

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, one of the most consequential elections in the preferences, and a dynamic political landscape. Amidst these developments, one of the critical factors influencing voting behavior was the ethno-religious dynamics that have historically played a significant role in Nigerian politics. Nigeria, with its diverse ethnic groups and religions, has witnessed how these divisions often intersect to shape electoral outcomes, influencing candidates' strategies, campaign messages, and the public's voting choices. Ethnicity and religion, being deeply entrenched aspects of Nigerian identity, have often been manipulated or leveraged in electoral processes, leading to voting patterns that reflect not only political affiliations but also ethnic loyalty and religious affiliations.

In the 2023 election, the two major political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), alongside smaller regional parties, engaged in strategies that attempted to appeal to specific ethno-religious groups. These efforts aimed at securing key votes from regions with significant support bases, often reinforcing ethnic and religious identities (Akinola, 2023; Ojo, 2023). The effect of ethno-religion voting patterns in the 2023 election became evident in the regions that showed a clear division in support based on the ethnic and religious identity of the presidential candidates. Northern Nigeria, with its predominantly Muslim population, largely supported candidates from the northern part of the country.

In contrast, the southern regions, with their more diverse religious landscape, exhibited a more pronounced division, often aligning with candidates from similar ethnic and religious backgrounds (Adebayo, 2023; Suberu, 2023). This division is especially notable in the context of Nigeria's ongoing efforts to build a unified and inclusive nation-state. Scholars and analysts have debated the implications of these patterns, particularly in relation to national unity and the potential for identity-based politics to hinder democratic progress (Egwu, 2023; Nnoli, 2023). Nnoli (2011) and Suberu (2015), view them as a manifestation of Nigeria's ethnic and religious fault lines, arguing that these identities often play a dominant role in shaping electoral behavior. On the other hand, others, like Ojo (2018) and Olorunmola (2020), contend that economic disparities, security challenges, and governance issues may be equally significant in influencing voter decisions. The 2023 election also witnessed the rise of a new generation of voters, exemplified by findings from Akinola (2023), who observed a growing inclination among youths to prioritize good governance over ethnic and religious identity. Nonetheless, the persistence of ethno-religious voting remains a crucial feature, as emphasized by Egwu (2023), in understanding the overall electoral outcomes.

This study seeks to examine the role of ethno-religious voting patterns in shaping the results of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. Specifically, it will explore how ethnic and religious affiliations influenced voter preferences, the strategies adopted by political parties, and the impact of these patterns on the legitimacy and inclusiveness of the electoral process. By analyzing the intersection of ethnicity, religion, and politics in the 2023 election, this research will contribute to the broader understanding of electoral behaviour in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies like Nigeria.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election witnessed the continuation of a long-standing trend where ethno-religious considerations heavily influenced voter behaviour. Despite efforts toward national unity and inclusiveness, Nigeria's political landscape remains deeply divided along ethnic and religious lines, which are often exacerbated during election periods. The role of these divisions in determining electoral outcomes has been the subject of debate, yet a comprehensive understanding of how ethno-religious voting patterns impacted the 2023 election results remains underexplored. Several scholars have noted that ethnicity and religion continue to be significant determinants of voting behaviour in Nigeria. For instance, Ojo (2021) argues that ethnic loyalty plays a central role in voting patterns, where many Nigerian voters align themselves with candidates from their ethnic group or region, often disregarding other political or governance considerations.

Similarly, Agbaje and Adejumo (2017) emphasize that religious affiliations influence political allegiances, with Nigerian voters frequently casting their ballots based on the religious identity of candidates. In the 2023 election, these dynamics were particularly pronounced, with political campaigns emphasizing ethnic and religious solidarity to rally supporters. A striking example of this ethno-religious voting pattern can be seen in the northern part of the country, where candidates from the predominantly Muslim north, particularly Bola Tinubu of the APC, garnered significant support. This was contrasted by the southern part of Nigeria, which exhibited regional and ethnic divisions in voting preferences, with many southerners supporting the candidacies of their ethnic group members. For instance, the support for Atiku Abubakar of the PDP was heavily influenced by his status as a Fulani from the north, while Peter Obi of the Labour Party, an Igbo candidate, garnered substantial support from the southeastern region, which is predominantly Christian (Ogunyemi & Akinyemi, 2023).

Moreover, religious affiliations, particularly the Muslim-Christian divide, have been central in shaping political strategies. The choice of running mates, as seen with Tinubu selecting a Muslim running mate, Kashim Shettima, was seen as an attempt to consolidate the Muslim vote, despite criticism from religious and ethnic leaders who viewed it as reinforcing religious divisions (Ibrahim, 2022). On the other hand, Atiku's

decision to choose a Christian running mate reflected a strategy to attract the Christian vote, particularly in the Middle Belt and southern regions, which are predominantly Christian.

While these ethno-religious voting patterns have been well-documented in previous elections, the 2023 election presents a unique case due to the involvement of new voter demographics, including young voters who have shown a preference for more inclusive governance (Eze, 2023). This emerging trend raises important questions about whether ethno-religious factors continue to dominate Nigerian elections or whether other issues, such as good governance and economic stability, have begun to outweigh ethnic and religious considerations.

Therefore, the problem this study seeks to address is the extent to which ethno-religious voting patterns shaped the outcomes of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, and how these patterns influenced the legitimacy and inclusiveness of the electoral process. Understanding the persistence of ethno-religious divisions in the voting behaviour of Nigerians will offer valuable insights into the challenges of building a truly national political identity and fostering a more cohesive political system.

1.3. Research Objectives

- i. To examine the role of ethnic and religious affiliations in shaping voting patterns during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria.
- ii. To investigate the influence of economic, security, and governance issues on voter behaviour in the 2023 election.
- iii. To assess the impact of the new generation of voters on electoral outcomes and democratic practices in Nigeria.
- iv. To evaluate strategies for enhancing electoral integrity and reducing the influence of identity politics in Nigerian elections.

1.4. Research Questions

- i. What role did ethnic and religious affiliations play in determining voting patterns during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria?
- ii. How did economic, security, and governance issues influence voter decisions in the 2023 election?
- iii. What contributions did the new generation of voters make toward electoral outcomes and democratic processes in the 2023 Presidential Election?
- iv. What measures can be implemented to enhance electoral integrity and minimize the impact of identity politics on Nigerian elections?

1.5. Significance of the study

This study is significant as it provides a comprehensive understanding of how ethno-religious factors influenced voter behaviour in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, highlighting implications for democratic governance and electoral integrity. By examining the dynamics of ethno-religious voting, the research contributes to the broader discourse on electoral behaviour in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies, offering insights into how identity politics shape electoral outcomes. The findings of this study will benefit policymakers, electoral bodies, political parties, and civil society organizations. For policymakers, it underscores the urgent need to address divisive identity politics through reforms and policies that promote national unity and inclusivity. For electoral bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the study offers actionable insights into designing voter education programs that encourage issue-based voting. Political parties can leverage the findings to reform their candidate selection processes, prioritizing competence and merit over ethnic or religious considerations.

Academically, this study fills a gap in the literature on ethno-religious voting in Nigeria, contributing to political science, sociology, and public administration disciplines. It provides a valuable resource for future research on the intersections of identity, democracy, and governance in Nigeria and similar contexts. Finally, for the general public and advocacy groups, the study raises awareness of the potential dangers of ethno-religious voting patterns, emphasizing the importance of fostering a political culture that prioritizes policies and leadership qualities over divisive identity-based affiliations. By doing so, the research supports efforts to build a more cohesive, democratic, and progressive society in Nigeria.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on examining the influence of ethnicity and religion on the voting behavior of Nigerians during the 2023 presidential election. It aims to identify how ethno-religious affiliations shaped voter preferences, party alignment, and electoral outcomes. The study covers selected geopolitical zones in Nigeria to reflect diverse ethnic and religious compositions, with attention to voting trends, public perception, and candidate appeal. The analysis will be based on data from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), opinion polls, academic literature, and selected interviews or surveys conducted with voters. The timeframe of focus is the period leading to, during, and shortly after the 2023 presidential election.

The study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, it may not comprehensively cover all states in Nigeria due to time and resource constraints. To address this, the research focuses on selected representative states from different geopolitical zones. Secondly, the accuracy of the study relies heavily on the availability and reliability of secondary data sourced from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), survey respondents, and existing scholarly literature. Additionally, the sensitive nature of ethnic and religious affiliations may lead respondents to provide biased or socially desirable answers, affecting the objectivity of the data. Political sensitivities surrounding the electoral process may also limit access to honest opinions and reliable information, particularly in volatile regions. Lastly, because the research centers specifically on the 2023 presidential election, its findings may not be fully generalizable to previous or future elections without careful contextual consideration.

1.7 Definition of Terms

- i. *Ethno-Religion*: The interconnection between ethnic identity and religious affiliation, especially in a context where these identities strongly influence political behavior and group allegiance.
- ii. *Voting Pattern*: The trends and behaviors demonstrated by voters in an election, including the choices they make based on factors like ethnicity, religion, party loyalty, and candidate appeal.
- iii. *Presidential Election*: A national election in which citizens vote to elect the President of Nigeria. In this context, it refers specifically to the election held on February 25, 2023.
- iv. *Electoral Behavior*: The actions and decisions of voters during an election, influenced by socio-cultural, economic, and psychological factors.
- v. *INEC (Independent National Electoral Commission)*: The electoral body responsible for overseeing and conducting elections in Nigeria.
- vi. *Geopolitical Zones*: The six major divisions in Nigeria used for administrative and political purposes, often reflecting ethnic and regional identities.
- vii **Partisan Loyalty**: Consistent support for a particular political party, often based on ideology, ethnic or religious alignment, or historical loyalty.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a review of existing literature on the influence of ethnicity and religion on voting behavior in Nigeria and similar contexts. It draws from both historical and contemporary studies to understand the persistence of identity politics in Nigerian elections. The review also highlights gaps in previous research, particularly the need for updated empirical analysis in light of the 2023 presidential election, which featured candidates from the three dominant regions and religious affiliations in Nigeria.

2.2. Conceptual Clarification

i. Ethno-Religion

Ethno-religion represents a fusion of ethnicity and religion where religious identity is closely linked to a specific ethnic group, creating a unified cultural identity (Connor, 1994). Ethno-religions are systems of beliefs and practices that bind a particular ethnic group together, often distinguishing them from others based on shared traditions, symbols, and histories (Smith, 1991). Hastings (1997) describes ethno-religion as the

phenomenon where religion becomes the defining characteristic of an ethnic identity, influencing cultural norms and intergroup relations. Ethno-religious groups maintain boundaries through shared religious and cultural practices, which serve as markers of identity in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies (Barth, 1969).

Nash (1989) views ethno-religion as a concept where ethnicity and religion overlap, with the latter providing the ideological framework for cultural practices, group cohesion, and social order. The fusion of religion and ethnicity in ethno-religion acts as a cultural system, shaping the worldviews and social structures of its adherents (Geertz, 1973). Esman (1994) sees ethno-religion as an identity framework in which ethnic and religious components are inseparable, often forming the basis for collective action and group solidarity.

ii. Voting Pattern

Voting patterns are determined by enduring psychological attachments to political parties, shaped by socialization and long-term party identification (Campbell et al. (1960). Voting patterns emerge from group affiliations and communication processes within a community, emphasizing the role of interpersonal influence (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954). Voting patterns can be understood through a rational choice perspective, where voters make decisions based on utility maximization by comparing party policies to their preferences (Downs (1957). Voting patterns are shaped by "cleavages" such as class, religion, and ethnicity, which structure political competition in societies (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967).

Voting patterns represent the aggregation of individual voter preferences influenced by media, party campaigns, and institutional frameworks in shaping political choices (Norris, 2004). Voting patterns reflect the interplay of cognitive mobilization, social structures, and political values that guide individual voter behavior over time (Dalton, 2014).

iii. Election

Diamond (2020) describes elections as the primary method by which a polity expresses its democratic will, with citizens' preferences being translated into political leadership and public policy. Przeworski., Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi, (2000) define elections as a formal method of selecting individuals for political office. Huntington (1991) views elections as essential for ensuring political stability and legitimacy within a democratic system. Dahl (1998) defines an election as a process where citizens choose their leaders through free and fair competition.

2.3 Empirical Review

Baba (2021) studied on ethno-religious conflicts in Kaduna, Nigeria. This study examined ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, with a particular focus on Kaduna State in the Northern region. As the most populous black nation, Nigeria has experienced persistent ethno-religious tensions, especially in the North. While numerous news outlets and academic studies have documented these conflicts, efforts by both State and Federal Governments to effectively address them remain insufficient. A primary objective of this research was to analyze the various forms of ethno-religious conflicts and identify development strategies needed to address them in Nigeria.

The study sought to raise awareness about the impact of these conflicts on Kaduna State and to propose recommendations aimed at fostering peace and harmonious coexistence. The research utilized a qualitative methodology to analyze existing literature on Kaduna's ethno-religious conflicts. Findings revealed that ethno-religious conflicts have significantly hindered the development of Kaduna State. The study recommended Kaduna state should establish platforms for regular interaction between religious leaders and communities to foster mutual understanding and resolve tensions; ensuring that government policies promote inclusivity and fairness to reduce perceptions of marginalization among ethnic and religious groups; ntroducing educational campaigns to promote tolerance, diversity, and peaceful coexistence within communities.; implementing localized security measures to address community-specific challenges and improve trust in law enforcement as well as developing and enforcing laws that discourage hate speech, incitement, and discrimination based on ethnic or religious identities.

David, S.I & Doris (2015) analyzed the ethno-religious crises in Nigeria, which, from various perspectives, are deemed significant threats to the nation's unity. Among these conflicts is the Jos crisis, which has resisted numerous resolution efforts since its inception in 2001. Attempts to address the crisis through commissions, committees, panels, and even the declaration of emergency rule have proven unsuccessful. Consequently, Plateau State, once renowned as "The Home of Peace and Tourism," has been disparagingly labeled "The Home of Pieces and Terrorism.

The study focuses on the escalating nature of these conflicts, which have become a major source of concern for Nigerians. It seeks to uncover the reasons behind the persistence of the Jos crisis despite repeated interventions and to propose strategies for managing the conflict to achieve sustainable peace in the state. Employing content analysis techniques and the relative deprivation theory, the study reveals that the enduring

nature of the Jos ethno-religious crisis is primarily due to the government's failure to address the grievances of the deprived Jasawa community and its disregard for the recommendations provided by various investigative bodies. The paper recommended that sustainable peace in Plateau State can be achieved through the comprehensive implementation of the recommendations made by the commissions of inquiry established to investigate the crisis.

Kulachai, Lerdtomornsakul, and Homyamyen (2023) explored the factors influencing voting decisions, emphasizing their critical role in shaping a country's political structure. Understanding what drives voters' choices is essential for politicians, candidates, and policymakers. This study provides an in-depth examination of the diverse factors that affect voting behavior among the American populace. By synthesizing and analyzing findings from multiple studies, the research offers insights into the key elements influencing voter behavior. The study adopted a qualitative approach, utilizing a comprehensive review and synthesis of existing literature on voting behavior. Sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, and relevant academic studies on voting patterns and decision-making processes.

The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes, trends, and gaps in the literature to provide a well-rounded understanding of the factors influencing voting decisions. The study recommended that developing programs to inform voters about candidates, policies, and the electoral process to ensure informed decision-making; encouraging political campaigns to address diverse socio-demographic groups, ensuring all voices are represented; implementing measures to curb misinformation and ensure balanced media representation during elections and facilitating community-based initiatives to promote dialogue and participation in democratic processes.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Ethno-Religious Identity Theory by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979). The theory provides a compelling explanation for how ethnic and religious affiliations influence political behavior. The theory argues that individuals form part of social groups such as ethnicity or religion from which they derive their identity and loyalty. These group identities often create a sense of "us versus them," leading to political preferences that favor candidates from one's own ethnic or religious background. Donald Horowitz (1985), in his seminal work *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, expanded on this by demonstrating how ethnicity becomes a central axis around which political loyalties are organized in plural societies. Similarly, Paul Brass (1991) noted that ethnic and religious identities are not only deeply rooted but also strategically mobilized by political elites to gain electoral advantage.

In the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, this theory manifested clearly in the voting patterns across the country. The three leading candidates Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a Yoruba Muslim from the South-West; Atiku Abubakar, a Hausa-Fulani Muslim from the North-East; and Peter Obi, an Igbo Christian from the South-East each drew significant support from their ethno-religious strongholds. For example, Peter Obi won overwhelmingly in the South-East states such as Anambra, Enugu, and Abia, where his ethnic and religious identity resonated strongly with the electorate (Premium Times, 2023). Atiku dominated in Northern states like Sokoto, Gombe, and Kebbi, where the Hausa-Fulani Muslim identity played a pivotal role (TheCable, 2023). Tinubu secured victory in Lagos, Ogun, and parts of the South-West, where his Yoruba heritage and Muslim background aligned with the majority of voters.

The case of the Muslim-Muslim ticket fielded by the All Progressives Congress (APC), with Tinubu and his running mate Kashim Shettima (a Muslim from Borno State), further illustrates how ethno-religious considerations shaped public discourse and voter reactions. The decision sparked significant debate and opposition from Christian groups such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which viewed the ticket as exclusionary in a religiously diverse nation (Vanguard, 2023). On the other hand, the rapid mobilization of Christian youth and professionals behind Peter Obi popularly called the "Obidient" movement was interpreted by many analysts as a religious and generational reaction to the APC's ticket.

Despite its utility, Ethno-Religious Identity Theory has limitations. Critics argue that it overly simplifies political behavior by reducing it to identity affiliations. It overlooks other critical determinants such as economic performance, anti-corruption stance, leadership qualities, or social media influence factors that were notably significant among urban voters and the youth demographic during the 2023 election. For instance, Obi's appeal in cosmopolitan cities like Abuja and Lagos was driven not just by religious affinity but by a broader narrative of competence and change (Aljazeera, 2023). Moreover, the theory assumes homogeneity within ethnic and religious groups, ignoring internal divisions based on class, ideology, or political experience.

Nonetheless, the theory remains highly relevant for understanding voting patterns in Nigeria's electoral politics. It helps explain why certain candidates consistently perform well in their ethno-religious regions and how political actors exploit identity to frame campaign messages. In a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Nigeria, where historical grievances, mistrust, and identity politics are deeply entrenched, Ethno-Religious Identity Theory offers a valuable analytical framework to assess electoral dynamics.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design, focusing exclusively on secondary data to analyze the influence of ethno-religion on voting patterns in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The descriptive design is appropriate because it allows for the examination of existing data sources, offering insights into the ethno-religious factors influencing electoral behavior without the need for direct data collection from respondents. The study will analyze pre-existing datasets, including reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), previous academic research, media articles, and civil society reports related to the 2023 election.

3.2. Population and Sources of Secondary Data

The population for this study comprises all available secondary data sources that document voting behavior, ethno-religious demographics, and political trends in Nigeria during the 2023 presidential election. Specifically, the study will rely on a range of data sources, including INEC Election Reports, which provide detailed information on voter turnout, regional results, and breakdowns by ethnic and religious groups. Civil society reports from organizations like the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), YIAGA Africa, and other relevant bodies will be utilized to analyze the role of ethno-religious affiliations in the election. Additionally, media articles and news reports will be reviewed to explore how ethno-religious influences, campaign strategies, and voting patterns were discussed in public discourse. Lastly, scholarly articles and books examining previous Nigerian elections and the impact of ethnic and religious identities on voting behavior will also contribute valuable insights to the study.

3.3. Data Collection Method

Since this study relies solely on secondary data, there will be no direct interaction with respondents. The secondary data will be collected through several methods. First, a comprehensive document review will be conducted, focusing on relevant reports and publications from INEC, civil society organizations, and academic sources. Key documents will include the official results of the 2023 presidential election, regional voting breakdowns, and analyses of voting trends segmented by ethnic and religious groups.

Additionally, media and newspaper archives will be examined, particularly reports that analyze the ethno-religious dynamics of the 2023 election. These media articles offer valuable insights into the public discourse surrounding the election and how ethno-religious identities influenced voter behavior. Finally, previous research will be reviewed, including published papers and books that focus on the role of ethnicity and religion in Nigerian elections. These sources will provide historical context and comparative data to help understand how voting patterns may have been influenced by similar factors in past elections.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis of secondary data in this study will involve both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of ethno-religion on voting patterns. For the quantitative analysis, data from INEC and civil society reports will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, to identify patterns in voting behavior. Specifically, the distribution of votes across different ethnic and religious groups will be examined to assess the extent to which ethno-religious factors influenced voting decisions.

Additionally, regional voting trends and party affiliations will be explored to determine any correlation between ethnic or religious identity and electoral outcomes. In terms of qualitative analysis, content analysis will be applied to media reports, academic papers, and other narrative sources to identify recurring themes and discourses related to ethno-religious identity in the 2023 election. This analysis will help contextualize the quantitative findings and provide deeper insights into how ethno-religion shaped voter behavior and political campaigns, offering a broader understanding of the intersection between ethnic, religious, and political factors during the election.

3.5. Validity and Reliability of Secondary Data

Since this study relies on secondary data, the validity and reliability of the findings are contingent on the quality of the data sources. To ensure the robustness of the data, several strategies will be employed. Source credibility will be prioritized by sourcing data exclusively from reputable and reliable institutions, including INEC, respected civil society organizations such as the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and YIAGA Africa, as well as peer-reviewed academic publications. These sources are regarded as credible and authoritative in their respective fields.

To further enhance the accuracy of the data, cross-referencing will be utilized. This involves comparing data from multiple sources to minimize the risk of bias or inaccuracies in the secondary data. For example, electoral data from INEC will be cross-referenced with reports from civil society organizations to ensure consistency in voting patterns and the analysis of ethno-religious influences. Additionally, the time frame of the data used will be carefully considered. The study will draw from the most recent and relevant sources, focusing primarily on the 2023 presidential election to ensure that the findings are current and reflective of the contemporary political landscape in Nigeria. This approach will ensure that the data is not only credible but also timely and pertinent to the study's objectives.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Even though the study relies on secondary data, ethical considerations remain crucial. Citation and acknowledgment will be strictly adhered to, ensuring that all secondary sources, including reports, articles, and data, are properly cited to give credit to the original authors and organizations. This practice ensures transparency and avoids plagiarism. Additionally, data integrity will be a key priority. The researcher will ensure that the analysis of secondary data remains objective, without manipulation or distortion of the original findings. By maintaining the integrity of the data throughout the research process, the study will uphold ethical standards and ensure that the conclusions drawn are based on accurate and reliable information.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of secondary data collected for the study on the effect of ethno-religion on voting patterns in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The aim of this chapter is to analyze the available secondary data to identify patterns, trends, and potential correlations between ethno-religious identities and voting behavior during the 2023 election.

4.2 Result

4.2.1 Ethnic and religious affiliations in shaping voting patterns during the 2023

Presidential Election in Nigeria

Ethnic and religious affiliations significantly influenced voting patterns during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria, continuing a historical trend where voters often align with candidates perceived to represent their ethnic or religious groups. For instance, the Southeastern region overwhelmingly supported Peter Obi of the Labour Party, largely because of his Igbo ethnicity, which resonated with the majority ethnic group in the region (Ojo, 2023). Similarly, Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) gained substantial votes in the Southwest, where his Yoruba ethnicity and political influence were key factors (Akinola, 2023). In the North, Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) received robust support, leveraging both his Fulani ethnicity and his appeal to predominantly Muslim voters (Suberu, 2023).

Political campaigns further exploited identity politics, using ethnic and religious narratives to mobilize support, which deepened societal divisions (Egwu, 2023). Grassroots mobilization by ethnic organizations and endorsements from religious leaders were critical in shaping opinions and influencing voting behavior. For example, some Christian leaders openly endorsed Peter Obi, framing their support as a defense against perceived marginalization of Christians in governance (Olorunmola, 2023). However, this emphasis on identity politics often overshadowed discussions about candidates' policies and governance credentials, limiting substantive debates on critical issues such as economic reforms, security, and national development (Adebayo, 2023). Despite these trends, the 2023 election also saw a shift among younger and urbanized voters, many of whom prioritized candidates emphasizing good governance over ethnic and religious considerations. This shift was particularly evident in urban centres like Lagos, where voter turnout among youth favoured Peter Obi due to his reputation for accountability and reform-oriented policies (Adeyemi, 2023). Nonetheless, Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity remains a central feature of its electoral dynamics, perpetuating a cycle of identity-based politics while simultaneously presenting opportunities for gradual transformation in democratic practices (Nnoli, 2023).

4.2.2 The influence of economic, security, and governance issues on voter behaviour in the

2023 election

Economic, security, and governance issues significantly influenced voter behaviour in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election, reflecting a shift toward pragmatic electoral concerns. Economic hardship, driven by rising inflation, unemployment, and widespread poverty, was a critical factor. Many voters gravitated toward Peter Obi of the Labour Party due to his reputation for fiscal prudence and economic reforms during his tenure as governor of Anambra State. His campaign emphasized reducing wasteful government spending and promoting economic sustainability, which resonated with voters seeking solutions to Nigeria's deteriorating economy (Akinola, 2023). Security challenges also shaped voter decisions, particularly in regions plagued by insurgency, banditry, and communal violence. In the North-Central and Northwest regions, where insecurity was a major concern, voters were drawn to Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), who campaigned on promises to strengthen military reforms and address regional security crises through collaboration with local and international security agencies (Egwu, 2023). Conversely, the inability of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) to effectively address these challenges led to significant disillusionment among voters in affected areas (Suberu, 2023).

Governance issues, including corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and weak institutional capacity, further influenced voter preferences. Many urban voters, particularly in Lagos and Abuja, rejected established political elites in favour of candidates advocating systemic reforms and accountability. Peter Obi's focus on transparency and his outsider status appealed to young, urban voters who sought alternatives to the entrenched political class (Adeyemi, 2023). Additionally, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the eventual winner, garnered support in the Southwest by emphasizing his governance experience and infrastructure development during his tenure as Lagos State governor, though this appeal was less effective nationally (Ojo, 2023).

4.2.3. The impact of the new generation of voters on electoral outcomes and democratic

practices in Nigeria

The impact of the new generation of voters on electoral outcomes and democratic practices in Nigeria was a defining feature of the 2023 Presidential Election, signaling a shift in the country's political landscape. This demographic, largely composed of youths under the age of 35, represented a significant portion of the electorate. They were galvanized by economic hardship, unemployment, and dissatisfaction with the status quo, which made them more likely to support candidates advocating reform and accountability (Adeyemi, 2023). One notable example of this impact was the unprecedented support for Peter Obi of the Labour Party, particularly among young, urban voters. This "youthquake" was most evident in urban centers like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, where voter turnout among this group surged.

Many young voters, who were active on social media platforms, used these channels to mobilize, disseminate campaign information, and monitor electoral processes. Their efforts challenged the dominance of traditional political elites and disrupted established voting patterns (Adebayo, 2023). The new generation also embraced technology to enhance electoral integrity. Many youths participated actively in using platforms like the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) iREV portal to monitor real-time results, increasing transparency and accountability during the election (Egwu, 2023). This group also demonstrated a willingness to prioritize candidates' competence and track records over ethnic or religious affiliations, marking a departure from traditional identity-based voting.

However, challenges remained. Despite their enthusiasm, instances of voter suppression, violence, and logistical issues disproportionately affected young voters, particularly in densely populated urban areas. Nonetheless, their participation highlighted their potential to shape Nigeria's democratic trajectory. Their emphasis on accountability, governance, and reform-oriented leadership signals a growing maturity in Nigeria's democratic practices (Akinola, 2023).

4.2.4. Strategies for enhancing electoral integrity and reducing the influence of identity

politics in Nigerian elections

The relationship between ethno-religious voting patterns and the overall integrity of the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria reflects a complex interplay of identity politics, voter behavior, and democratic credibility. Ethnic and religious affiliations have historically played a pivotal role in Nigerian politics, often influencing how voters cast their ballots. In the 2023 election, this was evident as major candidates, such as Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peter Obi of the Labour Party, and Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), found strong support within their respective ethnic and regional bases. For instance, Tinubu garnered overwhelming support from the Southwest, largely due to his Yoruba identity, while Obi was favored in the Southeast, with many Igbo voters rallying behind him (Akinola, 2023). Similarly, Atiku's stronghold remained in the northern regions, where his Fulani ethnicity garnered significant backing, especially among Muslims (Ojo, 2023).

However, the prominence of these ethno-religious voting patterns posed challenges to the overall integrity of the election. Identity-based voting often obscures the emphasis on candidates' policy platforms and governance capabilities. This focus on ethnicity and religion can lead to voting that prioritizes group interests over national development and competent leadership, thus undermining the potential for a more inclusive electoral process (Egwu, 2023). Furthermore, ethnic tensions often manifest in violence, voter suppression, and post-election conflicts, further eroding the legitimacy of electoral outcomes (Suberu, 2023). These issues are compounded by the manipulation of ethno-religious sentiments by political elites to gain power, which can exacerbate divisions and hinder national cohesion (Adeyemi, 2023).

Despite these challenges, the 2023 election also showed signs of a shift, with a new generation of voters emerging, who prioritized good governance over ethnic and religious identity. This demographic, largely composed of youth and urban voters, demonstrated a preference for candidates based on policy platforms, competence, and national development. For example, the strong showing of Peter Obi's Labour Party among young voters, especially in cities like Lagos and Abuja, was an indication of the growing desire for change beyond the traditional ethnic and religious divides (Adebayo, 2023). This shift suggests a potential for reducing the influence of ethno-religious voting in future elections, promoting greater electoral integrity and fostering a more transparent and accountable democratic process.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria revealed significant influences of ethnic and religious affiliations on voting patterns, continuing the trend of voters aligning with candidates from their ethnic or religious groups. Peter Obi gained overwhelming support in the Southeast due to his Igbo ethnicity, Bola Tinubu saw strong backing in the Southwest because of his Yoruba identity, and Atiku Abubakar's Fulani ethnicity helped secure votes in the North. Ethno-religious narratives in campaigns deepened societal divisions, though younger, urbanized voters began prioritizing candidates' governance capabilities over identity. Economic, security, and governance issues were also key factors in shaping voter behavior.

Economic hardship drove support for Peter Obi, whose campaign emphasized fiscal reforms, while security concerns, especially in the North, bolstered Atiku Abubakar's candidacy. Urban voters, disillusioned with corruption and infrastructure issues, leaned towards candidates advocating systemic reform. The new generation of voters, largely under 35, had a major impact on the election. Their focus on competence and good governance over ethnic or religious identity, combined with their active participation on digital platforms, disrupted traditional voting patterns. Despite challenges like voter suppression, their involvement signaled a potential shift towards more reform-oriented electoral outcomes.

Finally, while ethnic and religious identities played a prominent role in the election, the growing focus on governance and accountability among youth voters suggests a potential for reducing the influence of identity politics in future elections, promoting greater electoral integrity and democratic development.

5.2 Conclusion

The 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election highlighted both the persistence of ethnic and religious voting patterns and the potential for reform, driven by a new generation of voters. While these identity-based patterns continue to dominate Nigerian politics, they threaten the integrity of the electoral process by emphasizing group interests over policy and good governance. The election also demonstrated the increasing importance of youth in shaping the political landscape, with many young voters seeking candidates who offer real solutions to Nigeria's pressing challenges. Technology played a critical role in ensuring greater transparency, but much work remains to reduce the influence of identity politics and promote a more inclusive, merit-based approach to governance.

5.3 Recommendations

Electoral reforms should focus on empowering and enhancing INEC's independence through increased funding, improved technological infrastructure, and stringent measures against electoral fraud and manipulation. Voter education is equally essential, emphasizing policy-based voting and the importance of selecting leaders based on governance capabilities rather than ethnicity or religion. These initiatives should target urban and rural areas alike, leveraging diverse media platforms to reach a broad audience.

Additionally, political party reforms must encourage a shift towards ideologies and competencies over ethnic and religious affiliations. This involves creating more inclusive internal party structures that prioritize merit and public service records, thereby reducing identity politics in candidate selection. The integration of technology in electoral processes, such as digital platforms for result transmission and monitoring, should also be expanded. The success of INEC's iREV portal during the 2023 election serves as a model for further enhancing transparency and accountability.

Furthermore, fostering inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue through national programs can reduce tensions and promote unity, redirecting focus from divisive identity politics to collective national goals. Youth engagement is crucial, as greater youth participation in elections and political leadership can diminish the prevalence of ethnic-based voting. This can be achieved by supporting youth-led political movements, ensuring youth representation in decision-making bodies, and empowering young leaders in civic and political activities. Finally, promoting gender inclusivity by increasing women's representation in politics can diversify Nigeria's political landscape, encouraging policy-driven debates that transcend ethnic and religious lines.

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