

Voting Pattern and Voting Behaviour in 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria: A Cursory Prognosis

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Abstract

The 2023 Presidential Election is one of the most keenly and closely contested Elections in the history of Nigerian Presidential Elections since the colonial and post-independence period. The election was heralded with tensions, accusations and counter-accusations, intense campaign, trade of blames by the ruling and major opposition parties and other related issues. This study examined the voting pattern and voting behaviour of the Nigerian electorate during the 2023 Presidential Election, the outcome and analysis of the voting pattern and its implications. The work adopted both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source is the direct participant observation where the author was part of the process of the election as a party agent for the Presidential Election in Ilorin West local governments in Nigeria. The research also observed directly on a live broadcast the presentation of the results by the state returning officers where the results were collected and used for analysis. The secondary sources include the use of books, journals and internet sources. The data obtained was presented in a thematic form using tables and statistical interpretations. The research discovered that the outcome of the 2023 Presidential Election continued to reflect the voting pattern in Nigeria where ethno-religious, regional affiliations, party affiliation or identification determine how the electorates choose their President even though, the three major contenders this time emerged from three zones. However, two Presidential candidates from the same Southern region of Nigeria just like the previous situations. The research recommends that there is a need for massive enlightenment among the electorates towards choice of leaders based on performance and not sentiments. The paper concluded that the determinant to imbibe for re-electing same party into power should be the performance of incumbent party should be a yardstick.

Keywords: Voting Behaviour, Prognosis, Election, Politics, Presidential Election, Voting Pattern

INTRODUCTION

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Election is the process of choosing leaders in a democratic process where a legitimate change of government is constitutionally allowed (Johari, 2011). Election in Nigeria has been taking place since 1922 and since that period, election occurred continuously until 1960 when the political independence was gained from Britain. After political independence, election took place in 1964 but the democratic regime was short-lived because of bloody military coup. In 1979, Nigeria dropped the parliamentary system of government and switched to presidential system. The Aborted Third Republic in 1993 did not witness a smooth transition until in 1999 when the Fourth Republic emerged

and remains the longest democratic transition in the history of the country (Sule, et. al., 2018).

Election takes place in Nigeria at different levels. In the Fourth Republic, from 1999 to the 2023 General Elections, there are seven electoral offices constitutionally including the Presidential, Senatorial, Federal House of Representatives, Gubernatorial, State House of Assembly, Chairmanship and Councillorship (Nigerian 1999 Constitution as amended). One of the most interesting episodes in Nigerian politics is the Presidential Election. This is because of the voting pattern and political behaviour of the Nigerian voters towards electing their leaders. This makes the battle for the Presidential seat intense, chaotic and threatening, sometimes to the extent of national disintegration. The culture of ethnic, religious and regional voting inherited from the nationalists during the colonial period spillover to the present era and it seems to be continuous (Sule, et al., 2017).

This work is an investigation of the process of the conduct of the 2023 Presidential Election, the pattern of voting behaviour, an analysis of the outcome, the issues emanating from the contest and the anticipated implications of the pattern of the voting on the incoming government and the geopolitical zones in general. The paper is divided into ten parts following the introduction is the statement of problem, aims and objectives of the study, research questions, methodology, literature review and theoretical framework, the 2023 presidential election in perspective, data presentation analysis, interpretation and discussions, Implications, conclusion and recommendation.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Nigeria's democratic journey reached another milestone following the successful completion of the presidential /general elections in 2023. Every electoral period do generates fear of a possible large scale political/electoral conflict that may cause democratic breakdown as well as national integration. However, the fact that Nigeria had successfully carried out the election is a major achievement in its political history. The 2023general/ presidential elections were followed with high expectations because of the bad comment from both domestic and international election observers on the previous general elections in Nigeria. i.e.2019 general elections which described as less transparent and fall below international standard of electoral integrity. Not only that, with the new electoral reforms initiative by INEC 2021 which was signed by

former President Muhammad Buhari. For instance, the introduction of Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BIVAS) which was hoped and believed would help to reduce all cases of electoral malpractices as well help to improve the election administration. It was much to be desired. Its introduction also was hoped to assist in wiping away or put an end to the negative electoral integrity perception index on Nigeria election. Furthermore, since 1999 or better still all elections conducted by INEC were with one problem or the other. The only two elections that were fair, free and credible were the 2011 and 2015 presidential elections. All these shortcomings were responsible for the increasing waves of election petition in 2019 and the 2023 presidential elections.

The voting pattern in the last 2019 presidential elections showed that Nigerian voters are not yet sophisticated in their voting decisions. Their choices are still driven by primordial sentiments, particularly religion, ethnicity and party affiliations and this attests to the social divisions that have enveloped politics in the country since independence. Notwithstanding the reality that the principal candidates for the presidential elections shared many identities in terms of religion and ethnicity, the geopolitics of supports for their parties reinforces ethno-religious factors in voter behaviour. The All Progressive Congress (APC) won in the geo-political zones with a huge population of Muslims and the northern Hausa- Fulani group, while the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) attracted more votes in areas more inhabited by Christians and southern ethnic groups.

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State House of Assembly, Chairmanship and Councillorship (Nigerian 1999 Constitution as amended). One of the most interesting episodes in Nigerian politics is the Presidential Election. This is because of the voting pattern and political behaviour of the Nigerian voters towards electing their leaders. This makes the battle for the Presidential seat intense, chaotic and threatening, sometimes to the extent of national disintegration. The culture of ethnic, religious and regional voting inherited from the nationalists during the colonial period spillover to the present era and it seems to be continuous (Sule, et al., 2017). This work is an investigation of the process of the conduct of the 2019 Presidential Election, the pattern of voting behaviour, an analysis of the outcome, the issues emanating from the contest and the anticipated implications of the pattern of the voting on the incoming government and the geopolitical zones in general.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

(a)To examine the voting behaviour of the electorate in 2023 presidential elections in Nigerian

(b)To examine critically the implication of such voting behaviour in the nearest future.

Research Questions

(a.)What informed the voting behaviour in the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria?

(b.)What is/are the implication(s) of such voting behaviour in the nearest future?

Research Methodology

This research work relied heavily on both primary and secondary sources of data collection. It also used both quantitative and qualitative method of data analysis (Mixed method). The primary sources are the direct participant observation by the author being an active part-taker of the 2023 Presidential Election process in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State. In addition to this, the author participated in the process of live declaration of the result via television channel called “Channel’ where the author gathered primarily the raw results, compiled them, analysed them and interpret them in the discussion section.

The secondary sources involve books, journals, newspapers, internet sources and existing relevant materials on the subject matter. The secondary sources were used for a critical review of related literature, formation of theoretical framework to strengthen the arguments in the discussions.

The data gathered were presented and analysed using both quantitative and qualitative method of data analysis where themes were formed in a sub-heading for discussions. Tables were used for the presentation of some statistical figures such as percentage of the voters' turnout, parties' performance in the election and the margin of win as well as other related issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMWORK VOTING PATTERN AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR:

Voting pattern and voting behaviour are prominent themes in the literature on political behaviour and their study has long remained one of the pivotal concerns of political scientists. The emergence and foundation of political behaviour are premised on the study of factors which determine individual and group electoral choices (Guardado and Wantchekon, 2017; Heywood, 2013; Diener, 2000). Voting pattern and voting behaviour are forms of electoral behaviour in which studying and understanding them explains and leads to the understanding of the factors which influence decisions made by the electorate during elections (Goldman, 1966). The quest to study and to understand how electorates make political choices and decisions led to the interdisciplinary synthesis between political science and psychology, hence the development of the area of study of political psychology. One of the main concerns of political psychologists is the study of what prompts voters to make more informed electoral choices (Diener, 2000). Therefore, the most important issues about an election may not necessarily be who won but maybe to investigate why people voted the way they did or what the implications of the results will be. Such posers cannot be easily answered but explanations to these can be acquired through a rigorous study and a broad understanding of voting pattern and behaviour of voters in particular elections (Alvarez, 1998).

As a concept, the voting pattern is the study of partisan preferences or choices of selected voter groups or individuals (Merrill and Grofman, 1999). The pattern of voting of such voting groups or individual is not static but is largely dynamic due to

realignment. While several factors are crucial in explaining voting patterns, shared cultural attitudes towards a government, group or the society at large remain one of the conspicuous factors (Merrill and Grofman, 1999). Voting behaviour is an electoral activity. It is a combination of personal and electoral action, which manifests during an electoral process. Such include voting during elections, involvement in electoral campaigns and participation in electoral rallies as well as support for a candidate or a political party (Bratton et al., 2012). In essence, it connotes the participation and non-participation of the electorate in an electoral process. In other words, it simply implied to the manners electorates cast their vote for a given political party or candidates irrespective of their political affiliation in a particular election within a state or a political system or country.(Amao,2021)

Studies on political and voting behaviour focus on the determinants of voter choice (Guardado and Wantchekon, 2017; Agomor and Adams, 2014; Bratton et al., 2012; Heywood, 2013; Prysby and Scavo, 1993). These studies demonstrate that electoral decisions are not just taken overnight but are influenced by certain factors which according to Heywood (2013) are conditioned by short and long term effects. The short-term effects are peculiar to specific elections and can change from one election to the other. Such effects may include the government or regime performance, the charisma of candidates and the condition of the state's economy. Instances of long-term effects may include loyalty to the party which may be stable over a long period (Heywood, 2013). It is important to note that loyalty to the party in some instances can be an element of the short-term effects. This is because in some democracies particularly the new and developing democracies of Africa, party loyalty can be withdrawn in a short time. In such democracies, personal interest rather than party loyalty comes first. However, this can be further explain as one major reason why some member of PDP as a political party moved away from the PDP and named themselves New PDP and eventually switched to APC prior to 2015 presidential elections or General elections in Nigeria. In which case, their party loyalty was withdrawn in a short time. Moreover, Prior to the 2023 general election some APC members also party switch to PDP when they felt that their interest was threatened and decide to go back home. (Amao, 2023).

Studying American voting behaviour in Presidential elections from 1972 to 1992, Prysby and Scavo, (1993) identified several attitudinal and social factors that may determine or shape the decision of voters in an election. On the one hand, they posited

that individual attributes, assessment of government performance, knowledge of particular policy concerns, and party affiliation are the primary attitudinal factors that may determine the choice of the voter during elections. On the other hand, they identified ethnic group, faith, constituency and gender as the social factors that influence the voting decision. The influence these factors have on voter choices during specific elections assists in predicting electoral outcomes and enhances the comprehension of electoral dynamics (Prysby and Scavo, 1993).

In another study, which investigated the determinants of voters' behaviour in Ghana, Agomor and Adams (2014) sought to explain what makes voters in Ghana decide on the choice of candidates or party between evaluative rationales such as characteristics and accomplishments of candidates, the performance of government, and policy platforms of parties or non-evaluative factors such as political affiliation, ethnic or family ties which are largely psychological factors. Findings from the study showed that evaluative rationales such as issue-based campaign, the charisma of candidate as well as the extent to which the ruling party fulfils its campaign promises are factors which influence voters' choice in Ghanaian elections. They argued that this finding supports Nordin's, (2014) claim that issue-based political campaigns afford the electorate the opportunity of knowing the better candidate among several others because such campaigns help to define issues about a state's economy and explain to the electorate which candidate is in a better position to offer implementable policies to solve the challenges facing citizens' welfare in particular and the economy in general.

One limitation of the study is that the researchers did not take into consideration the notion that the evaluative rationales which they observed to condition voters' choice and pattern in Ghanaian elections are short term effects which are peculiar to specific elections. Thus, the evaluative rationales may not account for voters' choice and pattern in subsequent elections in Ghana. In another study carried out in Bangladesh, Hossain, et al. (2017) examined the voting behaviour of the people of Annadanagar Union, Pirgacha, Rangpur in local elections in Bangladesh. They investigated the factors that determine voters' decision either to vote or not to vote. Findings indicate that political ideology, interest in politics, candidate's qualification, locality, religious factor and citizen's obligation are all factors which determine the choice of voters in Annadanagar Union, Pirgacha, Rangpur local elections. Two out of the five determinants were the major determinants of the choice of voters. These are political ideology and candidate's qualification. While these factors may have long- term effects on voters' choice, the

authors failed to note that such factors may not explain voters' choice or pattern in subsequent local elections in Bangladesh in the sense that other factors such as those with long term-effects may account for voters' choice in future local elections in the nation.

Scholars have also dealt with the determinants of voting pattern and behaviour in multi-ethnic and developing as well as developed democracies (Hoffman and Long, 2013; Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000; Snyder, 2000). Hoffman and Long (2013) in their study employed two broad approaches to study voting pattern and behaviour. They observed that a chunk of literature on democracy admits that ethnic affiliation is the most powerful determinant of voting pattern and choice in multi-ethnic and new democracies. They suggest that ethnicity conditions voters' choice in such democracies. For them, two approaches can suffice for this. The first approach offers that: "binds of identity are strong enough to cause anxiety of out-group members and positive evaluations of in-group members, regardless of what those members do in office". The second approach states that "the distribution of goods, including political patronage and services, spoil of office and political largesse, in poor, multi-ethnic democracies primarily follows ethnic lines" (Hoffman and Long, 2013, Amao, 2023).

From the above, Horowitz (1985), cited in Hoffman and Long (2013), noted that voters may vote for candidates from their ethnic group based on common positive evaluations of members from the same ethnic group, thus votes are cast to show electoral support which is a derivative of a social group or ethnic affinity. Similarly, Dickinson and Scheve, (2006) opined that voters may tend to vote for candidates from their ethnic group in order to secure themselves against unfavourable consequences of governance spearheaded by another ethnic group. Again, it has been observed that the choice of voters during an election can be conditioned by voters' expectation of patronage and social goods from candidates from their ethnic group (Dickinson and Scheve, 2006). This notion of ethnic voting pattern and behaviour has been found to be the basis of patronage and clientelism in African politics. Patronage and clientelism, according to scholars, are strategies employed by African politicians to distribute social and public goods and services in favour of members who share the same ethnic group with them (Hoglund, 2009; Horowitz, 2001; Bratton and van de Walle, 1994). This situation in their perception is underscored by a patron-client relationship which is otherwise called patrimonialism.

Hoglund, (2009) has noted that patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism are prevalent phenomena in the politics of many post-conflict societies. Bratton and van de Walle (1994) further opined that neo-patrimonialism has turned into an important institutional character of African political systems. The patron-client-relationship has been described as a phenomenon in which the patron (godfather) provides protection, services or rewards to the client (usually individuals of lower status) who become the patron's political beneficiaries and who are in most cases of the same ethnic extraction (Horowitz, 2001). While ethnicity has been seen as a chief determinant of voting pattern and voters' choice in multi-ethnic and developing democracies, attributes of and identification with political parties has been discovered as the principal conditioning factor for the choice of voters and voting pattern in developed democracies (Lachat, 2015; McClurg and Holbrook, 2009; Johnston, 2006). These studies perceive party identification as the main determinant of voters' choice in industrialised societies.

Lachat, (2015) analysed the role of party identification in models of voting choice that combine 'spatial' and 'behavioural' factors. He observed that most models of party identification make the tacit hypothesis that the effects of party identification and spatial utilities are additive that is, voters irrespective of their identification with a political party are expected to respond in the same manner to changes in the relative issue of party decisions. He suggested an alternative assumption that: "party identifiers respond less strongly to issue factors than non-identifiers" (Lachat, 2015). This hypothesis is found to be in tandem with the notion that party identification plays a heuristic role in that it gives way to voters who identify with a political party to make choices among alternatives during voting at "cognitive cost" and "without treating all information in a systematic way" (Lachat, 2015). This can be corroborated by the opinion of Amao when he asserts 'that party identification made some politicians to vote APC in the last presidential (general) election. He argued that considering the policy implemented towards the last quarter of last administration few Nigerian would have voted for APC, the effect of those policies will ever remain green in the memory of many Nigerians'. (Amao, 2023)

Similarly, Johnston, (2006) in his study of the American case finds that party identification is a strong determinant of voting pattern and voters' choice. Findings from his study show that there is a strong correlation between partisan tendency and the choice of voters. He further argues that partisan tendency has a direct impact on values and views of voters as well as their perception of the candidate's performance in

governance. In their own study, McClurg and Holbrook (2009) investigated the relationship between the intensity of Presidential campaigns and voter behaviour. Findings from their study revealed that the behaviour of voters is more predictable in states where presidential election campaigns are more intense than in states with less intense Presidential election campaigns. This, according to them, is a strong indication that the decisions made at campaigns go a long way to influence election result through how votes are configured (McClurg and Holbrook, 2009).

Adebiyi, (2021) in his study of voting pattern and Nigeria's 2019 General Elections, findings shown that voting pattern of bloc votes for each of the two leading candidates and political parties in particular geo-political zones. Thus voting pattern in the 2019 general elections was largely influenced by psychological factor which mainly include ethnic and political party affiliation. However, this scholar failed to highly the patron-client-strategy employed by politicians in Nigeria in particular and Africa as whole.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Rational Choice Theory

This work adopted the Rational Choice Theory of Election in explaining the context of this work. The Rational Choice Theory of Election is a political economy approach towards understanding the nature and pattern of voters' choice during election in a particular democratic setting. The Theory originates from the writings of Anthony Downs (1957) in his discourse of "An Economic Theory of Democracy". Another scholar behind the postulation of this theory is Kenneth Arrow (1986).

The Rational Choice Theory of Election identifies that political behaviour and voting pattern of the electorates is a rational choice based on some indicators such as economic benefit, resources allocation, distribution of goods and services, allocation of juicy political offices and favour (Downs, 1957; Arrow, 1986). This view has been consolidated by Farber (2009). Rational Choice Theory of Election is either evaluative or non-evaluative according to Downs (1957) and Arrow (1986). Evaluative is the process of measuring and evaluating the performances of a n administration/ regimes to determine whether they deserve voters' choice or not and, in this regard, rationality is based on performance measurement. The non-evaluative is based on

clientelistic considerations such as favouritism, patronage, ethnicity, religion, regionalism and family. Lindberg & Morrison, (2008) observed that elections in African countries are mostly considered on clientelistic rationalism where the ethnic, religious and regional cleavages are given much consideration. Furthermore, Lindberg and Weghorst, (2010) identified what they called “Swing votes” in developing democracies like Nigeria where they analysed that ethnic, religious, patronage and clientele satisfaction of the voters when measured with evaluation of performances of the leaders in office can influence the outcome of an election.

The theory is directly applicable within the context of this study since voting is recognised as a rational choice based on performances and clientele considerations. The results of the past Presidential Elections in Nigeria and that of the recently concluded 2023 is a good example of how the voters give much emphasis on religious, ethnic, party affiliations and regional rationality than performances.

Criticism of Rational Choice Theory

Notwithstanding the assumptions highlighted, critics maintained that individual voters through a motley of factors that include vote-buying, feeding on election day, fake promises etc can vote for a wrong party or candidate who lacks the capacity to perform his assignment in either the legislative or executive arm of government. The concept of rationality is subjective. A programme in the manifesto of a political party that is considered rational by one voter might be seen as irrational by the other voter. Also they neglect the idea of joint or joint leadership within the neighbourhood as a factor in voting since it is an accepted dictum that no man is an Island.

The 2023 Presidential Election in Perspective

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999 till 2023, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress had always enjoyed overwhelming victories in elections, both at the state and national levels. Most of these victories were attributable to their membership sizes in relation to the other political parties, national spread and owing to the fact that the opposition parties had always been very weak in the arts of opposition politics. For the past twenty-four years, power had been shared between these two parties, sixteen years of PDP’s four by four years administration back to back and eight years of APC’s two by four years administration also back to back. The battle

for Nigeria's presidency since 2015 had always been a two-horse contest between the then two major political parties' candidates. As earlier noted, the "Muslim-Christian ticket" or the "Christian- Muslim ticket" has always been an unwritten tradition which the two major political parties unquestionably considered when fielding candidate for Presidency and Vice Presidency positions in Nigeria.(Salahu, 2017, Amao,2023).

Interestingly, the 2023 Presidential election was a clear departure from the unscripted political tradition of flying either a "Muslim-Christian ticket" or the "Christian- Muslim ticket", that was the norm among the major political parties. However, one of the three major parties, the All Progressives Congress, against all calls and warnings from religious institutions across the country ran on a "Muslim- Muslim ticket", while the other two major political parties, PDP and LP, ran "Muslim-Christian ticket" and "Christian- Muslim ticket" respectively. A development which heated the polity so much, leading to the Christian communities openly challenging the All Progressive party (APC) and its Presidential- candidate and even threatened to vote against the party in 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria. Despite the pressure from concerned party members and the Christian community for the APC as a political party and its Presidential candidate to shelve the idea of a "Muslim- Muslim ticket", he daringly declined, giving the reason that with his emergence as the APC Presidential candidate, the only option that could guarantee his party's victory in the Presidential election was to run on a "Muslim- Muslim ticket", since the majority of people from the North- Western and North-Eastern zone where he was expecting block votes are predominantly Muslims. His insistence heated the polity more than ever before, to the extent that the Christian communities openly challenged the party and its Presidential candidate and even threatened to vote against the party if it failed to changed their decision to run a Muslim-Muslim ticket.

Initially, at the beginning of the build-up to the 2023 Presidential election in 2022, it thus look like it was going to be the usual two horse race, between PDP and APC, but the circumstances surrounding the "Muslim- Muslim ticket produced a third force, the Labour Party (LP), with a Christian-Muslim ticket, since in the first instance, both the PDP and APC through their primary elections have returned all Muslims as their Presidential candidates-Atiku Abubakar and Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Consequently, the President, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), reaffirms the association's position on the "Muslim- Muslim ticket, maintaining that they took a position against the same faith ticket imbroglio under the leadership of Rev. Samson

Ayokunle and as his successor, he still stands on the same position (Okoh, 2022). The above position by Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), saw most Christian communities overtly and covertly campaigning vociferously and vigorously for the Labour Party (LP) and its presidential candidate, Peter Obi being a Christian as well as the only Christian Presidential Candidates .

Notably, the results of the 2023 election was a reflection of APC presidential candidate's claim of where he was expecting block votes and also a reflection of the Christian communities who openly challenged and threatened to vote against the party and they actually did especially in the South Western zone. The results of the 2023 Presidential election clearly showed that the APC presidential candidate got more than 60% of his votes from the Northern States of the country, which are predominantly Muslim enclaves, a clear reinforcement of his earlier claim, while the Labour Party (LP) candidate, who incidentally was the only Christian among the big three candidates, got well over 60% of his votes from the South-East and South-South and South-West geopolitical zones. Apart from the issue of the "Muslim- Muslim ticket" which heated up the Nigerian polity, there were issues generated from the introduction of the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) machines, an electronic device designed to read Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and authenticate voters, using the voters fingerprints to prove that only eligible voters can vote at a particular polling unit. The BVAS was introduced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 2021 to promote the integrity as well as the credibility of elections and prevent rigging outrightly. Apart from being a device used to register voters, it was also used to accredit voters before voting on election's day. While it also helps in scanning voters' cards, it is equally used for transmitting election results to the INEC viewing portal in real time on the day of election. It is important to note that BVAS doesn't require internet-connectivity during voting. It only requires internet connectivity when transmitting election results to the INEC portal (Arogbonlo, 2023, Amao, 2023).

Due to the already religion induced heated political atmosphere, there were serious insinuations that the challenges that came with the deployment of BVAS for the election may not allow INEC conduct a credible, a free and fair presidential election. There were accusations and counter-accusations among the three big political parties on INEC's preparedness and its status as a fair electoral umpire was continuously questioned, going into the election, but INEC was able to douse the tension with a promise of uploading election results on its portal in real time on the day of election.

With such assurance, from the electoral management body, some level of voters' confidence was restored in the electoral processes, believing their votes would eventually count. However, a few number of critics still believed that the BVAS would not work and that even if the accreditation and voting processes were smooth, the process would still be vulnerable at the point of collation. Some even believed that, even in the event of a credible, free and fair election, the period was likely to trigger some level of violence, as inflammatory language coming from supporters of the three major political parties could only make the mood more toxic.

It was so unfortunate, the election revealed that the political elite class in Nigeria lacks what was required in terms of political skills, hence the engagement of mindless campaign by the three major political parties, deploying every political, ethnic and religious antics in running down political opponents. The political elites failed to heed to an earlier warning by:

Sekoni (2014), that 'Citizens are more likely to want to hear from all the candidates how each of them plans to address the real issue: corruption, security, an economy that appears to have been nose-diving and degraded by the diminishing value of petroleum, an education and health sector in shambles, a polity being broken into two by the diversionary tactics of Christian and Islamic fanatics besotted to political power at all cost'.

Also, there were serious allegation and counter-allegations, on the part of the three major political parties over plots to use ethnicity and religion for votes hauling. However, amidst all these fear and endless, mindless campaigns, coupled with the challenges associated with the Central Bank of Nigeria's naira swap policy and scarcity of fuel in the country, INEC was able to conduct the election with a reasonable mark of success. Though there were some pockets of infractions reported by some political parties, the civil society, domestic and international observers, especially with respect to non-uploading of election results in real time as promised by INEC. It could still be said to be one of the best election that had ever been conducted in the country. This is because the deployment of BVAS in the election has to a great extent reduced ballot box snatching, rigging of election, and multiple voting, while the Central Bank of Nigeria's naira swap policy, reduced to the barest minimum the incidence of vote-buying. It is important to note that the new technology that is the introduction of BVAS has reduced the rate of electoral fraud to the barest minimum. This, interestingly, placed

the two major opposition parties almost on equal pedestal with the ruling, All Progressive Congress, (APC) to the extent that parties were losing their strongholds to opposition parties. For instance APC presidential candidate, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu lost Lagos State to a relatively new Labour party (LP) during the presidential polls, a state that he had total political control over for the past twenty-four years. However, the can be attributed to religious factor that is the issue of Muslim –Muslim ticket of the All Progressive Congress, (APC) vs Christian-Muslim ticket by Labour Party (LP). Besides, the issues of naira swap policy implemented by the last administration as well as the fuel scarcity were bad policies implemented just to favour the opposition parties (Amao, 2023).

Sequel to these, some incumbent governors also lost their senatorial elections to opposition candidates in their various states, even President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) could not win his home state, Katsina for his party, APC. It was so interesting that the ruling party, APC lost in twelve States in the presidential election, which include Kano, Kaduna and Lagos among others. The outcome of the 2023 presidential election was quite interesting. The candidate of the ruling, All Progressive Congress, (APC) Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, eventually won the election with 8,794,726 votes, despite running on a 'Muslim-Muslim Ticket' amidst warnings and threats from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Alhaji Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi of the Peoples Democratic Party and Labour Party polled 6,984,520 and 6,101,533 votes respectively. The election was certainly historic, this is the first time since the country return to democratic rule in 1999, that a party will run on a Muslim- Muslim ticket and win the election. Moreover, this was just the same joka used by Late Chief MKO Abiola in the aborted Third Republic in Nigeria in 1993 when Social Democratic Party (SDP) run a Muslim- Muslim Ticket and eventually won. However Nigeria as a country was not as divided like this then, the last administration under PMB actually Fulanised his administration. With his key appointment been only from the Fulani extractions. Analysis of data in the next section will throw more light on how religion, ethnicity and party affiliation has condition the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

To avoid analysis paralysis, it is important we present the 2023 presidential election results as released by INEC, tabulating these results according to each geo-

political zone for easy analysis. As such, each state's results shall be placed under their respective geo- political zones. It is equally important to note that, for the purpose of this study, we are chiefly interested in the results of the three major political parties, APC, PDP and LP, since it was virtually a contest among the three parties. Although, eighteen political parties participated in the election, but it is interesting to note that out of the 24,025,940 total votes cast during the election, 21,880,779 votes were shared among these three parties, APC, PDP and LP, which represents 91.1% , while 2,145,161 votes (8.9%) were shared among the other fifteen political parties (INEC, 2023).

Below is a table containing the 2023 Presidential Election's results, generated from the Independent National Electoral Commission's portal:

Table 1: 2023 Presidential Election Results of the Three Major Political Parties, APC, PDP and LP

/N	Geo- Political Zone		State	APC (Votes)	PDP(Vo	LP(Vo
				tes)	tes)	
0 1	North-West		Kano	517,341	131,716	28,513
	,,		Kadu	399,293	554,360	294,49
	na		Katsi	482,283	489,045	6,376
	na		Kebbi	248,088	285,175	10,682
	,,		Jigaw	421390	386,583	1,889
	a		Sokot	285,444	288,679	6,568
	o		Zamf	298,396	193,978	1,660
	ara		Sub-total(	2,652,235	2,329,536	350,18
	votes)					
	North-East		Bauc	316,694	426,607	27,373
	hi		Yobe	151,459	198,567	2,406
	,,		Gom	146,977	319,123	26,160
	be		Adam	182,881	417,611	105,64
	awa		Tara	135,165	189,017	146,31
	ba					

2							
	„		Born	252,282	190,521	7,205	
3		o					
	Sub-total(			1,185,438	1,741,446		
	votes)						315,10
						7	
	North-		Benu	310,468	130,081		30,637
4	Central	e					
	„		Kogi	240,751	145,104		56,217
5							
	„		Kwar	263,572	136,909		31,166
6		a					
	„		Niger	375,183	284,898		80,452
7							
	„		Plate	307,196	243,808		466,27
8		au				2	
	„		Nasa	172,922	147,093		191,36
9		rawa				1	
	„		FCT	90,902	74,194		281,71
0						7	
	Sub-total(			1,760,994	1,162,08		
	votes)					7	
							1,137,
	South-West		Lago	572,606	75,750	822	582,45
1		s				4	
	„		Oyo	449,884	182,977		99,110
2							
	„		Osun	343,945	354,366		23,283
3							
	„		Ondo	369,524	175,463		44,405
4							
	„		Ekiti	201,494	89,554		11,397
5							
	„		Ogun	341,554	123,831		85,829
6							
	Sub-total(			2,279,007	1,001,94		

	votes)				1		846,47
						8	
	South-East	Imo	66,406	30,234			360,49
7						5	
	„	Enug	4,772	15,749			428,64
8		u				0	
	„	Anam	5,111	9,036			584,62
9		bra				1	
	„	Ebon	42,402	13,503			259,73
0		yi				8	
	„	Abia	8,914	22,676			327,09
1						5	
	Sub-total(		127,605	91,198			
	votes)						1,760,
						589	
	South-South	Akwa	160,620	214,012			132,68
2		Ibom				3	
	„	Bayels	42,572	68,818			49,975
3		a					
	„	Rivers	231,591	88,468			175,071
4							
	„	Cross	130,520	95,425			179,917
5		Rivers					
	„	Edo	144,471	89,585			331,163
6							
	„	Delta	90,186	161,60			341,866
7					0		
	Sub-total(		799,960	717,908			
	votes)						1,210,67
						5	
	Total		8,794,726	6,984,520			
	(valid votes)						6,101,53
						3	

Source: Generated from the INEC database (2023)

Form Table 1, it is clear that the 2023 presidential election was a tight contest between APC, PDP and LP. This was because out of the 24,025,940 total valid votes cast during the election, 21,880,779 votes were shared among these three political

parties, APC, PDP and LP, which represents 91% while 2,145,161 votes (9%) were shared among the fifteen other political parties in the contest. APC had 8,794,726 votes, and PDP had 6,984,520 votes, while LP had 6,101,533 votes. Although, for every contest, there must be a winner, however this study is not really interested in which party wins or loses in the election. The main trust of our analysis is to show the voting pattern and how each of the three major candidates performs in terms of electoral outcomes in each of the six geo-political zones, juxtaposing the outcomes with the ethnicity, party affiliation and religion distribution pattern of each of these six- geo-political zones. As shown in Table 1, the North- West geo-political zone is made up of seven states, all predominantly Muslim states. Table 1 also shows that this same geo-political zone, which is predominantly a Muslim region, recorded a total of 5,331,953 votes out of the 21,880,779 votes shared among these three political parties. It is interesting to note that out of this 5,331,953 votes, APC's candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a Muslim, from the South-West geo-political zone polled 2,652,235 votes, 49.7% of the votes. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, also a Muslim from the North-East geo-political zone polled 2,329,536 (43.7%) of the votes, while Peter Obi of the Labour Party, a Christian from the South-East geo-political zone got just 350,182 votes, (6.6%) across the seven states that made up the North-West geo-political zone. It should be noted that between the two Muslim candidates of the APC and PDP, is 93.4% of the votes, which translate to 4,981,771 out of 5,331,953 votes.

The situation was not different in the North-East. Out of the 3,241,991 votes recorded by the three parties in the Presidential election, 2,926,884 (90.3%) votes went to the two Muslim candidates of APC and PDP, while 315,107 (9.7%) votes was recorded for Peter Obi. The above presented data suggests that in the two predominantly Muslim geo-political zones in the country, the North-West and North-East, the APC and PDP Muslim candidates polled 8,573,944 votes, 92.8% of 9,239,233 votes for the three candidates in the two geo-political zones. Peter Obi of the Labour party managed to get 665,289 votes, 7.2% of votes from the two zones. By implication, the data suggests that most people from these two geo-political zones, who are predominantly Muslims voted for either the APC or PDP candidates, who are Muslims, while some of the very few Christians assumedly voted for the LP candidate, Peter Obi, who got 7.2% of votes from the two zones

On the contrary, the reverse is the case, looking at the data recorded in terms of INEC results in the same election from the South-South and the South-East geo-

political zones. Table 1 reveals that in all the five states that make-up the South-East, predominantly Christian states, the APC candidate, a Muslim, scored 6.4% of the total votes for the three candidates in those five states, while the PDP candidate, also a Muslim had 4.6% of the votes.(127,605 and 91,198 votes for APC and PDP respectively, out of a total of 1,979,392 votes accruable to the three candidates). However, an overwhelming victory was recorded in the same South-East geo-political zone by Peter Obi of the Labour party, of the Christian faith, who polled 1,760,589 votes, 89% of the 1,979,392 votes casted for the three candidates in that zone. Going into the South-South, also a predominantly Christian region, the Labour party's candidate, a Christian, polled an overwhelming 1,210,675 votes,; while APC and PDP candidates, Muslims, polled 799,960 and 717908 votes respectively. Data from both the South-South and South-East reveals that LP candidate got 63.1% of votes, while APC and PDP candidates polled 19.7% and 17.2% respectively from these two predominantly Christian regions. In a similar vein, the APC's candidate, a Muslim, got 63.5% of his total votes of 8,794,726 votes from the Northern states, predominantly Muslim regions in the country.

It is equally interesting to note that the battle ground in terms of contest among the three political parties was the North-Central, In this geo-political zone, the three candidates of the APC, PDP and LP got over one million votes each (APC- 1,760,994, PDP- 1,162,087, LP- 1,137,822), which could be attributed to the almost equal mix of Christians and Muslims in terms of distribution, as presented in table 2. It is clear that no single religion, according to the information on the table, predominates in this zone, hence the slight victory witnessed by the APC candidate. It is also clear from the above analysis that certain revelations were made, which seemingly appear uncontroverted. It was noted that the geo-political zone, where there was stiff contest between the three major political parties, PDP, APC and LP, is that geo-political zones where we have almost an equal mix of Christians and Muslims, the North-Central.

The South West States, in Lagos State, considering the results obtained by the three major political parties, both religion and ethnicity did not played a significant influence for the APC Presidential candidates where as the two factors played prominent role in favour of LP Presidential candidate. Moreover, the Christian Ibo's and the Christian Yoruba's were convinced to vote against APC Presidential candidates as a result of the Muslim-Muslim ticket used by the party despite serious antagonism towards such move. The five States in South-Western Nigeria, ethnicity played a

prominent role in favour of APC Presidential candidates. Whereas, religion did not but the sophistication and political enlightenments of the South-Westerners played prominent role in favour of Asiwaju Ahmed Bola Tinubu (Jagaban Borgu) Available data suggest that South-Western States has more Christian than Muslim population, religion was not a serious factor in South Western Nigeria. (Amao, 2023)

Table 2. *Results of 2023 Presidential Election by Main Political Parties across the Six-Geo-Political-Zones*

<i>Geo-Political Zones</i>	<i>APC</i>	<i>PDP</i>	<i>LP</i>
North-Central	1,760,994	1,162,087	1,137,822
North-East	1,185,438	1,741,446	315,107
North-West	2,652,235	2,329,536	350,182
South-East	127,605	91,198	1,760,589
South-South	799,960	717,908	1,210,675
South-West	2,279,007	1,001,941	846,478
Total	8,805,239	7,044,116	5,620,853

Source: Computed by the Author from INEC Dataset, 2023.

In contemporary Nigeria, six zones have been defined. These are South East, South West, South-South, North East, North West, and North Central. From the historical perspective, the leading party in the South West had never occupied the centre. They were always in opposition. However, following the alignment of the core North and the South West, the APC which they both followed scored. Therefore APC scored 2,279,007 votes. It is important to note that the APC Candidate is from this zone thus ethnicity and tribalism comes to play here. While PDP scored 1,001,941 votes, and LP scored 846,478 votes. This close margin can be attributed to the strong financial strength of the incumbent APC. Moreover, this can be attributed to the fact that the President is from the South West precisely Lagos State. The PDP on the other hand, had this score in South West 2,329,536, this can be attributed to the bad governance of the last administration of PMB and simply because the PDP scored higher than the APC in South West. However, the LP scored 350,182 this can be attributed to the fact that the APC failed to deliver on his electioneering promises to the people, therefore, people were looking for an alternative to both PDP and APC.

In the South-south the APC polled a total sum 799,960,votes this can be largely attributed to alliance by leadership of the party and former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, It is important to note that the zone was a PDP dominated zone. Besides, the zone was strongly committed to Southern Presidency. Moreover, the PDP polled a total sum of 717,908 votes and this figure notwithstanding could have been more than this but for the alliance between the APC and former President Jonathan. Not only that, the running mate to Alhaji Atiku Abubakar was from this zone specifically Edo State, and above all, religion also played a prominent role or strong determinant in this regard. While the LP, polled a whooping sum of 1,210,675 votes could be attributed to their believe in the Southern Presidency as well as religion cum ethnicity played a significant role in the ability of the party to have such a surprising results from the region as well as the popularity of Peter Obi from Anambra State and a former Governor of the State. They equally believed in third force as an alternative to the two leading political parties in the country who had earlier failed the people.

Finally in the South- East, APC polled a total sum of 127,605 votes, this can attributed to so many factors like the security challenge and detainment of Nnamdi Kanu by former President Muhammadu Buhari,(PMB) Not only that, religion was a serious determinant, as well as ethnicity, the little votes was as a results of the party structure in zone. Besides, the South East was known to be a PDP zone. Furthermore the PDP, polled the sum 91,198, votes this was largely reduced because Alhaji Atiku Abubakar failed to support the Southern Presidency as well rotational presidency as agreed by the party. Not only that, the refusal of the national chairman of the PDP Chief Iyorchia Ayu to honour the agreement to resign if the Presidential candidate emerged from the Northern Nigeria. This internal party crisis was the last straw that breaks the camel back. Consequent upon this the G5 governors opposed the decision of the National Chairman of the PDP and work against the party at the presidential election and even boycotted the Presidential Campaign. Atiku Abubakar was expected to have give a supportive hand to his former running mate and failure to honour the agreement reached by the party big-whips instead he picked his running mates from Edo State Patrick Okowa a former Governor of Edo State. Finally, the LP polled a whooping sum 1,760,589 votes. This reason or the determinant of this success can be attributed to ethnicity, religion, and the zone was the home base of the presidential candidates of party, in person of Peter Obi a former governor of Anambra State and former running mate to Alhaji Abubakar Atiku in 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. Above all was

the believed in the Southern presidency and that the party present an alternative platform for Nigerians and the people of that geo-political zones.

Table 3: *Voting Pattern & Distribution of Voters' in the Six Geo-Political Zones.*

1. Table 2: Religion Distribution of the Six Geo-Political Zones.

2. S/N	3. Geo-Political Zone	4. Number of State	5. Description of Religion Distribution
6. 1	7. North-West	8. 7	9. Predominantly Muslim(Some communities in Kadunastate have Christian majorities)
10. 2	11. North-East	12. 6	13. Predominantly Muslim (In Taraba state, Christians holds a slight majority)
14. 3	15. North-Central	16. 6	17. Almost equal mix of Christians and Muslims(none ofthe two predominates)
18. 4	19. South-West	20. 6	21. Almost equal mix of Christians and Muslims(none ofthe two predominates)
22. 5	23. South-East	24. 5	25. Predominantly Christian (Muslims are insignificantly few in this region)
26. 6	27. South-South	28. 6	29. Predominantly Christian (Edo has a number of communities with Muslim majorities)

Source: Derived from PEW's 2011, PRB's 2005 Survey Reports and the Researcher's field study. Note that there are more Christians in the North-West and North-East than there are Muslims in the South- East and South-South geo-political zones.

Concerning the result that was turned in from the North West which showed huge votes for APCs Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, it can be explained from the premise of the Muslim-Muslim ticket that accounted for that is nature of results as well as level of the political consciousness of the Northerners cum the level of support by the Governors from that geo-political zones. Concerning the North West the APC polled a total 2,652,235 votes, this was equally as a results of the religious consideration and support for the APC government. The PDP polled the sum of 2,329,536, votes which could also be attributed to the fact that Atiku Abubakar was also of the Hausa-Fulani extraction. Finally, the LP also polled a meager sum of 350,182 votes in the region which could also attributed to the running mate Baba Ahmad Datti who was also an Hausa–Fulani extraction accounted for the votes recorded.

In the North East, APC recorded the sum of 1,185,438 votes this figure can be as result of the fact that the running mate to Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu in person of

Senator Kashim Shetima was from the North East geo-political zone and Religion plays a prominent role as well as his performance while serving as the governor of Bornu State. However, the reduction in this figure can be deduced from the fact that the zone was the home base of the PDP candidate. However, the PDP polled a total vote of 1,741,446, in the region. The reason for this huge or high score can linked the above reason given concerning the PDP candidate was from Adamawa State. Finally, the LP also recorded a meager sum of 315,107 votes and Christianity as a religion also help in this regard, since State like Gombe, the Christians are in the majority. In the North Central, the APC polled a total of 1,760,994 votes, which was predominantly an APC state majority are Muslims from the zones. While the PDP polled a total sum of 1,162,087 votes which was very competing with the APC, However, the LP polled a total vote of 1,137,822 which was equally challenging to the PDP votes from the region.

The Implications of These Voting Patterns

The country may not have the right leadership should the pattern either ethnicity or religion the country would still be swimming in the leadership problem. Economic problem would arise as a result of the emergence of poor leader; political problem would equally arise as a result of ethnic rivalry among the people, socio-cultural problem as a result of different socio-cultural background. The major implication of this voting pattern is that it will affect Nigerian unity and further disintegrate us as people, and we do not see ourselves as one nation rather as the ethnic grouping from different background. Despite all effort at unifying the country yet, we voted along our ethnic and religious lines except some collaboration between the political actors across ethnic lines e.g. APC stalwarts across Nigeria. Sequel to this, it will equally affect our psychic as a country and always having the feelings that Nigeria is not real but only our ethnic groupings was real. Moreover, this is what we refer to as centri-fugal politics, where we considered our ethnic origin as real and Nigeria at the centre as ephemeral. It will also increase the feeling of stealing at the centre to be taken back to our ethnic domains and shared to our kits and kins. That was why corruption was very rampart and prevalent in Nigeria. The voting pattern will often leads to creation of negative images of the country. Thus internationally, Nigeria would be portrailed negatively politically, culturally, and socially. The voting pattern will leads to emergence of mediocre as political leaders in the country, since the ethnic origin that is most populous might produce the President. Not only that, it can bring about the emergence of ethnically incline leader in the country. Pen ultimately, the voting pattern can brings bout

institutionalisation of poor leaders and thus breeds bad leaders. Above all, the administration faces legitimacy crisis.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding, that is 2023 presidential election in Nigeria falls below international standard of electoral integrity. The 2023 presidential elections betrayed some lapses that relegated its integrity, lowered the people's confidence in the process and belayed the responsibility it commanded among the domestic and international observers and the citizens. Worse, still, the legitimacy of the government was put to test by observers, commentators and scholars alike, that the federal government was altercating words on the integrity of the 2023 Presidential election after the final reports of EU, EOM was released. The matter is still at the Election Petition Tribunal (EPT). The paper also conclude that for Nigeria to improve her electoral integrity an impartial election management body should be man by leaders with high personal integrity and their selection process should be devoid of politics. As long as the Chairman of INEC has been appointed by the President subject to the ratification of the senate, we would continue to have electoral integrity issue since there a popular saying that whoever pays the piper dictates the tune.

From the foregoing analysis, based on the electoral outcomes as presented above it is evidently clear that the 2023 Presidential election presents the major determinants of the Nigerian voting patter and voting behaviour which ranges from religion, ethnicity, Party affiliation in Politics, incumbency factor, vote buying, etc in Nigeria. This paper in clear terms, based on the outcome of our analysis, has been able to establish and affirms the 2023 Presidential Elections was not totally different from the previous voting pattern

Based on the findings, that is the vote buying still played significant role in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria despite the new naira design policy of the CBN and the federal government. Money was used in buying cash from various outlets and business traders who received cash on daily basis, vote buying has come to stay in electoral politics of Nigeria.

The performance of INEC in the last 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria, leave much to be desire as public confidence on INEC was completely eroded. This can

be supported by volume of petition wrote against INEC, APC Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu. The major kudos area to INEC was on her ability to control unnecessary proliferation of the political party in Nigeria by deregistering some parties.

For the nation to witness any meaningful development, this paper recommends that there is the need to enhance the capacity of electoral staff by revising procedure and subsequent training of the election supervisors, collation officer and adhoc polling staff, addressing impartial the use of technologies counting procedure and the completion or cancellation of polling units results and collation forms. Secondly, ensure transparency and allow for public scrutiny of election technologies by mandatory in law timely disclosure of test and audit results, together with protocols, guidelines, methodology of implementation, procurements, and functionality details.

Thirdly, there is the need for a proper reliability test with professionals and technological experts so as to build the confidence in the electoral process.

Fourthly, INEC needs to train vigorously the adhoc staff to know the technicalities involved in the use of the gargets introduced in election recently. Fifthly, INEC should standardise her election risk management to improve the citizen confidence in the nearest future. Pen ultimately, INEC also need technical expert to protect their data and guide against cyber attacks. Finally, proper network coverage should be sought by INEC to prevent non-upload of election results.

The Nigerian electorates need to vote political parties with a very good ideology with a serious minded candidate who must demonstrated some level of commitment to equality, promote Nigerian unity and improve the nose-diving economy. Nigerian politicians should imbibe the genuine democratic culture and relegates their selfish interest for the national interest and that politics should not be taken as a do or die affairs. There is the need for the government to strengthened the National Orientation Agency, (NOA), Federal and States' Ministries of Information; and fund relevant Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in order to achieve this goal. The research also recommends that there is a need for massive enlightenment among the electorates towards choice of leaders based on performance and not sentiments. The paper concluded that the determinant to imbibe for re-electing same party into power should be the performance of incumbent party should be a yardstick.

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