

Nigeria's Elite and Manipulation of Politics: A Review of the 2023 Presidential Election

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Abstract

Nigeria, a nation renowned for its diversity, hosts an extensive array of over 450 ethnic groups, two predominant religions (Islam and Christianity), and numerous regional identities. Nonetheless, this abundance of diversity poses considerable problems for national unity and political stability. This paper analyzes the impact of various factors on the electoral process and outcomes, specifically how Nigeria's political elite exploited religion, ethnicity, and regional sentiments to garner support and sustain power during the 2023 presidential election, as well as the influence of religious affiliations, regional interests, and ethnic loyalty on political strategies and voter behavior. Through qualitative methods (case study, documentary approach), an analysis of historical and contemporary trends, and social identity theory, we contended that the ruling elite manipulates identity markers to create divisions, cultivate loyalty, and legitimize their authority, as demonstrated in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, which was characterized by substantial religious, regional, and ethnic mobilization. This reflects the intricate dynamics of identity politics in the nation, where the ruling elite exploited religious sentiments and regional support bases to energize their campaigns, ultimately influencing the election outcomes. The elites' tactics sustain societal divisions, weaken national unity, and intensify conflict. This research enhances comprehension of Nigeria's intricate political environment and the influence of identity politics on electoral results, policy formulation, and social interactions. This study emphasizes the necessity for inclusive governance, civic education, and institutional reforms to alleviate the detrimental effects of identity-based mobilization and foster a more equal and cohesive Nigerian society.

Background to the Study

Black people inhabit the largest country in the world. Additionally, it is Africa's most religiously diverse nation. According to Akumu (2006), Nigeria is home to approximately 450 distinct ethno-linguistic groups, making it the most populous African state and one of the world's most ethnically diverse nations. This position is consistent with the previous statement. The Southern protectorate and the Northern protectorate were the two distinct geopolitical zones into which the ethnic nationalities of Nigeria divided in the years leading up to the amalgamation in 1914. A variety of civilisations, each adhering to a completely separate traditional religion, made up these two geopolitical zones, which together formed what was known as "one Nigeria." In Okere (1988), Nakozi made the following assertion: "Nigeria as a single entity was born in 1914 when Sir Fredrick Lugard merged the two protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria into a single entity." Miss Flora Shaw suggested the term "Nigeria," which is taken from the river "Niger area," in an essay that she had written as a press communication to "the times in January, 1887." This was fourteen years prior to the unification of the two countries. The fundamental issue that plagues Nigeria as a state in all aspects of existence (religiously, economically, politically, geographically, and so on) is creation. The several cultures that adhere to a variety of traditional faiths have a significant impact on the government system in Nigeria, particularly in a negative way. Traditionally, each culture, with its own fundamental religion, has its own unique teachings. Historically, diverse systems have governed these cultures. The Igbo race in the South East zone experienced democratic rule, while the Hausa/Fulani race experienced oligarchy or purely indirect rule. This combination of distinct governance styles led to significant confusion. The worst part of it all was the merging of two conflicting religions, namely Christianity and Islam, which had been existing in various regions under the umbrella of two different geographical locations, namely the North and the South. The emergence of these two alien religions, Islam and Christianity, along with the existing traditional religion and the multi-ethnic structure of the country, has had and continues to have both beneficial and negative effects on the democratic government of this vast country, Nigeria.

At the time of Nigeria's independence, the pioneering leaders, often known as the founding fathers, decided that democracy would be the best form of government for the country. As Atubi (2011) has shown, the founders of this nation were responsible for the establishment of a democratic government. They distinguished between the church and the state to prevent us, as a nation, from indulging in the practice of allowing individuals to believe as they please. It is sufficient to note that the reality of democracy could not be achieved under these circumstances (the coexistence of the three different religions as well as the several different ethnic groups). According to Udeh (2011), one of the tangible reasons for the failure of democracy in Nigeria is the attitudinal character of the logical notion of each religion regarding government (democracy), which is linked with diverse ethnic justifications. The fact that Christianity and Islam compete also contributes to the problem in Nigeria. The two religions are in direct competition with one another. Odeh (2000) observed that "Today, with Nigeria in a state of disarray and so much blood spilled in the name of religion, it is evident that the evil genius of confusion is spreading not only

confusion but also death." Long ago, the Muslim North seized political power in an effort to halt the progress of the Christian south and, as a result, to alleviate the anxieties of the southern Muslim population. They did this by indiscreetly mixing religion and politics, and as a result, they caused a great deal of suffering for the entire nation and for the rest of humanity. Within the context of the presidential election of 2023, this research investigated the role that religion, regionality, and ethnicity played as instruments of political mobilization by the elite community. There are five distinct sections that make up the paper. The paper presents the introduction in the first section, discusses the conceptual review in the second section, discusses the methodology and theoretical framework in the third section, discusses the contextual analysis in the fourth section, and highlights the findings, concluding remarks, and recommendations in the fifth section.

Literature Review

Elitism/Governing and Ruling Elites

An elitist structure can be defined as a social system where a small group of individuals holds power, wealth, and influence, often at the expense of the larger population. To properly analyse the distinction between governing and ruling elites, it is essential first to establish definitions. Governing elites comprise ruling elite, bureaucrats, and other state officials responsible for making and implementing policies. This group operates within the framework of authority provided by the state's constitution and laws such as the President Ahmed Bola Tinubu, Vice president Kashim Shetima, Senate President Godswill Akpabio, Speaker of house of assembly, Tajudeen Abbas, national/state assembly members, the Judiciary, 36 states governors, 774 local government care takers, liason officers, chairmen as the case may be, ministers, commissioners, vice chancellors of universities, Rector of Polytechnics, Provost of College of education amongst others. The governing elite's primary role is to manage state affairs, ensure the rule of law, and provide public services (Schmidt, 2012). On the other hand, ruling elites extend beyond merely political figures; they include influential business leaders like Aliko Dangote (founder Dangote group; Cement sugar and flour), Bua Cement, MTN, Mike Adenuga (founder Globacom (telecom), Conoil oil and Gas), Femi Otedola (founder Forte Oil), Tony Elumelu (founder, Heirs Holdings (conglomerate), UBA Banking, Jim Ovia (founder zenith bank), Innocent Ifediaso (INNOSON Motors), Chief Samuel Maduka Onyishi (founder Peace mass transit), ABC Ojiako Sheba (founder seplat energy), Wale Tinubu (founder Oando Plc) amongst others, cultural figures; Sultan of Sokoto, Emir of Kano, Obi of Onitsha, Ata of Igala, Oba of Benin, Ooni of Ife, Aalafin of Oyo, Olu of Warri, religious organization (supreme Islamic council of Nigeria), Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and clerics like; Sheikh Ahmed Abubakar Gumi, David Oyedepo (general oversea of living faith church), Enoch Adeboye (general oversea of redeem church), Dr. Paul Eneche (general oversea, Dunamis church), and social opinion leaders who shape public discourse and societal norms.

Ruling elites wield substantial power and can exert influence over policy-making processes, often without formal political office. Their power arises from economic wealth, social capital, and control over cultural institutions (Mills, 2000). However, it is worthy to

note that these elites have unity of purpose in their modus operandi which gave them edge in constant manipulation of social relations using the instrument of the state. In Nigeria, this elite group is often composed of politicians, business moguls, and influential families who have wielded power for generations. This dominance manifests itself in the political sphere where decisions that affect millions are often made without their input or consideration. The Nigerian state has been largely characterized by the consolidation of power and resources in the hands of a few wealthy elites (Falola, & Ndimele, 2016). This concentration of power undermines democracy and leads to a governance system that prioritizes the interests of a few over the needs of the many.

Concept of Religion

There are some who view religion from a functional viewpoint, and there are others who view it from a substantive perspective. The notion of religion includes both of these perspectives. The functionalist viewpoint, on the other hand, views religion in terms of the functions it performs in society. This is the definition of religion from the functionalist perspective. The substantive perspective, on the other hand, views religion in terms of the substance it contains. In addition to serving as a motivating force, religion also serves functions such as socializing and moral upbringing. Furthermore, it integrates concepts such as the sacred and profane. Nevertheless, Karl Marx also adopted a radical approach to the study of religion during his time, aiming to elucidate the functioning of religion through an explanation of its mechanisms. As a result of these divisions, two schools of thought have emerged, dating back to the time when the founding fathers of politics were in existence. The first school of thought, which is known as the radical school of thought, contends that religion has the ability to destroy an individual and, as a result, prevents that individual from reaching the height that they have set for themselves. Therefore, this school of thought maintains that we should not allow religion to exist. When it comes to the radical school, Karl Marx is the most prominent advocate. It was the belief of the second school of thought, known as the functional school, that religion serves a purpose for society and that the continued existence of society may very well be dependent on religion. Therefore, the functional school of thought advocated for the coexistence of religion with other institutions. In the words of Karl Marx, "religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of a soulless condition; it is the opium of the people" (Marx in Bottomore and Rubel, 1963).

This is a well-known quote from Marx. From a Marxist perspective, religion has the potential to mitigate the suffering resulting from oppression in the following ways: On the other hand, members of religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses live in expectation of the day when supernatural powers will descend from on high and build heaven on earth. This is because religion can offer the prospect of divine intervention to alleviate problems that are occurring on earth. The anticipation of this future has the potential to facilitate a more acceptable present. It guarantees a paradise of unending happiness in the state of existence that follows death. Engels maintained that the promise of deliverance from bondage and sorrow in the hereafter is what makes Christianity appealing to downtrodden classes. He used this promise to support his position. By

giving people something to look forward to, the Christian view of heaven can improve life on earth. Religion frequently justifies a person's position within the social order and the social order itself. The verse from a Victorian hymn, "All things bright and beautiful; the rich man in his castle," demonstrates that God created and ordered the social system. To the poor man standing at his gate, God created both the lofty and the lowly, and he organized their estates.

According to the Marxist perspective, religion serves as both a tool to carry out oppression and a means of mitigating its negative effects. There is a substantial body of evidence that lends support to Marx's viewpoint of the function of religion in society. The religious beliefs of Hindus provided justification for the caste system that existed in traditional India. Mediaeval European kings and queens adopted the concept of divine right. By uniting the roles of deity and monarch in a single individual, the Egyptian Pharaohs went one step further than previously thought. They believed that the conversion of slaves to Christianity was a controlling and gentling effect, and as a result, slave owners in the southern states of the United States of America frequently approved of the process. Bosses allegedly used religion in the early days of the industrial revolution in England to manage the masses and motivate them to work hard and maintain sobriety. Employers also used religious beliefs to motivate workers to maintain sobriety. Talcott Parsons argued in 1937, 1964, and 1965 that the social system provides standards that direct and control human behaviour. The cultural system provides a more general set of guidelines for activities in the form of beliefs, values, and a specific system of meaning. When it comes to guiding activities, the cultural system's values and beliefs integrate and pattern norms, not just isolated examples of conventional behavior. For instance, many of the prevalent standards in western society express the value of materialism. Religion plays a crucial role in the cultural system by providing a standard for evaluating individuals' disagreements. Parsons (1965) asserts that religion's regular pattern of meaning enables individuals to alter their intellectual and emotional states. Within the context of society as a whole, this adjustment contributes to the maintenance of order and stability.

Ethnicity

Fundamentally, the term "ethnicity" refers to a group of individuals who identify with one another through shared cultural customs, languages, and historical accounts (Smith, 1991). In contrast to race, which is frequently associated with physical traits, ethnicity covers a wider range of human experience that is more complex. Brubaker (2004) frequently views ethnicity as a "dimension of social identities" that shapes people's perceptions of themselves and others. A variety of indicators, including customs, traditions, and values, influence the distinctive identity of ethnic groups. Research indicates that an individual's ethnic identity can significantly shape their perspective. Ethnic identification influences people's experiences in society, intertwining with elements such as political beliefs, educational attainment, and social standing (Phinney, 1990). Long-standing conflicts resulted from the British colonial government's frequent favoritism of certain ethnic groups over others in Nigeria, which united them under a

single political entity (Falola & Heaton, 2008). In contrast to the largely Christian South, the British preferred dealing with the Muslim empires in the North, which resulted in an imbalance of power and resources. Ethnic tensions still exist today as a result of the long-lasting impacts of this colonial history. Additionally, the 1914 union of the Northern and Southern protectorates produced a naive national identity that ignored the unique social and cultural customs of Nigeria's many ethnic groups (Obi, 2013). This lack of acknowledgement has alienated many ethnic groups, leading to unhappiness and rivalry. Since gaining independence, Nigeria has struggled to navigate these challenges, particularly during the 1967–1970 Nigerian Civil War, primarily sparked by resource rivalry and ethnic mistrust (Nwankwo, 2015).

Regional Sentiments

Regional sentiments are emotional attachments that individuals and organizations possess toward their homeland, regardless of whether it is a city, province, or nation. These sentiments frequently encompass a combination of nostalgia, pride, and a sense of belonging to a particular cultural or geographical identity. According to Anderson (1983), these sentiments play a crucial role in the formation of "imagined communities," communities where shared experiences and cultural narratives establish and reinforce collective identities. The significance of regional sentiments, the emotions, attitudes, and identities that individuals associate with their geographic locations has increased significantly in an increasingly interconnected world. A wide range of sentiments associated with political affiliations, cultural heritage, and local pride characterize the phenomenon. The investigation delved into the origins of regional sentiments, their manifestation in society, and their implications for political dynamics and social cohesion. Modern society expresses regional sentiments in a variety of ways. Regionalist political movements are one obvious approach. Separatist or autonomist movements worldwide, from Catalonia in Spain to Quebec in Canada, emphasize the fractious nature of regional sentiments. "Many individuals perceive the increasing demand for local autonomy and identity as a manifestation of their increasing dissatisfaction with centralized government," according to a 2020 report by the Pew Research Center. (Cohen, 2020) Regional sentiments motivate local populations to advocate for increased autonomy or even independence in these contexts. Additionally, social media has been instrumental in the amplification of regional sentiments. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook offer individuals the opportunity to mobilize activism, share local news, and express pride in their regional identities. The emergence of regional online communities suggests a change in the manner in which individuals establish connections with one another through shared local experiences.

Conceptualizing Politics

Scholars have examined the topic of politics from various perspectives. Heywood (1997) acknowledges the differing perspectives of scholars regarding the concept of politics, observing that esteemed authority cannot reach a consensus on its subject matter. Consequently, the term politics has been defined in multiple ways. Usman, Enojo, Ujah, Kakwagh, Ocholi, and Obi (2023) prominently highlight Aristotle's assertion that "man is

by nature a political animal" and his conclusion that politics is the "master science" due to its complexity in managing conflicts and resolving disputes over the allocation of power and resources in society. Heywood (1997) unequivocally associated politics with the dynamics of conflict and cooperation by defining it as the art of governance, a process pertaining to public affairs that seeks to resolve disputes through compromise, conciliation, or negotiation rather than through coercion and brute force. Sodaro (2011) articulates this perspective by characterizing politics as the mechanism via which communities seek collective objectives and resolve problems authoritatively through government.

Easton (1956) characterizes politics as the 'authoritative allocation of values' within a political system. Easton perceives politics as the array of procedures by which government addresses the pressures and demands associated with the distribution of advantages, rewards, or penalties within a society. Lasswell (1958) conceptualizes politics as the resolution of "who" "receives," "what," "when," and "how." However, it is noted that the numerous definitions above regard the concept of politics from the perspective of the normative role of politics, which is the resolution of conflicting interests. However, it is crucial to also consider the ascriptive value of politics. The concept of politics will extend beyond the perspectives of industrialized nations to encompass the contexts of developing countries, particularly those in Africa. Williams (1980) observes the holistic approach to the concept of politics from two angles. Firstly, politics is a disreputable endeavor characterized by the competitive pursuit of individual interests; secondly, it pertains to the management of public affairs, focusing on universal rather than specific concerns and with the objective of defining and advancing the common good.

Methodology

The paper employed a qualitative method using documentary research methods (DRM/analysis of secondary data), to find out how the elites (comprador bourgeoisie; governing and ruling elites) use religion, ethnicity and regionalism as instrument of the manipulating the proletariats (masses; electorates in the 2023 presidential election for them not to have unity of purpose), (Usman, Obi, Ibrahim and Anselm, 2024). A mix of case study analysis (Nigeria), historical analysis, and literature analysis was used. This was done by looking at the current situation's cause-and-effect relationships and going back in time to find plausible causes. The method of analysis is mostly based on reading and analysing the text and context of existing information about the thing we are looking into. We do this by looking at practices, reasoning, predictions, analysis, criticism, and discussion of relevant information from the different types of sources that led to our conclusions. The choice of this method of analysis was pertinent because the paper was primarily concerned with identifying and selecting relevant literature and evaluating evidence in academic research, (Avidime and Obi, 2020). To elucidate the interactions between religion, ethnicity, and regional sentiments in the 2023 presidential election, Social identity theory, as formulated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, provides foundational insights into how individuals identify with specific groups based on shared

characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In Nigeria, these identities are predominantly defined by ethnicity and religion, which significantly influence political alignment and voting behaviour. Moreover, the theory of ethnic voting posits that voters are more likely to support candidates who share their ethnic background, particularly in societies marked by deep-seated ethnic cleavages (Chandra, 2006). In the Nigerian context, this theory finds resonance with the voting patterns observed in past elections. The interplay between religion and ethnicity also receives considerable attention within the framework of intersectionality, which examines how various social categories such as race, gender, and religion intersect to create different modes of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991).

Social Identity Theory is important because it says that a person's sense of self comes from how they feel about their position in social groups. Tajfel (1978) says that people put themselves and others into different groups, called "in-groups and out-groups." This phenomenon can lead individuals to endorse their own group and harbor animosity towards those from other groups. Nigerians divide along religious, racial, and regional lines, making this phenomenon particularly relevant there. Each of these groups is an important factor that affects how people vote during elections. In Nigeria, religion is a vital part of the government system. Faith beliefs often translate into political support in this country, where Muslims and Christians dominate. Candidates for president in 2023 came from a wide range of religious backgrounds, which made voters' religious feelings even stronger. For instance, the votes cast by Muslim and Christian groups significantly influence the outcome of the election. Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), for example, were both running for office at the same time, and there was a lot of religious tension. BBC (2023) said that the election showed how tensions were growing between the mostly Muslim north and the mostly Christian south. Religion motivated voters. "Religious sentiments" exacerbated this division, as candidates frequently assumed responsibility for their faith groups' interests. Some Christian voters expressed dissatisfaction with Tinubu's choice of a Muslim as his running mate, believing it was unfair to exclude them. These feelings are similar to SIT's claim that people make choices that strengthen their religious identity. This means that people often vote based on the beliefs of their communities instead of their own tastes or policies. In the past, regional feelings have affected the results of Nigerian elections, showing the deep divisions in the country's society. More than just physical and cultural differences contribute to the North-South divide. It also includes differences in income and old grudges. During the 2023 elections, candidates were very loyal to their home areas and tried to get support from people in those regions.

Muslims still make up the majority in Northern Nigeria, and the northern leaders wield significant political power. The elections clearly demonstrated the growing awareness of the "Arewa" (north). Many northern voters backed Tinubu because they saw his campaign as a continuation of northern interest, even though he was born in the south. On the other hand, people in the south strongly supported Atiku Abubakar because they

saw him as someone who understood their needs and concerns, especially given the social and economic problems in their area. Again, articles from "The Guardian" explain how candidates framed their campaigns to appeal to regional loyalties while ignoring larger national issues, which exacerbated the already existing differences, (The Guardian (2023). Nigeria's society is based on over 450 different ethnic groups, and identity politics have become crucial in the ongoing election campaigns. During the 2023 presidential election, politicians used racial feelings to get people to vote for them. People of different races felt left out and betrayed in the past, which strengthened ethnic mobilization beyond the elections. Some groups, like the Igbos, were unhappy with the major political parties and wanted their choice, Peter Obi, to get more attention. His platform, emphasizing unity across racial lines, particularly resonated with younger individuals who aspired to abolish the historical racial conflict. According to a 2023 report by Al Jazeera, Obi's campaign sparked a significant discussion about ethnic identities and prompted individuals to reconsider their traditional voting methods, which heavily rely on ethnic loyalty. As ethnicity and political loyalty interacted, new political coalitions formed. They did this to help bridge the ethnic gaps that had previously caused Nigerian democracy to fall apart. That being said, it is important to figure out if these coalitions really show unity or are just a way to win elections.

Result and Discussion

The Role of Religion/Ethnicity and Regional sentiments in Nigeria Politics

You can't separate the 2023 presidential race from the state of Nigeria's economy. Over 70% of people live in poverty, and more than 32% of young people are unemployed. This meant that candidates had to talk about problems of economic stability and social welfare. Promises of job creation, investment in education, and revamping healthcare systems dominated campaign themes (Usman and Obi, 2023). However, without a clear plan for implementation, these promises remain mere words. According to research from the World Bank, Nigeria's economic problems are getting worse because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty in the oil sector. Poor governance significantly impacts the economy, impacting not only individuals' earning capacity but also the cohesiveness of society. (Yakubu, Obi, Abubakar, and Oloda 2023) Because of this, it is essential for the newly chosen president to move beyond empty promises and make real policies that help people with their most important social and economic problems. The reliability of polls in a country with diverse racial and religious groups also raises concerns about national unity. Nigeria is home to more than 350 different ethnic groups, and identity politics have a big impact on people's political views. Before the 2023 election, the campaigns were based on regional and racial issues, which often made voters less likely to agree with each other. The election results brought up arguments about participation and openness to everyone. Candidates from various regions, particularly the north and south, have attempted to leverage these divisions for electoral success. But, as a study from The Guardian pointed out, these kinds of actions could not only hurt the unity of the country but also make things worse. A united Nigeria is necessary to create a setting where everyone can do well, no matter where they come from. So, the new government needs to put national unity and healing ahead of partisan interests (Obi and Okoye, 2021).

The Role of Technology on Awareness Creation in 2023 Elections

The 2023 elections also highlighted the impact of technology on Nigeria's voting process. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) established the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) to enhance the credibility of the voting process. In an effort to reduce election fraud, this technical advancement enabled biometric voter verification. Despite some early problems, many saw BVAS as a positive development toward more open election. However, excessive reliance on technology can lead to significant issues. According to BBC reports, extensive technical issues plagued several voting sites, impacting both data transmission and voter accreditation. These blunders have major ramifications and make us wonder if technology can actually strengthen democracies in nations where a large portion of the population lacks reliable power and internet access. According to Obi and Enojo (2023), this issue highlights how difficult it is to incorporate technology into a varied society like Nigeria. The remarkable involvement of Nigerian youth in the 2023 elections emerged as a prominent narrative. Many people in the demographic voted because they wanted to see an end to corruption and a new beginning. There were a number of grassroots efforts that sought to increase youth involvement in politics; one of these was the "Not Too Young to Run" campaign. The Punch Newspaper reported that more than half of the voters were under the age of thirty. The youth of Nigeria are expressing their expectations of their leaders in terms of education, job creation, and positive government more openly than ever before, making this demographic transition all the more significant. But there are difficulties associated with youth engagement. Despite their excitement, many young voters expressed disappointment due to the lack of viable candidates. A new political party (LP) emerged with the goal of challenging the PDP and the All Progressives Congress (APC), but it was unable to garner enough support to become a viable alternative (Okoye and Obi, 2023).

Socioeconomic Considerations and Question of National Unity

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Table 1: 2023 Presidential Election Voting Pattern across the Six Geopolitical Zones

ELECTION PARTIES	PRESIDENTIAL				GOVERNORSHIP			
	APC	PDP	LP/ OTHER PARTIES	WINNER	APC	PDP	LP/ OTHER PARTIES	WINNER
ABIA	8,914	22,676	327,095 (LP)	LP	11,516	88,529	175,467	LP
ADAMAWA	182,881	417,611	105,648 (LP)	PDP	INCONCLUSIVE	INCONCLUSIVE	INCONCLUSIVE	INCONCLUSIVE
AKWAIBOM	160,620	214,012	132,683 (LP)	PDP	129,602	354,357	136,262 (YPP)	PDP
ANAMBRA	5,111	9,036	584,621 (LP)	LP	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON
BAUCHI	316,694	426,607	72,103 (NNPP)	PDP	432,272	525,280	60,496 (NNPP)	PDP
BAYELSA	42,572	68,818	49,975 (LP)	PDP	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON
BENUE	310,468	130,081	308,372 (LP)	APC	312,853	155,257	12,507 (LP)	APC
BORNO	252,282	190,921	7,205 (LP)	APC	545,542	82,147	1,457 (ADP)	APC
CROSS RIVER	130,520	95,425	179,917 (LP)	LP	258,619	179,636	N/A	APC
DELTA	90,183	161,600	341,866 (LP)	LP	240,229	360,234	48,047 (LP)	PDP
EBONYI	42,402	13,503	359,738 (LP)	LP	199,931	80,191	52,189 (APGA)	APC
EDO	144,471	89,585	331,163 (LP)	LP	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON
EKITI	201,494	89,554	11,397 (LP)	APC	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON
ENUGU	4,772	15,749	428,640 (LP)	LP	YET TO BE ANNOUNCED	YET TO BE ANNOUNCED	YET TO BE ANNOUNCED	YET TO BE ANNOUNCED
GOMBE	146,977	319,123	26,160 (LP)	PDP	342,821	233,131	19,861 (NNPP)	APC
IMO	66,406	30,234	360,495 (LP)	LP	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON
JIGAWA	421,390	386,587	98,234 (NNPP)	APC	618,449	368,726	14,246 (NNPP)	APC
KADUNA	399,293	554,360	294,494 (LP)	PDP	730,002	719,196	58,283 (LP)	APC
KANO	506,412	131,716	997,279 (NNPP)	NNPP	890,705	26,682	1,019,602 (NNPP)	NNPP
KATSINA	482,283	489,045	69,386 (NNPP)	PDP	859,892	486,620	8,263 (NNPP)	APC
KEBBI	248,088	285,175	10,682 (LP)	PDP	INCONCLUSIVE	INCONCLUSIVE	INCONCLUSIVE	INCONCLUSIVE
KOGI	240,751	145,104	56,217 (LP)	APC	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON
KWARA	263,572	136,909	31,166 (LP)	APC	273,424	155,490	18,922 (NNPP)	APC
LAGOS	572,606	75,750	582,454 (LP)	LP	762,134	62,449	312,329 (LP)	APC

NASARAWA	172,922	147,093	191,361 (LP)	LP	347,209	283,016	374 (NNPP)	APC
NIGER	375,183	284,898	80,452 (LP)	APC	469,896	387,476	3,415 (LP)	APC
OGUN	341,544	123,831	85,829	APC	276,298	262,463	83,806 (ADC)	APC
ONDO	369,924	115,463	47,350	APC	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON	OFF SEASON
OSUN	343,354	354,23	23,28	PDP	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF
	945	366	3 (LP)		SEASON	SEASON	SEASON	SEASON
OYO	449,884	182,977	99,100 (LP)	APC	256,685	563,756	1,342	PDP
PLATEAU	307,195	243,808	466,272 (LP)	LP	481,400	525,299	60,310	PDP
RIVERS	231,591	88,468	175,071 (LP)	APC	95,274	302,614	46,981 (SDP)	PDP
SOKOTO	285,444	288,679	6,568 (LP)	PDP	453,661	404,632	13 (LP)	APC
TARABAI	135,615	189,017	146,315 (LP)	PDP	142,502	257,926	202,277 (NNPP)	PDP
YOBE	151,459	198,567	18,270 (NNPP)	PDP	317,113	104,259	14,246 (NNPP)	APC
ZAMFARA	298,396	193,978	4,044 (NNPP)	APC	311,976	377,726	2,413 (NRM)	PDP
FCT	90,902	74,194	281,717 (LP)	LP	NO ELECTION	NO ELECTION	NO ELECTION	NO ELECTION

Source: Adopted from Oyewale, (2023) ANALYSIS: Voting Pattern Changes in Nigeria's 2023 Presidential and Governorship Elections (fij.ng)

2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria

With a complicated interaction of socioeconomic elements, regional dynamics, and ongoing issues of administration, the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria signals a turning point in the political scene of the country. With a population exceeding 200 million, Nigeria stands as the most populous nation in Africa, often serving as a barometer for the political direction of the continent. Apart from a race for the highest office in the country, the election reflected the shared hopes and discontent among its people. Driven by economic uncertainty, insecurity, and corruption, the political environment preparing for the 2023 elections was replete with public unhappiness. High inflation rates, unemployment, and a declining national currency have beset Nigeria's economy, therefore fostering conditions fit for political unrest. The World Bank estimates that nearly 40% of Nigeria's population lives below the poverty line, so the country has a shockingly high poverty rate (World Bank, 2022). The elections hold significant importance for the voters, given the financial challenges and growing citizen demands for change. Regional attitudes significantly shaped the political debate, with the northern and southern portions of the nation regularly engaging in conflict, particularly regarding political representation and resource distribution. The campaigns revolved mostly on the need for a more inclusive administration reflecting Nigeria's variety. Candidates faced significant challenges due to the entrenchment of regional politics, which necessitated careful negotiation of Nigeria's complex ethnic and religious diversity (BBC News, 2023). There were multiple contenders in the 2023 presidential contest, each standing for

different political philosophies and goals. Three top contenders were Gregory Peter Obi from the Labour Party (LP), Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), and Atiku Abubakar from the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Promoting continuity, former Lagos State governor Tinubu promised to build on the successes of the current government. He focused on security, infrastructure, and economic recovery, which resonated with many voters. He also originated the expression *Emi l'okan-Awalokan*, which translates to "it's my turn and theirs" (Oke, 2022).

By contrast, seasoned politician and past vice president Atiku Abubakar presented himself as a reformist. His campaign focused on improving education and healthcare, as well as privatizing to boost GDP. The message of Abubakar aimed to appeal to younger people who felt excluded and disappointed with the current state of affairs. "Northerners need someone from North, not Igbo or Yoruba," he said (Channels Television Live, 16/10/2023), resonating with many who saw these as basic concerns hindering the nation's development and who also campaigned on ethnicity, religion, and geography. Furthermore, Peter Obi, a Labour Party candidate, became a strong competitor, especially among younger people disappointed with traditional politics. Emphasizing openness, responsibility, and economic diversification, his platform reflected a fresh vision for Nigeria. With the acronym "Obidient Movement," Obi expressed a growing yearning among the voters for a departure from conventional political narratives and an acceptance of fresh ideas and leadership styles (Yakubu, Obi, Abubakar, and Oloda 2023). The polls conducted by Nigerians to choose their preferred candidates on February 25 and March 18 revealed notable changes in voting patterns.

Although several of the main political parties kept track of successes in various states during the presidential contest, they fell short in the gubernatorial contest. With 449,884 votes, the All Peoples Congress (APC) triumphed in Oyo State during the presidential contest. With polling 182,977 and 99,101 votes, respectively, the PDP and the LP came second and third in the same state. However, in the governorship race in the same Oyo State, the statistics changed as the PDP emerged victorious with 563,756 votes. This time, the APC secured the second position with 256,685 votes, while the LP secured a distant sixth place with 1,342 votes. Unlike the presidential contest, where the LP achieved significant success by winning 11 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), the LP only managed to win the governorship race in Abia State. Table 1.1 shows that the LP won the 2023 presidential contest in Delta, Enugu, and Plateau State, but the voting pattern shifted at the governor level when the PDP secured the three states' gubernatorial seats. In Abia State, the LP took first place in the governorship and presidential contest. Voting results in Cross River, Ebonyi, Lagos, and Nasarawa States during the presidential contest went LP's way. In the governorship election, the APC did, however, win in all four states. During the presidential contest, the PDP prevailed in Gombe, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, and Yobe State; the governorship election was different, though, as the APC prevailed in all five states. The APC prevailed in Oyo, Rivers, and Zamfara State at the presidential race; yet, the voting pattern shifted at the governor level since all three states cast PDP votes. Benue, Borno, Jigawa, Kwara, Niger, and Ogun State all voted for the APC

throughout both elections. During the presidential and gubernatorial elections, Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, and Taraba State also cast votes for the PDP. While the PDP led in the presidential poll in Kebbi and Adamawa State, the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) prevailed in the presidential and gubernatorial elections in Kano State. INEC has, however, declared the two states' governorship elections as inconclusive.

Findings from Analysis (Elite Instrument of Manipulation)

The Role of Religion, Regionalism in Ethnic Mobilization in the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria

Many times, ethnic groups in Nigeria identify with certain religious identities, which shape their political affiliations and voting behavior. The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) claims that Nigeria's ethnic variety and religious divisions primarily shape its complicated social fabric, providing a fertile ground for political mobilization, particularly during elections (USIP, 2022). For many in Nigeria, religion serves as their primary marker, essentially replacing or entwining with ethnic identity. For instance, the Christian population in the South identifies with ethnic groups such as the Igbo and Yoruba, whereas the majority Muslim population in the North primarily identifies with the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. Voters now view candidates and their parties through a basic prism of religious-ethnic duality. Historically, Nigeria has been rife with community strife, sometimes aggravated by the mix of religion and ethnicity. The late 20th century civil war, which was as much about political power as it was about ethnic conflict, showed how closely these elements interact (Nnoli, 1995). Numerous studies demonstrate instances where religious leaders and groups exploit the ethnic sentiments of their followers during elections, thereby influencing political outcomes (Eneji & Iorwuese, 2021). This historical pattern of religion's impact on ethnic mobilization was evident in the 2023 elections, as political parties attempted to leverage their religious affiliations to appeal to a wider range of ethnic groups.

The 2023 presidential battle in Nigeria reflected the complex interaction of religion and ethnic identity in a nation of diversity, going beyond a simple struggle for ruling eliteship. Nigeria, home to numerous ethnic groups and religions, particularly Islam and Christianity, significantly influences its political behavior and sociocultural dynamics (Yakubu, Obi, Abubakar, and Oloda, 2023). Nigeria generally stratifies political parties along religious and ethnic lines, making the importance of religion during elections much more apparent. For example, the two main political parties in Nigeria, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) have traditionally gathered support by depending on religious organizations and leaders. In the run-up to the 2023 elections, these parties, emphasizing common values and beliefs, increased their outreach efforts within religious communities, thereby promoting ethnic mobilisation. The APC, through its presidential candidate, employed a strategy to reassure Muslim voters in the North about their significance in the election agenda (Nigerian Observer, 2023). Candidates might combine people from particular ethnic backgrounds by using religious platforms, forming a strong voting bloc prepared to organize for their chosen candidate. Moreover, arguments and conversations about the contenders sometimes

evoked conventional religious themes, reinforcing the belief that their ethnic identity defines their faith.

Ethnic Mobilization through Religious Alliances

Faith-based organizations opened venues for ethnic mobilization in the 2023 presidential contest. A major portion of Nigerian society's religious groups actively engage in politics, organizing their adherents across ethnic lines. Muslim groups and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) actively participated in campaigns, clearly endorsing their candidates based on their religious identity. This was especially clear-cut when the presidential contenders presented themselves as representatives of their particular religious communities, therefore appealing to voters' emotions, anxieties, and loyalties. New, less established political entities aiming to negotiate the difficult terrain of ethnic and religious affinity also emerged in the 2023 elections. Candidates from these parties sometimes took advantage of the weaknesses and resentment connected to past injustices faced by particular ethnic-religious groups. To inspire support from groups who felt under-represented in the national story, some candidates, for example, reflected feelings of exclusion and marginalization (Sankore, 2023). Both front-runner candidates, Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC) and Atiku Abubakar (PDP), employed religious discourse to reinforce their ethnic affiliations in the 2023 polls. Their campaign presentations regularly included religious ideas and symbols meant to appeal to the values of their intended audience. Religious relevance permeated political campaigns as candidates asked divine help for their suggested policies, therefore establishing an emotional and spiritual link with their voters (Adekunle, 2022).

Furthermore, the employment of religious symbolism in public speeches and campaign demonstrations not only highlighted candidates' piety but also helped to create a feeling of group identity among their supporters. As people organized around common religious beliefs, this discourse typically translated into better turnout at the polls and, eventually, more opportunities for electoral victories. Furthermore, it is important to consider the role of social media as a tool in the 2023 elections, particularly in relation to religious and ethnic mobilization. Social media channels became powerful vehicles for disseminating religious and ethnic narratives as the voters grew more digital. Candidates interacted with followers personally and spread their thoughts on social sites. Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp spread campaigns, creating echo chambers within religious groups that bolstered specific ethnic identities and voting attitudes. Groups on social media, for instance, posted materials that framed the elections in religious terms, which raised followers' solidarity and finally resulted in community-driven voter mobilization (Nigerian Tribune, 2023).

Conclusion

In Nigerian politics, the intertwining of religion, ethnicity, and regional identity poses challenging issues that impact national unity and government. Although this variety enhances the cultural fabric of the country, it also makes political involvement difficult and could cause conflict. Both leaders and the populace now urgently need to strive for

inclusivity and understanding as Nigeria navigates its political landscape. Nigeria may progress toward a more stable and cohesive future by encouraging communication and collaboration among its diverse groupings. In Nigeria's politically volatile environment, the 2023 presidential contest shows the great influence religion has on ethnic mobilization. Historically, the amalgamation of religion and ethnicity has influenced power dynamics in Nigeria, serving as a dual-edged tool capable of uniting or dividing societies to achieve political goals. Religious organisations, social media, and individuals weave a complex network, underscoring the importance of understanding the consequences of this dynamic. Although religious identification gives a feeling of identity and community involvement in political processes, it also increases the chances of aggravating tribalism in a country still struggling with its complicated sociopolitical environment. Religion's influence on ethnic mobilisation remains a crucial aspect of Nigeria's political identity, requiring careful consideration and management to foster national unity and advancement as the country progresses in its democratic procedures. The 2023 presidential contest in Nigeria marks a significant milestone and serves as a reflection of the intricate political landscape of the country. The large voter turnout revealed an involved and demanding population, while the difficulties in the voting process and the need for genuine leadership highlighted systematic problems that required attention. The newly elected president will face challenging tasks as Nigeria progresses, including ensuring economic recovery, promoting national unity, and rebuilding faith in the democratic process. Responsible leadership that gives openness, inclusivity, and socioeconomic development top priority would help Nigeria come out of this voting exercise stronger. The real test of the 2023 presidential contest will ultimately be the deeds taken following the promises given. The goal is that if people keep pushing for change, Nigeria's democratic path will develop to not only involve but also empower every Nigerian.

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