverty is statistically associated with, and may plausibly contribute to, conditions conducive to electoral malpractice in Guma, though the cross-sectional design of this study means that a causal claim to this effect cannot be sustained on the present evidence alone. Efforts to strengthen electoral integrity in the area accordingly have reason to attend to the material circumstances of the electorate, alongside other institutional and political factors not examined here.

Several limitations should inform how these conclusions are used. The classification of respondents into high- and low-poverty groups relied on a median split of a five-item self-report scale rather than a validated multidimensional poverty index, and the cross-sectional design cannot rule out reverse causation or the influence of unmeasured confounding variables such as local political competition or ethnicity. Future research using longitudinal designs, validated poverty measures, and multivariate statistical techniques would be better positioned to establish the causal pathways that this study's associations only suggest.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on these findings, and consistent with what a cross-sectional, associational study can support, the following recommendations are made:

i. Federal and state governments should prioritise targeted social protection and livelihood restoration programmes for displaced and rural households in Guma; Bobonis et al.'s (2022) experimental evidence suggests reduced household vulnerability is associated with reduced susceptibility to vote buying.

ii. The Independent National Electoral Commission and civil society organisations should design voter education initiatives specifically tailored to poor, rural and displaced communities, communicated in accessible language and formats, emphasising the long-term costs of vote selling.

iii. Security and humanitarian agencies should expedite IDP resettlement and rehabilitation in Guma, given the study's finding that insecurity- and displacement-related hardship was the most strongly endorsed poverty item.

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

iv. Electoral offences relating to vote buying and vote selling should be investigated and prosecuted more consistently, with particular attention to the political patrons supplying inducements rather than only the voters receiving them.

v. Regulatory bodies and civil society should encourage political parties to campaign on development programmes relevant to Guma's agrarian and displacement context, strengthening the relative appeal of programmatic over patronage-based campaigning.

vi. Future studies should build on this survey instrument to track the association between poverty and voter behaviour in Guma over successive election cycles, ideally incorporating validated poverty measures and multivariate controls, in order to clarify the direction and stability of the associations identified here.

References

Bobonis, G. J., Gertler, P. J., Gonzalez-Navarro, M., & Nichter, S. (2022). Vulnerability and clientelism. *American Economic Review, 112*(11), 3627-3659.

Bratton, M. (2008). Vote buying and violence in Nigerian election campaigns. *Electoral Studies, 27*(4), 621-632.

Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1960). *The American voter*. University of Chicago Press.

Carreras, M., & Castañeda-Angarita, N. (2019). Economic adversity and electoral participation of vulnerable socioeconomic groups. *Electoral Studies, 57*, 110-120.

Chatham House. (2022). *Vote-selling behaviour and democratic dissatisfaction in Nigeria: Is democracy really for sale?* Chatham House.

Collier, P., & Vicente, P. C. (2014). Votes and violence: Evidence from a field experiment in Nigeria. *The Economic Journal, 124*(574), F327-F355.

Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika, 16*(3), 297-334.

Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*. Harper & Brothers.

Independent National Electoral Commission. (2015). *Directory of polling units (revised)*. Independent National Electoral Commission.

International Organization for Migration. (2024). *Displacement tracking matrix: Benue State round report*. International Organization for Migration Nigeria.

Irabor, B. P., & Onwudinjo, A. (2023). Political epistemology and the phenomenon of change in Nigeria: An evaluation of Nigeria's democratic process (2015-2019). *African Journal of Democracy and Governance, 10*(1-2), 85-100.

Vol. 2, No. 1, 2026 - Kwararafa University Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation
Pub. Link: https://aa.unij.co.uk/index.php/kujmri/issue/view/6 - E- ISSN: 3156-5492 | P- ISSN: 3156-5514

Jensen, P. S., & Justesen, M. K. (2014). Poverty and vote buying: Survey-based evidence from Africa. *Electoral Studies, 33*, 220-232.

Kinder, D. R., & Kiewiet, D. R. (1979). Economic discontent and political behavior: The role of personal grievances and collective economic judgments in congressional voting. *American Journal of Political Science, 23*(3), 495-527.

Madukpe, V. N., Ugoala, C. B., Wokoma, C. U., & Nwachukwu, G. C. (2025). *Assessment of socioeconomic determinants of voting patterns: A spatio-temporal and multinomial logits analysis of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election* [Preprint]. arXiv.

National Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Nigeria multidimensional poverty index 2022*. National Bureau of Statistics.

National Population Commission. (2006). *2006 population and housing census of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: Priority tables*. National Population Commission.

Scott, J. C. (1972). Patron-client politics and political change in Southeast Asia. *American Political Science Review, 66*(1), 91-113.

Stokes, S. C. (2005). Perverse accountability: A formal model of machine politics with evidence from Argentina. *American Political Science Review, 99*(3), 315-325.

Vanguard. (2022, November 9). Benue: 2.7m voters to participate in 2023 elections - INEC. *Vanguard News*.

Vicente, P. C. (2014). Is vote buying effective? Evidence from a field experiment in West Africa. *The Economic Journal, 124*(574), F356-F387.

Wantchekon, L. (2003). Clientelism and voting behavior: Evidence from a field experiment in Benin. *World Politics, 55*(3), 399-422.

Weitz-Shapiro, R. (2012). What wins votes: Why some politicians opt out of clientelism. *American Journal of Political Science, 56*(3), 568-583.

World Bank. (2023). *Nigeria poverty assessment: A better future for all Nigerians*. World Bank.

Yamane, T. (1967). *Statistics: An introductory analysis* (2nd ed.). Harper & Row.