

ATTITUDES TOWARD POLITICAL CLIENTELISM AND INVOLVEMENT IN CLIENTELIST PRACTICES AMONG SOCIAL STUDIES UNDERGRADUATES IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated attitudes toward political clientelism and involvement in clientelist practices among Social Studies undergraduates in Delta State, Nigeria, and examined the relationship between these variables in order to provide insights into the civic outcomes of Social Studies Education. The study was motivated by the persistence of vote-buying, political patronage, and other forms of transactional politics in Nigeria despite sustained exposure of students to civic and citizenship education. A descriptive correlational survey design was adopted. The study involved all 210 Social Studies undergraduates from Delta State University, Abraka, and the University of Delta, Agbor, using a census approach. Data were collected with the Attitudes toward Political Clientelism and Clientelist Practices Questionnaire (APCPQ), comprising the Attitudes toward Political Clientelism Scale ($\alpha = .82$) and the Clientelist Practices Scale ($\alpha = .73$). Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions raised to guide this study, while Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to test the only hypothesis for this study at the 0.05 level of significance. The results indicated the general negative attitude towards political clientelism, with strong disapproval of vote-buying, political patronage and electoral inducements. However, they also reported a moderate level of involvement in clientelist practices, suggesting that although they recognized the harmful consequences of transactional politics, they remained susceptible to participating in such practices under certain conditions. The study further revealed a moderate negative and statistically significant relationship between attitudes toward political clientelism and involvement in clientelist practices ($r = -.51, p < .001$), indicating that respondents who expressed stronger rejection of political clientelism were less likely to engage in clientelist practices. The findings suggest that civic knowledge and favourable democratic attitudes do not necessarily translate into corresponding political behaviour. The study therefore recommends that Social Studies Education should move beyond the transmission of civic knowledge by incorporating experiential civic learning, ethical decision-making, and authentic democratic participation capable of strengthening students' resistance to clientelist politics.

Keywords: Political clientelism, vote-buying, clientelist practices, Social Studies Education, democratic citizenship, undergraduates

1. Introduction

Democracy derives its legitimacy not only from the conduct of periodic elections but also from the quality of citizens' participation in the political process. Meaningful democratic participation requires citizens who are able to make informed political choices, evaluate competing policy alternatives, and hold elected leaders accountable. Elections are therefore expected to reflect informed civic judgment rather than the exchange of money and other welfare packages for political loyalty. When electoral decisions become transactional, democratic accountability is weakened, public trust in political institutions declines, and governance increasingly serves personal interests rather than collective interests. Among the practices that most visibly undermine these democratic ideals is political clientelism, a phenomenon that continues to challenge democratic consolidation in Nigeria and many other emerging democracies.

Kramon 2017 and Derick 2020 defined political clientelism as a reciprocal relationship in which political actors or politicians exchange material benefits for political support/votes, electoral loyalty, or continued patronage. Benefits may include cash payments, food items, employment opportunities, contracts, appointments or other forms of material assistance offered in return for votes or political allegiance. Unlike an ideal situation where citizens evaluate political candidates on the basis of competence, ideology, policy proposals, and commitment to the public interest, clientelist politics is sustained through personalised exchanges that transform political

support into a commodity. Recent evidence from Nigeria's 2024 off-cycle elections also shows that electoral inducements may take less explicit forms. Braimah and Fajimbola (2025) found that provisions presented as voter logistics, including transportation and food, could function as disguised forms of vote-buying, particularly within contexts marked by economic vulnerability, political patronage, and institutional weakness. Clientelist exchange may also extend beyond direct vote-buying. Nwangwu (2025) showed how social protection programmes in Nigeria could be strategically exploited by incumbent political actors for electoral purposes, illustrating the broader relationship between economic vulnerability, patronage, and political mobilisation. Consequently, electoral competition shifts from debates about governance and development to negotiations over immediate material gain at personal level. Such practices completely erode democratic accountability; weaken electoral integrity and poses significant challenges to governance and national development. Empirically, the exchange of targeted material benefits for political support has been shown to weaken state capacity, encourage tax evasion (Fergusson et al., 2022), increase the level of corruption in governance, and undermine the rule of law (Lindberg et al., 2022). It is equally associated with reduced quality of public administration (De La O, 2024), unequal and inefficient distribution of public resources (Robinson & Verdier, 2013), inadequate provision of public goods/services (Khemani, 2015), and abysmal welfare outcomes for citizens (Anderson et al., 2015). More recent evidence shows that voters may respond more strongly to targeted, excludable welfare benefits than to broader public-good programmes, thereby creating incentives that can sustain clientelist politics (Bardhan et al., 2024).

Although there are documented evidence of political clientelism in both developed and developing democracies, its manifestations are often more widespread in societies characterised by high poverty levels, high levels of unemployment, institutional instability, and obvious socio-economic inequality such as Nigeria. Studies have shown that clientelism is a reality in Nigeria (Suberu, 2007, Bratton, 2008, Ogbeidi, 2010, Ehwarieme, 2011). Under such conditions, patronage networks frequently become alternative mechanisms through which individuals gain access to economic opportunities and public resources. Across many African democracies, politicians have been shown to exploit these structural vulnerabilities by distributing money, food items, clothing, and other material incentives in exchange for electoral support. While these exchanges may provide temporary relief to beneficiaries, they also reinforce dependency relationships, reward political loyalty above competence, and weaken the principles of fairness, accountability, and merit that underpin democratic governance. Ultimately, the normalisation of clientelist exchanges undermines citizens' ability to exercise political choice freely and independently.

Nigeria offers an especially intriguing context for examining the persistence of political clientelism. Despite the fact that many Nigerians desire politics based on issues and public goods, clientelist politics continues to thrive, with politicians exploiting social networks and deep-seated partisan loyalties to secure electoral obedience (Zovighian, 2026). During election campaigns, and even on the day of election, politicians and their agents commonly distribute cash, food items, recharge cards, and other forms of inducement intended to influence voting behaviour. Practices such as vote-buying, campaign inducements, distribution of food and food items often referred to as "*stomach infrastructure*" and the influence of political godfathers have become recurring features of electoral contests at the federal, state, and local government levels in Nigeria (Omilusi, 2019; Wada & Okpanachi, 2021). There is empirical evidence that vote-buying in Nigeria is a deliberate political practice and not a haphazard response to poverty. Awoyemi (2025) shows that partisan affiliation is a strong predictor of being targeted for clientelist exchanges and that ethnic dynamics shape patterns of electoral inducement, highlighting the strategic nature of political clientelism. Bratton (2008) also found that approximately one in every five Nigerian voters had been exposed to vote-buying during election campaigns, while exposure to electoral violence was not as common when compared. The study also found that although vote-buying increased partisan loyalty, it did not always translate into actual votes, as many voters found such practices morally unacceptable and did not always vote as instructed.

The 2023 general elections further demonstrated the persistence of clientelist practices in Nigeria's democratic landscape. Empirical evidence indicates that vote-buying remained widespread during the elections, taking different forms across electoral contexts (Adeleke et al., 2024; Musa et al., 2024). There were widespread reports of vote-buying, cash inducements and other transactional political behaviour in a number of states, prompting renewed debate about the credibility of the electoral process and the effectiveness of existing measures to curb this electoral malpractice. Both traditional and electronic media have become venues outside polling stations through which citizens have documented, analyzed, and spread evidence of electoral inducement. Reports from newspaper, television, radio, online news platforms and social media have made this situation more visible and have encouraged public debate on them. The articulation of these practices in public

discourse is indicative of the fact that political clientelism is no longer seen as a mere isolated electoral offense, but is increasingly turning into a norm for engaging in politics. Such observations pose questions regarding the nature of political values acquired by the citizens, particularly by young voters who are just forming their views and might serve as future public leaders.

The youth constitute the largest population segment in Nigeria. Therefore, they have become an integral component of discussions about political clientelism and democracy. They are a considerable percentage of the voting populace and have the capacity to influence elections by virtue of numbers and networking. Undergraduates who are leaders of tomorrow are in an even more strategic position in this demographic segment. This is a generation expected to contribute meaningfully to the consolidation of democracy through informed political participation, critical engagement with public issues and adherence to democratic values.

There is growing evidence that young people are not only spectators of clientelist politics but in some cases, active participants within it. Their tech-savvy, organisational ability and heavy use of social media have made them prime targets for political mobilisation at election time. Reports suggest that some youth groups, student bodies/unions and undergraduate networks have been mobilised as campaigners, digital influencers and political advocates in return for financial or material incentives. The emergence of such practices has created concerns regarding the political values and civic attitudes being instilled in the youth who are supposed to be the custodians of democratic governance in the future. The growing integration of digital technologies into electoral politics has further altered the character of political clientelism among young people. Political participation now extends well beyond conventional campaign rallies to digital environments where political slogans, advertisements, hashtags, memes, and even sponsored content are being rapidly distributed via numerous websites and applications. Online political engagement appears to have been commercialized and individuals get paid or receive some form of compensation for promoting certain candidates/parties or influencing other people's opinions. Therefore, online spaces have ceased to be the arenas of public discussion and have become the arenas for establishing clientelism. The public discourse that unfolds in such spheres often contains views that justify political compensation and consider it as legitimate reward for years of neglect by politicians. These narratives reveal the ethical complexities surrounding political participation among young people and illustrate the tension between democratic ideals and prevailing socio-economic realities.

These issues become even more relevant in Delta State especially when taking into account its distinct socio-political situation, where abundant natural resources exist alongside high rates of unemployment, inequality, and fierce competition in politics. In such situations, people especially the youths become particularly vulnerable to clientelism and electoral inducement. Studies have shown that its persistence can be partially attributed to young democracies' low credibility of pledges for public goods (Keefer and Vlaicu, 2008) and voters' consequent lack of interest in politicians due to this broken promises (Keefer and Khemani 2024). It becomes difficult to manage the political and economic pressures during such periods especially where material incentives appear to offer immediate benefits despite their long-term implications for democratic governance. Understanding how students perceive and respond to these realities is therefore important not only for strengthening democratic institutions but also for evaluating the civic outcomes of formal education.

Social Studies Education is of special relevance in the context of formal education as it is a discipline that is concerned with citizenship education, democratic participation, ethical reasoning and social responsibility. Social Studies seek to develop learners who are capable of participating constructively in democratic society (Akinlaye, 2003). This is not only about teaching civic knowledge, but also about cultivating critical thinking, moral judgment, political literacy, respect for democratic institutions and commitment to the public good among learners. Continued exposure to ideas such as democracy, justice, accountability, electoral integrity and responsible citizenship should enable learners to develop the dispositions to resist corruption, political manipulation and other anti-democratic practices.

The relationship between attitudes and behaviour has long been a subject of scholarly interest within the social and behavioural sciences. One theoretical perspective that provides a useful explanation for this relationship is the **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)** proposed by Ajzen (1991). The theory posits that an individual's behaviour is shaped by behavioural intentions, which are themselves influenced by attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Central to the theory is the assumption that individuals who hold favourable attitudes toward a behaviour are generally more likely to engage in it, particularly when they perceive social support for the behaviour and believe they have the opportunity to perform it. Within the context of the present study, the theory provides a useful framework for understanding whether Social Studies undergraduates' attitudes toward political clientelism are reflected in their involvement in clientelist practices. Although the present study focuses primarily on attitudes and practices, the Theory of

Planned Behaviour offers a sound conceptual basis for examining the extent to which students' evaluations of political clientelism are associated with their political behaviour. Recent empirical evidence also underscores the importance of citizens' normative evaluations of vote-buying. Cohen et al. (2025) found that the relationship between exposure to vote-buying and electoral trust varies according to how citizens themselves evaluate such exchanges, suggesting that attitudes and social norms are important for understanding responses to clientelist politics.

Existing scholarship has substantially advanced understanding of electoral corruption, vote-buying, patronage politics, and political participation in Nigeria. However, much of this literature has concentrated on the general electorate, political elites, community-level experiences, or the broader dynamics of elections (Omilusi, 2019; Wada & Okpanachi, 2021). Recent studies have continued to examine the demand side of clientelism, including how voters respond to targeted benefits and whether they reward or reject vote-buying candidates. For instance, Baniya et al. (2025) found that voters who perceived vote-buying as competing with future public-good provision expressed stronger preferences for candidates who did not engage in vote-buying. Nevertheless, such studies remain centred largely on the general electorate rather than students undergoing explicit citizenship education. Comparatively little empirical attention has been devoted to Social Studies undergraduates, despite the expectation that prolonged exposure to citizenship and civic education should influence both their political attitudes and democratic behaviour. More importantly, the existing literature provides limited evidence regarding whether negative attitudes toward political clientelism among Social Studies undergraduates are accompanied by corresponding resistance to clientelist practices. Consequently, an important educational question remains unanswered: Do the democratic values promoted through Social Studies Education translate into political attitudes and behaviours that are consistent with responsible democratic citizenship?

Addressing this question is important for both educational policy and democratic development. If Social Studies Education is to fulfil its mandate of preparing informed, ethical, and politically responsible citizens, then its expected outcomes should be evident in the attitudes and political conduct of those who have received sustained instruction in the discipline. Whenever there are gaps between people's knowledge regarding democracy and their political behavior, it becomes clear that something needs to be done in order to improve both teaching methods and learning opportunities for citizens. In this way, students will learn to use democratic values in practice. Therefore, the problem here is not only in the prevalence of political clientelism but in the effectiveness of citizenship education in instilling transaction resistance among learners.

Therefore this research focuses on the attitude of Social Studies undergraduates in Delta State, Nigeria towards political clientelism and their level of engagement in clientelist practices. In particular, the research intends to focus on the attitude of undergraduate students towards political clientelism, engagement in clientelist practices and the relationship between the two constructs. The aim is to contribute to the body of literature on democratic citizenship and political behaviour by providing empirical evidence that can inform policy makers and practitioners regarding curriculum development and teaching strategies that can foster democratic citizenship among the youth. The findings will also provide relevant recommendations for Social Studies educators, curriculum developers and policy makers, among others who are interested in promoting ethical political engagement among youths.

2. Statement of the Problem

Social Studies Education occupies a central position in preparing learners for responsible citizenship by developing the knowledge, values, attitudes, and civic competencies required for meaningful participation in democratic society. With continuous learning on issues related to civics and citizenship, students are expected to reject electoral malpractice, resist political manipulation, and demonstrate behaviors consistent with accountability, transparency, and public interest. Consequently, Social Studies undergraduates, having received years of instruction in democratic principles and responsible citizenship, are expected to exhibit attitudes and behaviours that are inconsistent with political clientelism.

Political clientelism is a very rampant practice in Nigeria during elections. Vote-buying, political patronage, campaign inducements, and other forms of transactional politics remain recurring features of elections across the country (Omilusi, 2019; Wada & Okpanachi, 2021). The growing acceptance of these practices, particularly among young people, raises important questions about whether democratic values acquired through formal education are reflected in actual political behaviour. If students who have received prolonged exposure to Social Studies Education from the pre-primary level of education remain susceptible to clientelist practices, then concerns arise regarding the extent to which the democratic ideals promoted through education are translated into practice.

Although previous studies have investigated electoral corruption, vote-buying, patronage politics, and political participation in Nigeria, they have focused largely on the general electorate and politicians. There is limited empirical evidence on how Social Studies undergraduates perceive political clientelism, the extent to which they engage in clientelist practices, and whether their attitudes toward political clientelism are associated with such practices. This gap complicates efforts to understand whether prolonged exposure to Social Studies education has any impact on the democracy-oriented attitudes and civic behaviors of future citizens and teachers.

3. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of undergraduate Social Studies students in Delta State, Nigeria towards political clientelism as well as the extent to which they participate in such practices. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the attitudes of Social Studies undergraduates toward political clientelism in Delta State, Nigeria;
2. determine the level of involvement of Social Studies undergraduates in clientelist practices in Delta State, Nigeria; and
3. determine the relationship between Social Studies undergraduates' attitudes toward political clientelism and their involvement in clientelist practices in Delta State, Nigeria.

4. Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide this study:

1. What are the attitudes of Social Studies undergraduates toward political clientelism in Delta State, Nigeria?
2. What is the level of involvement of Social Studies undergraduates in clientelist practices in Delta State, Nigeria?
3. What is the relationship between Social Studies undergraduates' attitudes toward political clientelism and their involvement in clientelist practices in Delta State, Nigeria?

5. Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀: There is no statistically significant relationship between Social Studies undergraduates' attitudes toward political clientelism and their involvement in clientelist practices in Delta State.

6. Method

The study adopted a descriptive correlational survey research design. The descriptive component was employed to determine Social Studies undergraduates' attitudes toward political clientelism and their level of involvement in clientelist practices, while the correlational component examined the relationship between these variables. The population comprised all 210 Social Studies undergraduates from Delta State University (DELSU), Abraka, and the University of Delta (UNIDEL), Agbor. Owing to the relatively small and manageable population size, a census approach was adopted, allowing all members of the population to participate in the study. The data were collected using the Attitudes toward Political Clientelism and Clientelist Practices Questionnaire (APCPQ). The instrument contained two subscales: the Attitudes toward Political Clientelism Scale (ATPCS) and the Clientelist Practices Scale (CPS). Both subscales were assessed using a four-point Likert-type response format ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Social Studies Education, Political Science and Measurement and Evaluation. The validators assessed the relevance, clarity, appropriateness and coverage of the instrument as to the objectives of the study. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire. A pilot study was carried out to determine the internal consistency of the instrument using Cronbach's alpha reliability technique. Reliability coefficient of Attitudes towards Political Clientelism Scale (ATPCS) is 0.82 and that of Clientelist Practices Scale (CPS) is 0.73. These coefficients were acceptable for internal consistency and demonstrated that both subscales were reliable for data collection. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. For the interpretation of respondents' attitudes toward political clientelism, a criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted. Mean scores of 2.50

and above were interpreted as indicating a negative attitude toward political clientelism (that is, respondents generally rejected clientelist practices), whereas mean scores below 2.50 indicated a positive or permissive attitude toward political clientelism. For the Clientelist Practices Scale, mean scores of 3.50 and above indicated a high level of involvement in clientelist practices, scores ranging from 2.50 to 3.49 indicated a moderate level of involvement, while mean scores below 2.50 indicated a low level of involvement in clientelist practices.

7. Findings

Research Question 1: What are the attitudes of Social Studies undergraduates towards political clientelism in Delta State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation showing Attitude of Social Studies Undergraduates towards Political Clientelism in Delta State

S/N	Item Statement	N	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Accepting money or gifts in exchange for political support is morally wrong.	210	3.33	0.84	Positive
2.	It is acceptable to accept political inducements during periods of financial hardship.*	210	2.29	1.03	Positive
3.	Ethnic or religious loyalty should take precedence over competence when choosing political leaders.*	210	2.38	1.05	Positive
4.	Citizens are justified in supporting drastic political actions to eliminate persistent political corruption.	210	3.12	0.98	Positive
5.	Receiving compensation should be a condition for participating in elections.*	210	2.19	1.01	Positive
6.	Politicians who use money or gifts to influence voters should not be supported.	210	3.21	0.92	Positive
7.	Vote-buying is unacceptable regardless of the benefits offered.	210	3.24	0.92	Positive
8.	Political leaders who distribute money or gifts during elections are primarily seeking votes rather than public service.	210	3.14	0.92	Positive
9.	Vote-buying undermines democracy and weakens citizens' political influence.	210	3.36	0.84	Positive
10.	Politicians who depend on inducements are unlikely to govern fairly.	210	3.21	0.92	Positive
11.	Poverty does not justify participation in political clientelism.	210	3.19	0.91	Positive
12.	Political clientelism promotes corruption and poor governance.	210	3.38	0.85	Positive
13.	I disapprove of politicians who attempt to buy votes.	210	3.31	0.86	Positive
14.	Electoral choices should be based on candidates' competence and policies rather than material rewards.	210	3.40	0.85	Positive
15.	Political clientelism takes advantage of economically vulnerable citizens.	210	3.33	0.87	Positive
16.	Rejecting political inducements contributes to strengthening democracy in Nigeria.	210	3.29	0.86	Positive
17.	Political clientelism weakens accountability among elected public officials.	210	3.31	0.86	Positive
18.	Accepting money in exchange for votes is unacceptable, even when encouraged by friends or peers.	210	3.17	0.93	Positive
19.	Communities that reject political inducements are more likely to experience good governance.	210	3.14	0.87	Positive
20.	Political clientelism undermines citizens' civic responsibility.	210	3.33	0.87	Positive
Cluster Mean			3.12	0.91	Positive

Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)

*Reverse-scored items.

Table 1 shows that Social Studies undergraduates displayed a negative attitude toward political clientelism, as indicated by the cluster mean of 3.12 (SD = 0.91), which exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50. Respondents strongly agreed that electoral choices should be based on candidates' competence rather than material rewards (M = 3.40, SD = 0.85), that political clientelism promotes corruption and poor governance (M = 3.38, SD = 0.85), and that vote-buying undermines democracy (M = 3.36, SD = 0.84). The low mean ratings for the negatively worded items which were reverse-coded during analysis further indicate respondents' rejection of accepting political inducements, prioritizing ethnic or religious loyalty over competence, and making electoral decision based on financial rewards. Overall, the findings suggest that Social Studies undergraduates in Delta State generally disapprove of political clientelism and recognize its adverse implications for democratic governance.

Research Question 2: What is the level of involvement of Social Studies undergraduates in clientelist practices in Delta State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation showing the level of Social Studies Undergraduates involvement in Clientelist Practices in Delta State

S/N	Item Statement	N	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	If I were certain that I would not face any consequences, I would be willing to mobilize support for a political candidate in exchange for money, gifts, or other material benefits.	210	3.44	0.66	Moderate
2.	I would accept money, gifts, or other material benefits in exchange for supporting a political candidate during an election.	210	3.13	0.83	Moderate
3.	I would be willing to join a political campaign if promised financial or material rewards.	210	2.93	0.93	Moderate
4.	I would participate in clientelist political activities if they were widely accepted by people around me.	210	3.26	0.86	Moderate
5.	I would promote political messages on social media in return for personal benefits.	210	2.90	0.92	Moderate
6.	I would accept food, transport fare, airtime, or similar incentives from political candidates during elections.	210	3.01	0.92	Moderate
7.	I would encourage others to support a political candidate because of incentives received or promised.	210	2.74	0.97	Moderate
8.	I would serve as a campaign mobilizer if offered adequate financial or material rewards.	210	2.81	0.98	Moderate
9.	I would attend political meetings if doing so provided personal benefits.	210	3.10	0.89	Moderate
10.	I would distribute money or gifts to influence people's voting decisions if given the opportunity.	210	2.56	0.97	Moderate
11.	Promises of future personal benefits could influence my political decisions.	210	3.18	0.93	Moderate
12.	I would remain silent about vote-buying if speaking out meant losing personal benefits.	210	2.76	1.00	Moderate
13.	I would defend a political candidate involved in vote-buying if I benefited personally.	210	2.70	0.97	Moderate
14.	I would change my political support if offered attractive material incentives by another candidate.	210	2.60	1.00	Moderate
15.	I could support a political candidate because of incentives rather than competence.	210	2.93	0.93	Moderate
16.	I would accept political patronage if it offered personal or academic advantages.	210	2.97	0.94	Moderate
17.	I would use a leadership position to assist a political candidate if there were personal benefits.	210	2.49	1.00	Low
18.	I would participate in political gatherings mainly because of the personal benefits I expected to receive.	210	3.10	0.89	Moderate
19.	I would persuade undecided voters by promising material	210	2.74	0.97	Moderate

S/N	Item Statement	N	Mean	SD	Remark
	rewards.				
20.	I would ignore electoral rules if doing so resulted in personal or group benefits.	210	2.81	0.98	Moderate
	Cluster Mean		2.90	0.92	Moderate

Note: SD (Standard Deviation), N (Sample Size)

Table 2 shows that Social Studies undergraduates exhibited a moderate level of involvement in clientelist practices, as indicated by the cluster mean of 2.90 (SD = 0.92). The highest-rated item indicated that respondents would be willing to mobilize support for a political candidate in exchange for money or other material benefits if they were certain they would not face any consequences (M = 3.44, SD = 0.66). They also reported moderate willingness to accept political inducements, participate in clientelist political activities, and allow promises of personal benefits to influence their political decisions. Conversely, respondents reported a low likelihood of using a leadership position to support a political candidate for personal gain (M = 2.49, SD = 1.00). Overall, the findings suggest that although Social Studies undergraduates generally disapprove of political clientelism, they remain moderately susceptible to engaging in clientelist practices under certain circumstances, particularly where personal benefits are involved.

7.1 Test of Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between Social Studies undergraduates' attitudes toward political clientelism and their involvement clientelist practices in Delta State.

Table 3: Pearson (r) showing Relationship between Social Studies Undergraduates' Attitude towards Political Clientelism and their involvement in clientelist practices in Delta State

Variable	N	R	Sig. 2-tailed (p-value)	Remarks
Attitudes toward Political Clientelism	210	-0.51	< .001	Significant
Clientelist Practices				

$\alpha = .05$, $p < .05$

The Pearson product-moment correlation analysis revealed a moderate negative and statistically significant relationship between undergraduates' attitudes toward political clientelism and their involvement in clientelist practices ($r = -0.51$, $p < .001$). Since the probability value was less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. The finding indicates that undergraduates who expressed stronger rejection of political clientelism tended to report lower levels of involvement in clientelist practices. Conversely, respondents with more favourable attitudes toward political clientelism were more likely to report higher levels of involvement in clientelist practices. This suggests that attitudes toward political clientelism are significantly associated with students' engagement in clientelist practices.

8. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that Social Studies undergraduates generally exhibited negative attitudes toward political clientelism. Respondents overwhelmingly rejected vote-buying, political patronage, and other forms of electoral inducement, while recognizing that such practices undermine democratic accountability, good governance, and civic responsibility. This finding suggests that the respondents possess an appreciable understanding of democratic values and the undesirable consequences of transactional politics. Considering that the participants were Social Studies undergraduates who had received sustained instruction in citizenship education, the finding may reflect the influence of Social Studies Education in fostering awareness of democratic principles, ethical political behaviour, and responsible citizenship. The finding is consistent with Bratton (2008), who reported that although many Nigerian voters are exposed to vote-buying during elections, a substantial proportion consider the practice morally unacceptable. Similarly, Zovighian (2026) observed that clientelist politics persists despite voters' preference for programmatic politics and public goods, indicating that citizens are often aware of the developmental costs associated with political clientelism.

It is important to note that despite the fact that their attitude is generally negative, the respondents indicated moderate participation in clientelist practices. In principle they disapproved of transactional politics, but many admitted a willingness to accept political inducements, mobilise support for political candidates, or engage in clientelist activities under certain conditions, particularly where personal benefits were involved. This

finding indicates a wide gap between democratic attitudes and political behaviour. This therefore implies that a rejection of political clientelism at the attitudinal level does not necessarily mean a complete resistance to clientelist practices in real political situations.

This finding lends support to the work of Zovighian (2026), who found that clientelist exchanges in Nigeria is fueled by the fact that politicians deliberately target individuals rooted within strong social and political networks that encourage compliance with clientelist bargains. This finding suggests that participation in clientelist practices may be shaped not only by individual beliefs but also by broader political relationships and social influences. The result also corroborates Vicente and Wantchekon's (2009) finding that although vote-buying remains an effective electoral strategy, sustained civic education and voter awareness can reduce its influence. The moderate level of involvement observed among respondents therefore implies that democratic knowledge alone may not be sufficient to eliminate susceptibility to transactional politics.

The study also found a moderate negative and statistically significant relationship between attitudes towards political clientelism and involvement in the practices of clientelism. This means that those respondents who expressed stronger rejection of political clientelism were less likely to report engaging in clientelist practices, whereas those with more favourable attitudes toward political clientelism were more likely to report involvement in such practices. This is in line with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour, which states that attitudes are an important determinant of behaviour. Attitudes may not necessarily be a complete predictor of behaviour but they do have considerable effect on an individual's behavioural intentions and subsequent actions. The moderate strength of the relationship observed in this study suggests that while attitudes play an important role in shaping political behaviour, other contextual and social factors may also influence students' decisions to engage in clientelist practices.

The relationship between attitudes and involvement in clientelist practices highlights the need for educational programmes that promote democratic values and ethical political practices. For Social Studies Education to meet its objective of producing responsible democratic citizens, there should be greater emphasis on experiential civic learning, ethical decision-making, critical political engagement and opportunities for students to translate democratic values into responsible political behaviour.

9. Conclusion

The study concludes that Social Studies undergraduates in Delta State generally have negative attitudes toward political clientelism, but still report a moderate level of involvement in clientelist practices. Moreover, the significant negative relationship between attitudes towards political clientelism and involvement in clientelist practices indicates that the higher the rejection of political clientelism, the lower the involvement in such practices. These results indicate that even though Social Studies students mostly acknowledge the detrimental effects of political clientelism, positive attitudes might not be sufficient to eradicate vulnerability to clientelist practices. Therefore, the study highlights the need for Social Studies Education to move beyond the mere transmission of civic knowledge and to offer experiential learning opportunities that enhance ethical reasoning, democratic values, critical political engagement, and responsible citizenship.

10. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are hereby offered:

1. Experiential civic learning should be given a greater prominence in the Social Studies curricula at secondary and tertiary level, moving away from a primary reliance on theoretical instruction. Teaching should include service-learning, civic engagement projects, electoral observation exercises and community-based democratic initiatives, to enable students to convert democratic values into responsible political behaviour.
2. Social Studies teachers should use instructional strategies that promote ethical decision-making in real political situations. Debates, case studies, role playing, mock elections, simulations of ethical dilemmas, and reflective discussions of electoral integrity are approaches in the classroom that should be regularly used to help students critically evaluate and resist clientelist political practices.
3. Universities should develop and enforce clear policies prohibiting vote-buying, campaign inducements and other clientelist practices in student elections to improve the quality of electoral processes. Furthermore, civic education and ethical campaign guidelines should also be embedded in student electoral bodies to promote democratic norms in the university environment.

4. Government agencies, electoral management bodies and civil society organisations should maintain voter education programmes specifically aimed at young people and university students. These programmes need to shift from raising awareness to building practical skills for recognising, resisting and reporting political inducements during elections.
5. Given that positive attitudes alone did not insulate respondents from the risk of engaging in clientelist practices, Social Studies teacher education programmes need to incorporate formal training on values clarification, ethical leadership and democratic participation. This would better prepare future Social Studies teachers to model and encourage responsible political behaviour in learners.

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