

## **SOCIOECONOMIC CUM POLITICAL IMPACT OF ETHNIC CLEAVAGES AND VOTERS' SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IN 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

**AMAKA PQ UZODINMA,**

*Peacebuilding Zonal Office, Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution IPCR,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, South East, Federal Secretariat, Awka, Anambra State  
[priscaamaka444@hotmail.com](mailto:priscaamaka444@hotmail.com); Tel No: +2348037272277*

**CHIEMERIE STEPHEN ODILI**

*Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka  
[odilistephen2019@gmail.com](mailto:odilistephen2019@gmail.com); Tel No: +2349033156932*

**NDUBUISI ISAAC\***

*Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka  
[ndubuisi.isaac@unn.edu.ng](mailto:ndubuisi.isaac@unn.edu.ng); Tel No: +2348035450930 (Corres. Author)*

### **ABSTRACT**

Nigeria is a pluralistic society with various ethnic and religious groups competing not just for political resources, but also for the right to assert their individual identities. This dynamic frequently plunges the country into an apparent insurmountable political quagmire, endangering the collective survival of its various groups and fueling their struggle for political dominance. In this context, the study looks at how ethnic cleavages affect voters' support for presidential candidates in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The study employs a documentary methodology, with data mostly acquired from secondary sources and examined for substantive content. Social Identity Theory provides a theoretical framework for a thorough evaluation of the subject matter. The study finds that the bloc votes received by candidates from their respective geopolitical zones were significantly influenced by voters' identification with specific ethnic or religious affiliations. Based on these findings, the paper makes several recommendations, including the need for political leaders to prioritize nation-building. Most importantly, national interest should take precedence over personal ambition and ethnic chauvinism.

**Keywords:** Ethnic cleavages, Ethnicity, 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

**JEL Code:** D72

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The terms ethnicity, ethnic groups, and ethnic identity were originally used in anthropology to specify populations bound together by shared cultural attributes such as language, customs, and traditions (Jonah & Pat, 2004). Rather than referring to a particular origin, the terms have evolved due to the accrual of ideas about identity and social belonging. In Nigeria, the onset of ethnic cleavages is traceable to colonial policy that formalized and institutionalized ethnicity. These colonial policies encouraged segregation and yielded uneven relationships among groups, particularly the Hausa, Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba, whose political competition was anchored by ethnic mobilization (Ukiwo, 2005). Over time, ethnicity and identity had become political power tools used by elites, public institutions, and civic actors to coordinate power and shape voter behavior (Nnoli, 1978; McCauley, 2016).

This colonial heritage continues to be seen in the politics of Nigeria today, where ethnic, religious, and regional identity heavily influences voter preference. The 2023 presidential election provided a stark example of this tendency, as each of the four major candidates—

Ahmed Bola Tinubu of the APC, Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, Peter Obi of the Labour Party, and Rabiu Kwankwaso of the NNPP—represented distinct ethnic groups. Voters voted primarily along ethnic lines, illustrating the difficulties of establishing a shared national identity. The quest for political power and control over state resources exacerbates ethnic divisions while undermining national politics. While zoning and rotation of power deals were meant to reduce ethnic tension, their impact has been eroded. This was evident when the PDP abandoned its zoning policy in 2023, paving the way for the emergence of another northern Muslim aspirant after the long-time occupation of the presidency by a candidate from the same region.

The implications of such ethnic cleavages extend beyond the election cycle. Voting behavior based on ethnic identity engenders exclusion, reduces policy focus on national development, and reduces social cohesion. Politicization of ethnic strongholds for support creates a winner-takes-all mindset, where winning politicians are inclined to prioritize the interests of their own ethnic group above the broader national interest. This pattern promotes systemic inequality and patron-client form of governance. Allocation of resources after elections also leans towards these ethnic inclinations, where appointments and development initiatives disproportionately benefit the ruling ethnic group. These inclinations detract from institutional trust and perpetuate continued feelings of exclusion in minority groups. Despite the increased body of literature on ethnic politics in Nigeria, there is little analysis of how ethnicity-based electoral decisions ultimately translate into tangible governance outcomes and widen long-term socio-political disparities.

In light of this, it is crucial to examine critically the role of ethnic cleavages in shaping voter alignments in the 2023 general elections. Nigerian ethnic politics continues to be an expression of long-standing frustrations within communities that perceive political exclusion. This has underpinned not just skewed voting behavior but also uneven access to national resources and opportunities. Although historians and theorists have made significant contributions to understanding the history and theory of ethnic cleavages, little effort has been directed towards empirically exploring how ethnicity affects voters' decisions in specific election periods. This study attempts to fill that void by examining how ethnic identities influenced voting choices in the presidential election of 2023. To do this, the study has been structured into six significant sections, beginning with the introduction and conceptual framework, passing through theoretical debates, analytical findings, and policy implications.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 CONCEPTUAL ELUCIDATION**

**Ethnic Cleavages:** Ethnic Cleavages, in general, refers to the use of personal or group identities, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality, to further political goals (Saharso, 1989). In light of the growing polarization and division of societies, it has grown to be a powerful force in modern politics everywhere (Gbadebo, 2023). According to the instrumentalist, ethnic cleavages/identity is a tactic for obtaining more secular goals (Nnoli, 1995; Ibeanu, 2000). The reason is that ethnic identity depends on a person's affiliation to the community that is advantageous to them politically and economically. Therefore, rather than focusing on issues that affect all community members, it can be regarded as the politics of a group-based movement that claims to demand the interests and identity of a certain group (Wonah, 2017, p. 3-5).

**Ethnicity:** Conceptually, ethnicity is a social phenomenon linked to interactions between people who belong to social formations that are characterized by having a community border (Nnoli, 1978). The most significant aspect of a community is its culture, notably its language. However, ethnic groups are not always homogeneous culturally speaking, as social formations.

The behaviour and content of ethnicity are contradictory. There are specific characteristics of ethnicity that can be seen in the interactions between the various ethnic groups within a given political system.

## **2.2 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

The 2023 General Elections marked an important stage in Nigeria's democratic journey, ushering in a new template of administration at both the national and state levels (Amao, 2020; Augustus-Daddie et al., 2024). As noted by Olijì (2023), these elections recorded a large number of voters on February 25 and March 18, 2023, in which Nigerians elected a new President, National Assembly members, 28 State Governors, and members to all 36 State Houses of Assembly. This is the seventh successive general election since 1999, when democracy came back to power, or 23 years of uninterrupted democratic rule—the longest in the history of Nigeria (DII, 2023). Despite this democratic milestone, analysis of the 2023 elections by the majority of domestic and foreign observation organizations has been mixed. While some observers highlighted incremental progress, suggesting electoral outcomes have changed from being poor to increasingly acceptable, others grumbled against continuing electoral transparency and integrity shortcomings. These differing evaluations mirror Nigeria's electoral process ongoing issues as the country deepens democracy diverging from acceptable democratic standards (Omotayo, 2023; Agbakoba, 2023).

## **2.3 THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

Theoretically, the study of ethnic cleavages and regional politics in Nigeria highlights the primary function of ethnicity in shaping socio-political behaviour, particularly in voting. Scholars such as Nnoli (1998) advance the perspective that ethnicity provides individuals with identity, security, and communal solidarity, thereby emerging as an organizing factor in determining political affiliation and preference. These ethnic solidarities are deeply entrenched in regionalism, as specific ethnic groups are physically grouped together, identity politics automatically gain support. Ojo (2014) and Ojo and Bello (2022) explain how colonial administrative decisions deepened ethnic divisions and regional cleavages that have persisted into the post-colonial democratic era. Such historical structuration has produced systemic identity-based fractures that continue to influence voter decisions. Ethnic cleavages have also contributed to the genesis and survival of political parties, particularly during Nigeria's first and second republics, when parties like the NCNC, AG, and NPC closely represented the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups, respectively (Osadolor, 2000; Nnoli, 1980). The integration of Northern and Southern protectorates without socio-political integration has led to extensive cleavages, which are still experienced today, informing voter choices based on ethnic affiliation rather than policy consideration. While the power of literature is significant, most theoretical paradigms concentrate on historical and structural origins without applying theoretical frameworks to contemporary electoral outcomes, such as the 2023 general election. This constitutes a gap that this research aims to fill.

## **2.4 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

Empirical evidence validate the impact of ethnic identification on voting behavior in Nigeria, which has been dubbed a "ethnic census" (Wiwoleku, 2020). Bratton and Van de Walle (1997), Ferree (2004, 2008), and Lindberg et al. (2008) have all proven that familial descent, religion, and ethnicity greatly influence voter affiliation, a conclusion comparable to Erdmann's (2007) study of party identification and voter loyalty. Historical data from Nigeria's elections, such as the 1979, 1983, and 2011 presidential elections, reveal recurring patterns of ethnically related voting, where political parties perform best in areas dominated by their ethnic base (Nwolise, 2007; Okpu, 1989). For instance, Goodluck Jonathan achieved the majority of his victories in

the southern states, with very little support in the North during the 2011 election (Oladeji, 2015). These trends affirm the continued importance of ethnic identity in determining election outcomes. Furthermore, case studies from Anambra State regarding Biafra-voter intimidation (Nwangwu, 2018; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2018) illustrate how ethnic tensions can even lead to election boycotts, thereby affecting voter turnout and representation. Despite these strong findings, few empirical studies have been performed to determine the extent to which ethnic divisions influenced voter support for presidential candidates in the 2023 general elections. This paucity of recent empirical work presents a major gap in understanding the dynamic alterations in voting along ethnic lines in modern Nigeria—the theme of this study.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The research draws on the Social Identity Theory approach, which consists of two different strands: the foundational theory as developed by Tajfel (1981) and Tajfel and Turner (1979), labeled Social Identity Theory, and a derivative strand referred to as Self-Categorization Theory and developed by Turner and colleagues (Turner et al., 1987). Both theories emphasize that social identity is built based on cognitive and motivational factors. Turner et al. (1987) term this motivation as the inclination of human beings to build their in-group positively compared to out-groups, in order to establish a positive social identity (p. 42). In Tajfel's perspective (1981), an individual's identity is significantly derived from his or her feeling of belonging to a given group and the emotional solidarity attached to the membership of the group. Furthermore, Tajfel posits that group membership is a direct correlation with self-esteem and hypothesized that individuals who have a positive attitude toward their membership in a group would have greater self-esteem (Phinney, 1992; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997). Social Identity Theory is grounded in fundamental principles of human social behaviour. First, it presumes that individuals automatically group themselves and others into social categories in accordance with shared attributes such as ethnicity, nationality, or organizational affiliation. Second, the theory posits that group membership significantly contributes to a person's sense of self, enabling them to feel part of a group, develop an identity, and possess self-esteem. Such group identifications play a crucial role in shaping social attitudes and behaviour, especially where competition or perceived group disparity exists. Third, the theory holds that people constantly compare their in-group and out-groups, often favouring the in-group to boost their self-esteem and preserve a positive social identity. These theoretical notions collectively reveal how group affiliation influences people's cognitive frames, attitudes, and behavioural responses within social contexts, thus clarifying phenomena such as in-group preference and out-group bias, and intergroup dynamics. In succinct terms, if the premises of Social Identity Theory are adept at elucidating the processes of group formation and membership, they consequently possess the capacity to elucidate the mechanisms of political functioning.

In the plural social order of Nigeria, the application of Social Identity Theory is particularly useful in considering patterns of group behaviour and political affiliation. Nigeria is made up of a wide variety of ethnic communities, the majority of which have at some point competed for political dominance, possession of resources, and preservation of distinct cultural identity. These forces have been supplemented by the heritage of colonial administrative strategies, best represented by indirect rule and ethnic partition, that regularized cleavages and fostered suspicion among groups (Nnoli, 1978). The unification of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914—traditionally seen as a forced and abrupt federation—created what has long been described as a "marriage of convenience," reinforcing fears of domination and marginalization among constituent groups. As such, various groups of people tried to secure their independence and security by pulling back into private ethnic enclaves, a process correctly described as

retreating into "ethnic cocoons" (Adekunle, 2023). Retreating does help to sustain the persistent relevance of social identity processes in the explanation of political conduct and ethnic mobilization in contemporary Nigeria. The tribalization of political parties serves as a manifestation of this phenomenon. This aligns with our findings, which assert that the bloc votes garnered by candidates from each candidate's geopolitical zone were significantly shaped by their affiliation with a particular ethnic or religious group. This elucidates the historical voting patterns across geopolitical zones, as evidenced by voters' longstanding allegiance to their respective ethno-religious and local leaders in the 2023 Presidential Election. For instance, the bloc votes received by the candidates from each candidate's geopolitical zone were markedly influenced by their identification with a specific ethnic group, as evidenced in the electoral results. Consequently, the outcomes of the election foreshadow the potential for future ethnic bloc voting (Tola, 2023; Ndubisi, 2023).

This reality accentuates the notion that political parties, by their establishment and objectives, evolve into instruments of division, as politicians exploit them as platforms to sway voters across the six geopolitical zones, rather than fulfilling the traditional function of aggregating interests for national cohesion. The preceding examples have been presented to illustrate how the actions of one group concerning others within a pluralistic society can elucidate the functioning of a political system, particularly concerning how regional politics and the issues of ethnic cleavages and identity influence voter preferences for Presidential candidates in the 2023 General Election.

### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The study utilizes a non-experimental research design, i.e., an ex-post facto design by retrospective factor analysis of documentary records. As defined by Ernest and Harriet (2018), ex-post facto design, also referred to as "after-the-fact" research, entails observation of causal relationships by studying independent and dependent variables following the occurrence of events, and the data concerned are already on hand. Here, hypotheses are being tested by observing the independent and dependent variables at the same time, keeping in mind that any effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable happened before the research. Echoing the same opinion, Kerlinger (1977, p. 41) defines ex-post facto design as a descriptive type of study wherein the researcher begins with the observation of a dependent variable and traces the independent variable backwards to determine its potential effect. This methodological predisposition is parallel to the current study's objective of observing prevailing trends and influences rather than manipulating variables under an experimental environment.

As far as data collection is concerned, research employs the documentary approach, which is the use of available documents—both governmental and personal—as facts of experience (Nworgu, 2006). Consequently, the research rests on secondary data, such as books, scholarly journals, policy documents, and a range of online and offline media that offer information regarding the subject matter. For data analysis, the study employs a qualitative descriptive analytic method, which is appropriate for analyzing human behavior in a non-statistical and normative setting. This method, argues Ezeibe (2015), is particularly relevant to research employing the use of interpretive conclusions on social phenomena over time. Due to the application of secondary data, thematic summarization technique was applied to the analysis, which facilitated structured identification and display of key findings, trends, and conceptual thoughts in an understandable and compact manner.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **4.1 HOW ETHNIC CLEAVAGES AND REGIONAL POLITICS INDUCED VOTERS SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IN THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria is by far the largest country in the world, with ethnic and religious identities evenly split between Christians and Muslims (Wonah, 2017). The country has historically been divided along ethnic, religious, and regional lines during General Elections (Paden, 2023). This is due to the southeast and south-south being largely Igbo, and other ethnic minorities are Christian, and the far northern states being predominantly Hausa-Fulani (Muslim). The north-central and south-western states, which are ethnically, religiously diverse, are likewise diverse politically. This suggests that there is a link between ethnic identities and voting behaviour. The personalities and charisma of the candidates, regional, ethnic, and religious party allegiances, ideological considerations of the electorate, party platforms, candidate debates, the media's dominance and influence, partisanship, incumbency, and other factors, including the "nature of the times," all had an impact on voters' support for a Presidential candidate in Nigeria's General Elections.

Unsurprisingly, ethnic cleavages, religion, and regionalism play a larger role in Nigerian elections than actual problems (Paden, 2023). Although Nigeria's presidential contests have often been two-horse races since the transition elections in 1999 that brought about the current administration, the 2023 contest breaks dramatically from history by producing four primary contenders. 18 candidates contested the Presidential Election, with four or five of them holding the lead. The four main candidates are Dr. Rabiun Kwankwanso of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), Mr. Peter Obi of the Labour Party, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). (Daily Trust, 2023, Nov. 27).

The aforementioned is linked to Nigeria's lack of a cohesive national identity, as well as the overall reliance on ethnicity, religion, and regionalism for political allegiance, which has historically contributed to election violence and instability. For example, the four main candidates for the 2023 presidential election are from the Yoruba, Fulani, Igbo, and Hausa ethnic groups, respectively: Ahmed Bola Tinubu of the APC, Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, Peter Obi of the LP, and Rabiun Kwankwaso of the NNPP. This is because, in their "home" geopolitical zones, where they are expected to outperform their opponents, candidates are under pressure from both state and non-state actors, whereas opposing party members are not. Ethnicity has had a significant impact on Nigeria's political history, as the country is predominantly divided along ethnic lines (Idayat, 2023).

Nigeria's identity politics have also been influenced by regionalism. The nation is divided into six geopolitical zones, each with a distinct history and personality. Consequently, politicians now frequently view it as an opportunity to garner support by appealing to voters' regional sympathies while making promises to advance the interests of their regions during their tenure (Alabi et al., 2023). However, efforts have been made to relieve these worries, with the political elite employing strategies such as power rotation and zoning to promote minority inclusion. Nevertheless, ahead of the 2023 presidential elections, the PDP decided to open its ticket, which was eventually won by another northern Muslim, after eight years of a northern Muslim holding the presidency, because candidates are expected to outperform their opponents in their "home" geopolitical zones, while opposition party members face repression from state and non-state actors. As a result, the informal rules governing zoning and power rotation were disregarded.

This explained the historical voting patterns throughout geopolitical zones as seen by voters' historical allegiance to their respective ethno-religious and local leaders in the 2023 Presidential Election. For example, the North West has 22, 255, 562 registered voters, whereas

the North Central has 15, 363, 731, the South South has 14, 440, 714, the South East has 10, 907, 606, the North East has 12, 542, 427, and the South West has 17, 958, 966. These figures appear to give the North West and the South West an electoral edge. As a result, it appears that parties and candidates having a strong presence in either of the two regions will have a better chance of winning the election (Adekunle, 2023). This fact emphasizes the rationale behind the elite inducement of voters to vote for candidates based on their ethnic, religious, and regional affiliations, as illustrated by the outcome of the 2023 presidential election presented in the table below.

**Table 1: Ethnic-Based Voting in Support of the Four Leading Presidential Candidates across Geo-political Zones in 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria**

**ZONE A: SOUTH-EAST**

S/N	States	Political parties/ votes casted						
1	Abia	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP	Total votes cast	Percentage	Winner
		8,914	22,676	327,095	1,239	2.2 million	8.7%	LP
2	Anambra	5,111	9,036	584,621	1,967			LP
3	Ebonyi	42,402	13,503	259,738	1,661			LP
4	Enugu	4,772	15,749	428,640	1,808			LP
5	Imo	66,406	30,234	360,495	1,552			LP

**ZONE B: SOUTH-WEST**

S/N	States	Political parties						
1	Ekiti	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP	Total votes cast	Percentage	Winner
		201,494	89,554	11,397	264	4.25 million	16.3%	APC
2	Ogun	341,544	123,831	85,829	2,200			APC
3	Ondo	369,924	115,463	4,405	930			APC
4	Oyo	449,884	182,977	99,100	4,095			APC
5	Osun	343,945	354,366	23,283	713			PDP
6	Lagos	572,606	75,750	582,454	8,442			LP

**ZONE C: SOUTH-SOUTH**

S/N	States	Political parties						
1	AkwaiBom	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP	Total votes cast	Percentage	Winner
		160,620	214,012	132,683	7,796	2.85 million	11%	PDP
2	Bayelsa	42,572	6,818	49,975	540			LP
3	Edo	144,471	89,585	331,163	2,743			LP
4	Delta	90,183	161,600	341,866	3,122			LP

5	Cross River	130,520	95,425	179,917	1,644			LP
6	Rivers	231,591	88,468	175,071	1,322			APC

#### ZONE D: NORTH-EAST

S/N	States	Political parties						
1	Adamawa	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP	Total votes cast	Percentage	Winner
		182,881	417,611	105,648	8,006	3.4million	13.2%	PDP
2	Bauchi	316,694	426,607	27,373	72,103			PDP
3	Taraba	135,165	189,017	146,315	12,818			PDP
4	Sokoto	285,444	288,679	6,568	1,300			PDP
5	Yobe	151,459	198,567	2,406	18,270			PDP
6	Borno	252,282	190,921	7,205	4,626			APC

#### ZONE E: NORTH-WEST

S/N	States	Political parties						
1	Kano	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP	Total votes cast	Percentage	Winner
		517,341	131,716	28,513	997,279	6.6million	26.5%	NNPP
2	Gombe	146,977	319,123	26,160	10,520			PDP
3	Kaduna	399,293	554,360	294,494	92,969			PDP
4	Kastina	482,283	489,045	6,376	69,386			PDP
5	Kebbi	248,088	285,175	10,682	5,038			PDP
6	Jigawa	421,390	386,587	1,889	98,234			APC
7	Zamfara	298,396	193,978	1,660	4,044			APC

#### ZONE F: NORTH-CENTRAL

S/N	States	Political parties						
1	Benue	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP	Total votes cast	Percentage	Winner
		310,468	130,081	308,372	4,740	4.5million	17.2%	APC
2	Kogi	240,751	145,104	56,217	4,238			APC
3	Kwara	263,572	136,909	31,116	31,141			APC
4	Niger	375,183	284,898	80,452	21,836			APC
5	Nasarawa	172,922	147,093	191,361	12,712			LP
6	Plateau	307,195	243,808	466,272	8,869			LP
	FCT	90,902	74,194	281,717	4,517			LP

Source: Researcher's compilation in (Tola, 2023; Ndubisi, 2023).



The results of the table above show that the aforementioned candidates earned votes in bulk from their ethnic constituencies. This is since each candidate received a larger number of bloc votes from their respective geopolitical zones than from other zones. Thus, it can be said that the bloc votes received by the candidates from each candidate's geopolitical zone were significantly influenced by their identification with a particular ethnic or religious group. Throughout the February 25 presidential election, a significant portion of voters' voting decisions were influenced by their ethnicity, demonstrating the continued relevance of ethnic politics throughout the six geopolitical zones (Adelana, & Osifo, 2020; Idowu, 2023; Adekunle, 2023).

On the regional level, for example, Bola Tinubu, the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate, received the most votes, and a breakdown of the data in the table above shows that he outperformed his opponents in three of the six geographic zones. Mr. Tinubu triumphed in the South West, North West, and North Central districts. Mr. Obi of the Labour Party (LP) won the South-east and South-south, with Atiku of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) taking the Northeast. In the North-Central, Mr. Obi trailed Mr. Tinubu, while Mr. Atiku finished second in the South-West and North-West. The NNPP's Rabi'u Kwankwaso won only Kano State in his own North-west geopolitical zone (Ndubisi, 2023).

## **4.2 IMPLICATIONS OF ETHNIC CLEAVAGES IN SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE FOR THE NEWLY ELECTED OFFICIALS**

The nation will likely become more polarized if politicians keep dividing voters along racial, religious, and geographical lines. This might result in a scenario where several regions of the nation start to secede, which would fuel more violence and instability. As an example, the 2023 General Elections were marred by isolated incidents of violence, with both sides accusing the other of electoral fraud. Inter-communal violence broke out in different regions of the country as a result of conflicts between supporters of various political parties over election results. Because Nigeria has a long history of election violence, many incidents have been motivated by ethnic identity, as is the case with the four main candidates, who represent distinct regions, religious groups, and ethnicities (Wonah, 2017). As a result, this is not a unique incident. The legacy of this election will ultimately be that it revealed how divided Nigerians are, and the danger of the foregoing lies in the fact that newly elected officials will be tempted to serve the interests of "their" communities rather than acting in the interests of all Nigerians, running the risk of a deepening spiral into ethno-religious conflict. Additionally, if this trend persisted, trust would be in short supply, and subsequent low turnouts would smooth the way for partisans on all sides. Therefore, the major goal of newly elected leaders should be to address this problem (Hassan, 2023; Kabir, 2023).

## **5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, voting trends in the 2023 Presidential Election were observed to be influenced by ethnic identification from the findings above. This is since regionalism, ethnicity, and religion are all reflected in Nigeria's political activities. Voting, employment, and general government patronage of the public are very evident instances. For example, government general patronage syndrome, which arises when political actors capture state authority and use it to advance their own ethnic, religious, and regional interests, is a feature of Nigeria's political system at both the federal and state levels. This is due to the unequal distribution of public resources to assist majority groups; political representation and access to power are fiercely competitive in the country. Additionally, the geographic distribution of votes suggests that ethnic and religious identities are becoming more important in Nigerian politics. This is since each candidate received a larger number of bloc votes from their respective geopolitical zones

than from other zones. This supports our findings, which state that the bloc votes received by the candidates from each candidate's geopolitical zone were significantly influenced by their identification with a particular ethnic or religious group. In fact, throughout the February 25 Presidential Election, a significant portion of voters' voting decisions were influenced by their ethnicity, demonstrating the continued relevance of ethnic politics throughout the six geopolitical zones (Adelana, & Osifo, 2020; Idowu, 2023; Adekunle, 2023).

Furthermore, in more diverse states, like Lagos, where competition is fierce and no one community maintains a "natural" majority, these ethnic and religious voting patterns have exacerbated tensions. This supports the stance of our findings, which reveals that Mr. Obi of the LP received 582,454 or 16.3% of the total of 4.25 million votes cast in Lagos state, which narrowly won the presidential race. This is also the reason why there was a lot of voter intimidation, suppression, and violence during the just-finished Presidential Election, which was held on February 25th. For example, in the northern and southeastern regions, where Atiku and Obi received widespread support, particularly in the north-east, north-west, south-east, and south-south, the results announcement provoked unprecedented post-election violence. This is because supporters of the PDP and LP presidential candidates believed Tinubu had an unfair edge in the presidential election. Even while local and foreign observers declared the 2023 Presidential Election free, fair, and genuine, the election's outcomes indicate a risk of future ethnic bloc voting (Preliminary Statement of the Joint (NDI/IRI), 2023).

## **5.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the foregoing negative scenario, we recommend the following:

There is a need to Institutionalize Power Rotation and Zoning Agreements through Legislation. To rein in the dominance of ethnic politics in presidential elections, Nigerian electoral institutions and political parties must entrench power rotation and zoning agreements in legal documents. Making these informal agreements legally binding will promote equitable political participation among zones and reduce the perception of ethnic exclusion. Legislating such principles would also strengthen national integration by ensuring that every geopolitical zone has a fair chance of accessing executive power, thereby ending the long-standing grievances of marginalization.

There is a critical need for continuous civic education programs to orient voters to the dangers of ethnic bloc voting and the advantages of issue-based electoral choices. The campaigns should be geared towards national unity, democratic accountability, and the imperative to judge candidates based on competence, vision, and policy agenda rather than ethnic affiliation. These programmes ought to be formulated and enacted in collaboration with the National Orientation Agency, civil society organizations, and educational institutions, targeting especially the youth and rural populations that are more vulnerable to ethnic mobilization.

The Nigerian state should promote inclusive governance and equitable distribution of resources. To reduce the post-election tensions and perceptions of ethnic favoritism, the winners must commit to practicing inclusive governance by making appointments, public investments, and development projects fairly distributed across various regions. This will overturn the "winner-takes-all" syndrome and establish trust in the state as a neutral arbiter rather than a tool of ethnic patronage. National institutions are required to monitor and evaluate federal and state governments' adherence to the principles of equity and inclusiveness in policy implementation and service delivery.

## REFERENCES

- Adekunle, A. (2023) 2023 *Presidential Election*: The contest, context and probable outcome. *The Nigerian Tribunes*
- Adelana, O. S. & Osifo, K. O. (2020) Ethno-Religious issues and electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: the cases of Nigeria and Kenya. *KIU Journal of Humanities*, 5(3): 73-81
- Agbakoba, O. (2023). *Shocking discovery I made about BVAS*. Daily Post, 5 April 2023. <https://dailypost.ng/2023/04/05/shocking-discovery-i-made-about-bvas-agbakoba/> accessed 12 June 2023.
- Alabi, A. et al., (2023) Identity Politics and its Implication on the Nigerian Electoral Process. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies (AJPAS)*, 16 (1), 201-213
- Amao, O. B. (2020). *Nigeria's 2019 general election: what does it mean for the rest of the world?* *The Round Table*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2020.1788767>. Accessed 6 April 2023
- Augustus-Daddie, J. et al (2024) Implications of the 2023 General Elections on Sustainable Democracy and National Development: Issues, Challenges and Solutions. *International Journal of Public administration (IJOPAD)*, 3(1): 1-14.
- Center for Democracy and Development (CDD) (2023) *Understanding the 2023 Nigerian Presidential and National Assembly Elections*. CDDwestafrica.org
- DII, C. T. (2023) Voters' Disposition and the Outcome of 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. *International Journal of Development and Management Review*, 18, (9), 1-11
- Emeka, A. M. (2022). *Ethnic Politics and Federal Character in Nigeria (2015-2021)*. Unpublished project report Presented to the Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Ezeibe, C. (2015). *Hate speech and electoral violence in Nigeria*: A seminar paper submitted to the Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Gbadebo, R. V. (2023) *The Danger of Identity Politics*. Tribune online April 26th
- Hassan, I. (2013) *Nigeria: Trust and Turnout Define 2023 Elections*. Chatam House: The Royal Institute of International Affairs. [www.chathamhouse.com](http://www.chathamhouse.com)
- Hogg, M. A. (1996). Intragroup processes, group structure, and social identity. In W. P. Robinson (Ed.), *Social groups and identities: Developing the legacy of Henri Tajfel* (pp. 65–93). Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Ibeanu, O. (2000). Ethnicity and Transition to Democracy in Nigeria: Explaining the passing of Authoritarian Rule in a Multi-Ethnic-Society, in *African Journal of Political Science*, 5(2): 45-65.
- Idayat, H. (2023) *Identity, Insecurity, and Institutions in the 2023 Nigerian Elections*: The Africa Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies: Washington, D.C.
- Idowu, H. A. (2023) Democratic and electoral process in Nigeria: A forecast into the 2023 general elections. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 18(2), 145-176.
- Jonah, O. and Pat, O.U. (2004) *Ethnic Nationalism and Democratic Consolidation: Perspectives from Nigeria and the United States of America*. Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers Ltd.
- Kabir, Y. (2023). *Data, What the Voting Pattern in the 2023 Presidential Election is Telling Us*. Premium times <http://premiumtimes.com> accessed 12/06/2023
- Kerlinger, F. N. (1977). *The Influence of Research on Education Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X006008005>
- McCauley, J.F. (2016). *Ethnicity and religion as sources of political division in Africa*. Paper prepared for presentation at the Comparative Politics Symposium at UC Berkeley, February 2016.
- Ndubisi, E. (2023). *Final Nigeria Presidential Results in 2023 by States*. Daily Trust Feb. 28

- Nnoli, O (1978). *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Nnoli, O. (1995). *Ethnicity and Development in Nigeria*. Aldershot, Avebury, Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
- Nnoli, O. (1998). *Ethnic Conflicts in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Nworgu, B.G. (2006) Educational Research: *Basic Issues and Methodology*. (2nd ed.) Enugu: University Trust Publishers
- Omotayo, Y. (2023). *To Whom 'Too Much' is Given. The Republic*. <https://republic.com.ng/february-march-2023/inec-2023-presidential-election/> accessed 1 June 2023.
- Paden, T. (2023) *Regionalism Beyond State centrism*
- Phinney, J. S., Cantu, C. L., & Kurtz, D. A. (1997) Ethnic and American identity as predictors of self-esteem among African American, Latino, and White adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 1 (26), 165–185
- Preliminary Statement of the Joint NDI/IRI (2023) *International Observer Mission to Nigeria's 2023 Presidential and Legislative Elections*: Accessed February 23, 2023
- Saharso, S. (1989) Ethnic Identity and the Paradox of Equality, in Van Ouden Houlen J.P. and Willemsen T.M. (eds.), *Ethnic Minorities: Social Psychological Perspectives*. Berwyn, PA: Swets North America.
- Slawu, B. & Hassan, A.D. (2011), Ethnic Politics and its Implication for the Survival of Democracy in Nigeria in *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*, 3(2): 28-33.
- Tajfel, H. (1981) *Human Groups and Social Categories*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–48). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Tajfel, H., & Wilkes, A. L. (1963) Classification and quantitative judgment. *British Journal of Psychology*, 3 (54), 101–114.
- Tola, A. (2023) *Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election: illegalities, legal questions, what next?*
- Ukiwo, U. (2005). The Study of Ethnicity in Nigeria, in *Oxford Development Studies*, 33(1):7-33 Retrieved from <http://www.peaceworkspartners.org.5/7/2016>.
- Wonah, E. I. (2017) Identity Politics and National Integration in Nigeria. *Open Science Journal*, 2 (1), 1-8