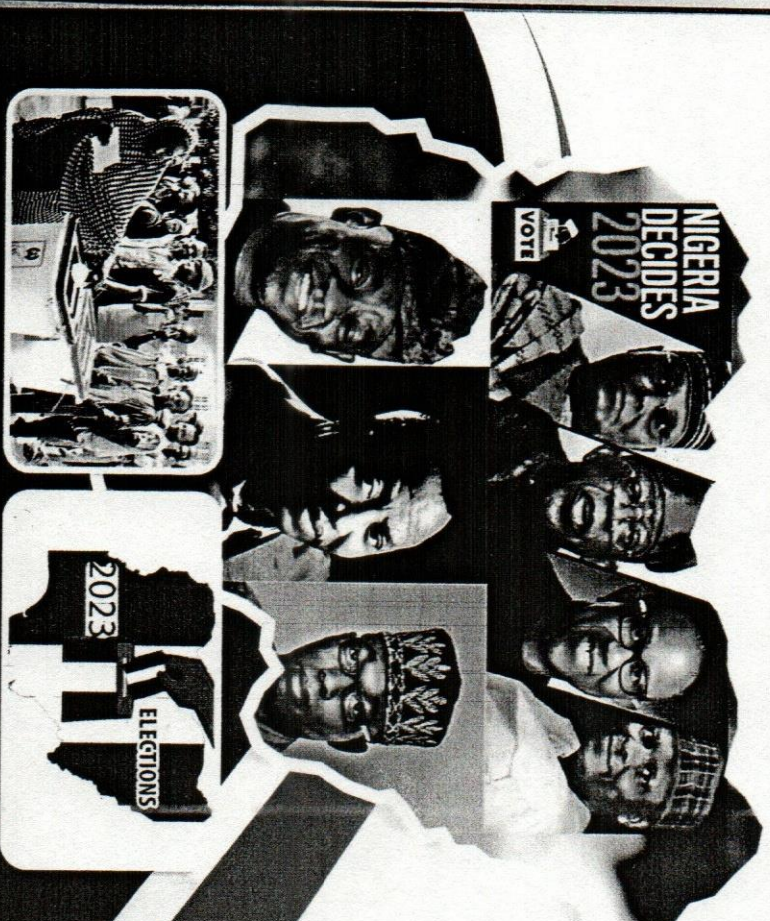


THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: Issues, Challenges, and Prospects



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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Hassan A. Saliu, Ph.D.

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Elections and matters associated with them have become global events that people follow with an uncommon level of interest because of the increasing impact that democracy and more importantly, elections are making on interstate relations. Every country in the world is in the game of impressing others about its democratic credentials. And for those countries whose democracies are being adjudged flawed or limited, the inclination is always there for them to want to catch up with global democratic standards. This explains why elections in developed capitalist countries are being followed with keenness and expectations as, if it is the only thing that would determine the fate of their own countries. It does in a way given the unequal structure of the international system. For instance, the last Presidential election in America instantly became a global event with the preference of the majority of the people of the world clearly in support of the incumbent. Election results are unpredictable everywhere, as so many variables always impinge on their conduct that tends to make electoral forecasting an uncertain reality. While it should be noted that the quality of elections is generally falling across the world, its mode is still the most popular way of gaining political power and legitimacy in contemporary times.

The quality of elections being seen in the third world, however, is in the class of its own. This has been promoting the view that what we see in Africa are selections, not elections in the real sense of the term. This assessment is enabled by the phenomena of election observation and monitoring that have crept into the electoral process that no country can ignore. Although controversies usually trail them with the imperialistic intentions that are associated with them. On the whole, one can say that they have become a useful barometer for measuring the quality of an election.

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CHAPTER THREE THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS AND THE REBIRTH OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS POLITICS IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The 2023 general election was conducted between February 25th, 2023, and March 18th, 2023 on the backdrop of a heavily contested and chaotic political atmosphere. It will be no gainsaying to say that the 2023 general election was one of the most fiercely contested elections since the return to democracy in 1999. The heat wave that greeted the political landscape of Nigeria from the pre-election period up until the winner was declared seemed to have reopened old wounds of ethnic bigotry and religious hatred. The major culprits were religious leaders and traditional rulers who released their platforms for the dissemination and peddling of political vendettas. It is on this note, that this chapter took a cursory look into the socio-cultural and religious underpinnings of the adversarial nature of the 2023 general election, the breeding ground for ethno-religious and hateful campaigns, the immediate and likely future consequences of ethno-religious politicking on the political system and what is needed to be done to tame the monster of ethno-religious politics. From the findings of the study, it is suggested that a holistic pragmatic, and unified approach must be taken by both the government and non-governmental institutions to ensure a healthy and safe political atmosphere for future elections.

Keywords: Election, Religion, Ethnicity, Democracy, Violence, Zoning

Introduction: A Historical Overview of Electoral Politics in Nigeria

The history of electoral politics in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era, when in 1922, the Clifford constitution introduced an elective principle. The elective principle of the Clifford constitution, for the first time, gave the opportunity to qualified Nigerians to elect some representative in the legislative council. It is worthy of note that the Clifford constitution limits electoral politics to the colony of Lagos and Calabar only, where three representatives are elected from Lagos and one from Calabar. The restriction of the elective principle to the colony of Lagos and Calabar sets a limit on electoral politics to just that part of the country.

Aside from restricting electoral politics to Lagos and Calabar, the elective principle under the Clifford constitution limits electoral politics to the wealthy class of the society. Only qualified adults who earn a minimum of one hundred thousand pounds per annum were eligible to vote and be voted for (Nnadozie 2007:45-47). The implication of this was that a larger part of the black population at the time could not participate in the electoral process due to lack of funds. Another problem of the elective principle was that the elected representatives in the central legislature were just four, giving them little or no influence in the legislative process. Despite the limitations of the Clifford constitution, however, it is still credited with the introduction of the practice of electoral politics in Nigeria as it is today. Hence, electoral politics in Nigeria today is a brainchild of the 1922 constitution.

In 1946, the Richard Constitution was introduced. The 1946 constitution in Nigeria operated a restricted franchise where little or no change was made to the preceding Clifford constitution as regards the elective principle. Four elective seats were made available at the central legislature, with three representatives from Calabar and one from Lagos as it was under Clifford. However, the financial qualification was reduced from a minimum of one hundred pounds per annum to fifty pounds per annum. A major difference in the practice of electoral politics between the Clifford Constitution time and the Richard Constitution, however, was that political awareness under the Richard Constitution increased. This is due primarily to the introduction of regionalism by the Richards Constitution. The

introduction of regionalism by the constitution of Arthur Richards was accompanied by the formation of political parties at the regional level. These new political parties, viz; The Action Group, The Northern People's Congress and National Council of Nigeria, and the Cameroons put on an ethnic and regional coloration.

By 1951, the Macpherson Constitution was introduced to replace that of Arthur Richards. The Macpherson constitution adopted and restricted popular franchises at the regional level. The constitution adopted different electoral laws for the regions (David, 2018). Voting took place at the primary electoral colleges only in the West and North, where every adult taxpayer was eligible to vote. However, in the east candidates were chosen at the primary college.

A careful analysis of political party formation and electoral politics from 1946 onward reveals that ethnic-regional and religious sentiments began to dilute the true sense of nationalism that had been the fulcrum of party politics in the country. This is more apparent in the formation, ideologies, and membership of political parties that were formed during that time. For example, the three northern political parties were the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). They displayed religious character in the composition of their leadership in the sense that the NPC represented the upper-class Muslims; while the NEPU represented the lower-class downtrodden Muslims. The UMBC, created by the non-Muslim societies, was opposed to the dominance of the NPC. They were supported by Christians and missionaries to counter the perceived Fulani-Hausa Islamic hegemony in the North (Onapajo 2016:117)

The influence of religion in party formation and voting was not limited to northern Nigeria, but also to southern Nigeria. The National Muslim Party was formed in Lagos in 1953 to oppose the Action Group (AG). However, they did not win any elections in the 1954, 1956 and 1959 elections. In 1957 another Muslim party was formed, namely the National Muslim League (NML).

In 1954 the Lyttleton constitution was introduced. The constitution had allowed for different elections with different electoral laws in regional and central legislatures just as the case under Macpherson. In the East, there was universal adult suffrage for persons over 21 years. However, in the West, only adult male taxpayers could

vote. In the North, however, there was an indirect college system whereby only taxpayers could participate in an election. In the 1954 election, 92 seats were allocated to the North, out of which the NPC won 83; the NCNC won two and the AG won one seat. Altogether, 42 seats were allocated to the West, of which 18 were won by the AG; 22 were won by the NCNC; and one seat was won by the NPC. The East was allocated 42 seats, of which the NCNC won 34; the United National Independent Party (UNIP) won four; the AG won three and an independent candidate won one seat (Nnadoze 2007, 54).

What is clear according to David, (2018:7) is that there was evidence of the politicization of ethnicity, regionalization, and religionization of politics. Thus, the three dominant parties (the NCNC, NPC, and the AG-led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, and Chief Obafemi Awolowo respectively) won in each of their regions where religion dominates. It must be noted that none of the other two parties of Christian origin won in the North. On the eve of independence in 1959, another election was organized to usher the country into the independent era. The pattern of voting in 1959, however, was the same as in 1954, according to David, (2018:8) "the seed of ethnic, regional and religious politics that had been sown since the forties had taken a firm root". The NPC took its campaign to the South in the place where Muslims dominated. The NPC captured 134 seats out of the total of 312 seats in the Federal House. The NCNC had 81 and the AG had 73. Most of the seats won by NCNC and AG in the South were won where Christians dominated (David 2018:8).

Nigeria gained independence on October 1, 1960, and the country had to wait until 1964 before another general election. The 1964 general elections were described by Kirk-Greene and Rimmer, (1981:21) as the most "perilous display of brinkmanship". It was the period during which Nigeria was on the brink of disintegration and bloodshed (Anglin 1965:173). This period was characterized by intra and inter-party conflicts and other socio-political problems such as the Action Group (AG) crisis; the treason trial of Action Group leader (Chief Obafemi Awolowo); the census controversy of 1962-64; the Workers' General Strike of 1962; the Federal Elections of 1964/65; and the 1965 Western elections crisis, among others. It was the time when the western region had the hope of getting rid of northern dominance at

the federal level through a census. However, their hope was dashed because of a merger of political parties.

The election was boycotted by the United Progressives Grand Alliance (UPGA) in protest against the arrest of their leaders in the West and North, but the North continued with the election. This created a constitutional crisis so that for three days there was no government, until 4 January when Alhaji Tafawa Balewa was reappointed as prime minister. After a fresh election was conducted in March 1965, the northern party, Northern People Congress (NPC), was still dominant with 162 seats while the NNPP had 36, the NCNC 84, and the AG 21 seats (David 2018:9). The culmination of several politically motivated crises in the first republic eventually led to the military taking over the power of government. The country endured a tumultuous military regime under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon and the Murtala/Obasanjo administration between 1966 and 1979 when the power was handed back over to a civilian government.

The return of government power back to the civilians in the second republic re-activated the menace of ethno-religious politics. According to Onapajo (2016:118), the majority of the popular parties; (National Party of Nigeria, Unity Party of Nigeria, People's Redemption Party, and Nigeria People's Party) were either associated with Christians or Muslims and were seen as offshoots of the first republican parties. The NPN replaced the NPP as a party for the north, the UPN replaced AG as the party for the Yorubas while the NPP was seen as an Igbo party. An editorial report of Daily Star, on August 8, 1979, reported that "the Yorubas are no fools to have voted for Awolowo, the Kanuris are no fools to have voted for Waziri, the Kano people are no fools to have voted for Aminu Kano, the Anambra and Imo states should be wise enough to vote en-masse for Dr Nnamdi Azikwe (Daily Star, 8 August 1979).

As of the 1983 election, the dominant parties still voted according to ethnic-religious loyalties. The NPN won in the North, the NPP in the South in the Igbo-dominated areas, and the UPN in the Yoruba-dominated areas. Such was also the pattern in the presidential elections. The fact is that the electorate was simply voting for personalities according to ethnic-religious ambassadors (Kukah, 1994:54). This tradition caused electoral politics to be heavily marred by violence and an immature collapse of the Second Republic.

The military government of Babangida attempted to correct the menace of ethno-religious bias in electoral politics in its transition program. The regime introduced a two-party system and disallowed old politicians from being their parties' flag bearers for the election. Despite the popular belief that religion was insignificant in the third republic election process, it was confirmed that in 1993 there was a Muslim/Muslim ticket under the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC), which led to a protest by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and a threat to boycott the election because of the Muslim/Muslim ticket (Osaghae 1998, 237). The election conducted under the Babangida administration was believed to have been won by Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim. However, the election was annulled by the then-military head of state.

By 1999, the military government of Abdulsalam Abubakar transitioned into democratic rule which led to the birth of the fourth republic. Obasanjo, a Yoruba Christian won the 1999 election. The menace of ethno-religious politics has been evident throughout the Fourth Republic. According to Onapajo, (2016:119) when General Obasanjo, a Christian candidate, was elected, he was soon accused of favouring Christians by his Christian aids with the sole purpose of trying to Christianize Nigeria. Soon Pentecostal Christian leaders gave Obasanjo a name called "born again" president and saw him as a divinely chosen leader in answer to their prayers (Onapajo 2016:119). This development was believed to be partly responsible for the introduction of the Sharia legal system in the 12 northern states to counteract the Christianization of Nigeria. Since then there has been a strong move to retrieve power from the Christian South.

Between 2003 and 2019, a survey of electoral outcomes in Nigeria revealed a similar bias along ethno-religious lines when it comes to electoral behavior in the country.

Issues and Perspectives on the Electoral Campaign During the 2023 General Elections

The 2023 elections campaign kick-started on the backdrop of an age-long bickering among Nigerians along ethno-religious lines and other primordial sentiments. As campaign activities gathered momentum, politicians soon leveraged several lines of cleavages in Nigeria's socio-cultural/ religious set-up to forward their interest. Arguably, the 2023 general election is the most fiercely contested in

Nigeria's fourth republic along primordial lines of cleavages. Out of the several issues that generated heated controversies in the 2023 election, the most contentious are ethnicity and religion. The remaining part of this section attempts to holistically enquire into the dynamics of these two issues as they concern the 2023 general election.

Ethnicity and the 2023 General Election

The concept of ethnicity is loosely defined; this is because of its multifaceted dimension. According to Santos, Palomares, Normando, and Quintao, (2010), ethnicity is a concept that builds the identity of an individual through kinship, religion, language, shared territory and nationality, and physical appearance. Taking a cue from this definition, ethnicity can be said to refer to the ethnic quality or affiliation of a group of people, which is normally characterized in terms of culture. Hoffman and Graham (2009), denote ethnicity as a group of people bound by blood ties. From this perspective, the word ethnicity denotes a relationship that is bound by a sense of kinship or ancestry. Isiaq, Adebiri, and Bakare (2018:119) posit that ethnicity is characterized by social-cultural phenomena including ancestral descent, culture and norms, and the feeling of nationhood which suggests that ethnicity can only exist in heterogeneous societies.

Some scholars have argued from a radical perspective that ethnicity is an abstract and unreal idea manipulated by the political class for their self-interest. Enloe (1978:33) conceived of ethnicity as 'an unreal, an artificial basis of identification and collective organization, conjured up by outsiders looking for an efficient instrument of political and economic control'. Similarly, Hoffman and Graham (2009:2), see ethnicity as a strategic weapon chosen by a disadvantaged group as a new mode of seeking political redress, or by a privileged group to protect its advantages. Also, Oladiran (2013:698) suggests that the phenomenon of ethnicity should be expected in any situation where a group of people, irrespective of size and with distinct cultural and linguistic qualities from other groups, uses a feeling of oneness as a medium to interact with others (Oladiran, 2013:698). This is so true given the extent to which the political class in Nigeria has over the years manipulated ethnic and other primordial sentiments for political gains. The 2023 presidential election is not excused in this

regard as the three major contenders for the election represented the three dominant ethnic identities in the country, and their ethnic collaborators did not spare to show support for them. The candidate of the ruling All Progressives Congress, Alhaji Bola Ahmed Tinubu is a Yoruba man from the South-West Zone, Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party is a Hausa-Fulani man from the North-East Zone while Peter Obi of the Labour Party is an Igbo man from the South-East zone.

The pre-election campaign activities reverberate discussion bordering on ethnic marginalization of the Igbos, the suspicion against the Hausa-Fulani to dominate Nigeria politics when the outgoing president is similarly a Hausa-Fulani man as well as the 'emilokan' and 'Yoruba ron' mantra of Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the APC. According to Usman (2023:6), the impact of ethnicity on the outcome of the presidential elections is evident in the candidates' percentage of votes from their respective political zones. The eventual winner, Ahmed Tinubu of APC, received 53.59% of votes from the South West, despite losing his state of origin to Peter Obi. Atiku Abubakar of PDP secured 50.58% of votes from the North East geopolitical zone, despite having the APC vice presidential candidate from the same zone. Peter Obi of LP received 87.78% of the total votes in the South East, his geopolitical zone.

The Surge of Religious Propaganda in the 2023 General Election

Religion as a concept can best be described and not defined, this is a result of the fluidity of the concept as well as its emotive nature. Generally, the concept has often been described from the point of man's relation with the unseen or supernatural world. It often connotes the spiritual. Cox, (1996:1-4) argues that scholars have defined religion in five broad ways according to their disciplines and understandings; the first is from a theological perspective. Religion is seen as a belief in God and spiritual beings, as the life of God in the human soul, and as an awesome and attractive mystery. Secondly is the moral school whereby religion is considered to be as living a good moral life and accepting all our duties as divine commands. The third perspective is the philosophical perspective. In this sense religion is described as what a man does with his/her solitariness; what a person does about his

or her being that is outside of the person and a person's ultimate concern. The psychological perspective is another way in which religion has been described. In this sense religion is seeking comfort in a world of terrifying wilderness, as "some kind of profound inner experience" and as a universal obsessive neurosis. The Sociological perspective which is the fifth sees religion as "the opium of the people" and as "conservation of values" (Cox 1996: 4).

The description of religion above except from the sociological view seems to associate the concept of religion with a tranquil state of the soul and a peaceful coexistence among members of the society. Or to put it more lucidly as David, (2018:2) puts it, religion is the belief in the transcendent and immanent being or force who empowers and mandates us to maintain a good relationship with the creator and created. This perspective however does not agree with several violent religious conflicts and religion-motivated terrorist activities that have pervaded the world over the years. The majority of the terrorist groups in the world today are seen to be fighting for one religious course or another.

The sociological view of religion gives credence to its emotive nature and this makes religion easily susceptible to politicization and other propagandist tendencies, and this is why religion is easily manipulated by politicians and political parties for political contest. The 2023 presidential election was contested on the backdrop of heated and controversial religious propaganda that further divided the country and reopened old wounds of religious hatred. As the political campaign for the 2023 presidential election was flagged off, politicians began to leverage religious divides by using their collaborators in religious establishments to canvass votes from their audiences. Church pulpits and other religious gatherings soon became an avenue for endless prophecies on who "the lord" has chosen to take the scepter of political leadership in the country.

The Presidential election of 2023 was keenly contested among PDP's candidate, Atiku Abubakar, a Muslim from Adamawa state, in the Northern part of Nigeria; APC's flag-bearer, Bola Tinubu, also a Muslim from Lagos state in Southern Nigeria and Labour Party's Peter Obi, a Christian, from Anambra state, Southern Nigeria. Since the immediate past president was a northern Muslim, some advocates of

power-sharing believe that the presidency should be zoned to the southern part of the country while other adherents also add a religious dimension to the zoning demanding a southern Christian for the presidency. Irrespective of the various demands, it is worthy of note that the power-sharing structure is not a constitutional arrangement but a political one.

The presidential candidate of the ruling All Progressives Congress was at the centre of religious propaganda. This is because as a Muslim, he also chose another Muslim, Alhaji Kashim Shettima from the north as his running mate. His choice which was due to his political calculations for having a considerable block vote from the northern part of the country, was against the norm that had been practiced since 1999 (Salahu, 2023:11). As a matter of fact, the position of Nigeria's president and vice president has been alternated between the two major religions in the country since 1999, whereby, if the president is a Muslim, then the running mate would be a Christian and vice versa. This practice against the norm by the APC's flag-bearer was soon capitalized upon by the opposition parties who had opted to share the positions of president and vice president among the two dominant religions.

The choice of a Muslim-Muslim ticket by the APC flag-bearer gathered heavy criticism among different sections of the country especially Christians and increased the spectra of religious campaigns. The criticism against the Muslim-Muslim ticket started within the ruling APC where aggrieved members who had thought to benefit from the zoning of the presidency to the south were disappointed when the presidential candidate opted to choose a northern Muslim as running mate instead of a northern Christian. The Punch, (2022) reported that a former secretary to the government of the federation Mr. Babachir Lawal, and the ex-speaker of the House of Representatives Yakubu Dogara had threatened to quit the ruling APC opposing the Muslim-Muslim ticket. "They had vowed to mobilize the Northern Christians to reject the Timbu/Shettima joint ticket. They declared that it is not a personal opinion. It is a demand of the Nigerian nation. The nation is demanding free, fair, and equitable representation. Muslim-Muslim ticket would not guarantee peace. This is a clear threat to destroy the peace of the nation if only Muslims become the rulers". Yakubu

Dogara argued that the same-faith ticket is a politics of exclusion and oppression. "Timbu made a fatal error with the same-faith ticket, for it posits northern Christians' votes don't count—small in number. It is satanic in dividing the Church in Nigeria into North and South. It will fuel inequality and breed division, which is counter-productive for a prosperous nation. The same-faith ticket denies the justice of God and fails in leadership quality in crisis to have the ability to recognize a departure of events from routine to novel." The northern Christian leaders submit that this period in Nigeria is not 1993 routine (Editorial Punch, Green-barge Reporters July 29, 2022).

Political parties and candidates who could not advance issue-based campaigns soon leveraged the opportunity afforded by the Muslim-Muslim ticket of the APC to resort to primordial religious sentiment to beg for votes from the electorates. In fact, according to Salahu, (2023:12) the circumstances surrounding the Muslim-Muslim ticket were what produced a third force, the Labour Party, with a Christian-Muslim ticket in the election. 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 Timbu. Consequently, the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), reaffirms the association's opposition against Muslim-Muslim ticket, maintaining that they took a position against the same faith ticket imbroglio (Okoh, 2022). The above position by CAN, saw most Christian communities overtly and covertly campaigning vigorously for the Labour Party and its presidential candidate, Peter Obi.

Pastor Daniel Omotosho, a Senior Regional Pastor of God's Chosen Miracle Church, Barrawa, Kaduna State, called on President Mohammedu Buhari to call to order Timbu to stop disrespecting Christians for the sake of politics. He should stop using "fake pastors" to misrepresent Christians at the unveiling of the vice-presidential candidate on July 20th, 2022, for it was aimed at achieving political gain. If Christians did such, using fake Imams and Mallams, it could have led to setting the country ablaze, Omotosho queried (Gabriel July 22, 2022).

The Secretary General of the Northern CAN, Sunday Oibe, reaffirms their opposition to the same-faith ticket. He says Nigeria is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural society that has never been so divided along religious and ethnic lines (Enyioche, 2022). Similarly, Reverend John Joseph Hayab, CAN Chairman of the 19 Northern States and the FCT declares that the same-faith ticket of the APC is "a Nollywood movie." He said that it is out-rightly false a claim that Tinubu met with CAN National Chairman and Pastor Adeboye of the RCCG on the issue of same-faith tickets (Tauna, 2022). In the same vein, the new CAN Chairman and the General Superintendent of Christ Holy Church International, Bishop Daniel Okoh declares that the same-faith ticket is an insult to Christian sensibility. Christians feel "there is a deliberate plan to remove the Christian faith from the scheme of things and make them second-class citizens in their own country" (Are, 2022).

Reasons for the Ethno-Religious Dimension of the Campaign for the 2023 Elections

Some of the reasons for the ethnocentric and religious dimension of the election campaign for the 2023 presidential elections were succinctly captured by Professor Atteh, (2023) in his report thus;

- i. The key players and dominant followers in the politics of Northern Nigeria are Muslims. It appears difficult to think non-Muslims from the North should represent their interests in such a critical post. This accounts for the selection of a Muslim as the running mate of the APC candidate which later became the basis for religious conspiracy
- ii. The notion that the faith and practice of a Southern Muslim are not at par with those of the Northern Muslim is practically playing out itself. Muslims from the North see a Muslim from the South as inferior or second class in Islam. So, to think Tinubu would fully represent the interests of the North (dominantly Muslim) is unthinkable in practice.
- iii. At least in the current Nigeria, Northern Christians cannot be the presidential or vice presidential candidate from the North, especially in the ruling party. This is why some northern

- iv. Christian politicians were vociferous in their campaign against the Muslim/Muslim ticket
- v. Religion is the first line of thought, and not indigenization, in Northern Nigeria, especially in critical regional or national politics.
- vi. Regional interests, and not religious equilibrium or national cohesion are uppermost in who occupies critical positions. The Hausas have only Muslims, the Igbos have only Christians, and the Yorubas have both Muslims and Christians for critical first-class positions in Nigeria. It appears absurd for either to do otherwise.
- vii. Muslims are out to queue up only for candidates of their faith, likewise Christians for the candidates of their faith.
- viii. Muslims will not accept Christian-Christian, and Christians will not accept Muslim-Muslims in critical first-class positions.

Effects of Ethno-Religious Campaign on the Electoral Outcome

Notably, the result of the 2023 presidential election was a reflection of the ethno-religious structure of the country. The result reflected the claim of the APC Presidential candidate of where he was expecting block votes and also a reflection of the Christian communities' open challenge and threat to vote against the party. 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 claim, while the Labour party candidate, who incidentally is the only Christian among the big three candidates, got well over 60% of his votes from the South-East and South-South geopolitical zones where Christianity is predominant (Salahu, 2023:12). Due to the already religion and ethnic 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 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

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

SN	Geo-Political Zone	State	APC (Votes)	PDP (Votes)	LP (Votes)
1	North-West	Kano	317,241	131,716	28,438
2	North-West	Kaduna	399,293	554,360	294,494
3	North-West	Katsina	482,283	489,045	6,325
4	North-West	Kobbi	248,088	285,175	10,682
5	North-West	Jigawa	421,390	386,583	1,900
6	North-West	Sokoto	285,444	288,679	6,568
7	North-West	Zamfara	298,396	193,978	1,860
Sub-total (Votes)			2,652,235	2,329,536	350,182
8	North-East	Benue	316,694	426,607	29,778
9	North-East	Yobe	151,459	198,567	2,406
10	North-East	Gombe	146,977	319,123	26,060
11	North-East	Adamawa	182,881	417,611	105,648
12	North-East	Taraba	135,165	189,017	146,315
13	North-East	Borno	252,282	190,521	7,205
Sub-total (Votes)			1,185,438	1,741,446	315,107
14	North-Central	Benue	310,468	130,081	308,372
15	North-Central	Kogi	240,751	145,104	56,217
16	North-Central	Kwara	263,572	136,909	31,166
17	North-Central	Niger	375,184	284,898	80,452
18	North-Central	Plateau	307,196	243,808	466,272
19	North-Central	Nasarawa	172,922	147,093	191,661
20	North-Central	FCT	90,902	74,194	281,717
Sub-total (Votes)			1,760,994	1,162,087	1,465,559
21	South-West	Lagos	572,606	75,750	582,454
22	South-West	Oyo	449,884	182,977	99,110
23	South-West	Osun	343,945	354,366	23,283
24	South-West	Ondo	309,524	125,463	44,408
25	South-West	Ekiti	201,494	89,554	11,397
26	South-West	Ogun	341,554	121,831	85,829
Sub-total (Votes)			2,279,007	1,001,941	846,478
27	South-East	Imo	66,406	30,234	360,495

28	South-East	Enugu	4,772	15,749	428,640
29	South-East	Anambra	5,111	9,036	554,652
30	South-East	Ebonyi	42,402	13,503	259,738
31	South-East	Abia	8,914	22,676	327,025
Sub-total (Votes)			127,605	91,198	1,760,589
32	South-South	Akwa Ibom	160,620	214,012	110,653
33	South-South	Bayelsa	42,572	68,818	49,975
34	South-South	Rivers	231,591	88,468	105,071
35	South-South	Cross Rivers	130,520	95,425	179,917
36	South-South	Imo	144,471	89,585	39,163
37	South-South	Delta	90,186	161,600	341,866
Sub-total (Votes)			799,960	717,908	1,210,675
Total (valid votes)			8,794,726	6,984,520	6,101,533

Source: Generated from the INEC database (2023)

A cursory look at the election result would reveal the ethno-religious dimension in the voting pattern of the electorates during the last election. In the North-West zone, which is predominantly Muslim states, the APC with a Muslim candidate polled a total of 2,652,235 votes which is 40.2% of the total votes. Similarly, the PDP with a northern Muslim candidate polled 2,329,536 which is 35.3 % of the votes cast from that region while Peter Obi of the Labour Party who is a Christian candidate only polled 350,182 which is 5.3% of the votes from the zone. The victory of the APC in that region could be largely attributed to the choice of a Muslim-Muslim ticket by the party.

In the North-East Zone of the country, voting patterns equally reflected the influence of both religion and ethnicity. It is worthy of note that this zone is predominantly Muslim and the flagbearer of the PDP, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar is from Adamawa state, in the Northeast. It is therefore not surprising that Atiku of PDP won this zone with a total of 1,741,446 votes which is 51.7% of the votes cast in the zone. He is followed by Ahmed Tinubu of the APC who is also a Muslim with a total of 1,185,438 that is, 35.2% while Peter Obi of Labour Party got 315,107 which is 9.4% of the votes.

The voting pattern in the North-Central zone reveals the multifarious ethno-religious makeup of that part of the country. The zone comprises both states that are predominantly Muslim and those that are dominated by Christians. On the whole, Tinubu of APC won the zone with 1,760,994 which is 40% of the total votes. He was followed by Peter Obi of LP who polled 1,415,559 votes amounting to 32.2% of the votes while Atiku Abubakar of the PDP polled 1,162,087 votes which was 26.4% of the votes cast.

Electoral behavior in the South-East zone of the country was shaped by both religious and ethnic motivations. All the five states in the zone are predominantly Catholic Christians. It is noteworthy that the candidate of the Labour Party, Peter Obi a southern Christian, hails from that zone. Expectedly, the Labour Party candidate won with a landslide victory polling a total of 1,760,589 which is 89.6% of the total votes from the zone. Tinubu of the APC came a distant second from the zone with 127,605 which is 5.8% of the votes, while the PDP candidate came third with 91,198 votes 4.2% of the total votes from the zone.

The South-West zone consists of a significant mixture of both Muslims and Christians. This is the zone of the APC candidate a Yoruba man and a Muslim. On a general note, the votes from the South-West reveal an ethnic bias in favour of the APC candidate. The candidate of the APC polled a total of 2,279,007 votes which is 55.8% of the votes. He was followed by Atiku Abubakar of the PDP who polled 1,001,941 votes making up 23.1% while Peter Obi of Labour Party polled 846,478 votes which is 20.7% of the votes.

The South-South zone voting pattern also followed both the religious and ethnic dimensions. The zone is predominantly Christian. On the whole, the Christian candidate in person of Peter Obi of Labour Party won the zone polling a total of 1,210,675 which is 44.1% of the votes. He was followed by Tinubu of the APC with 799,960 votes which is 29.1% while Atiku Abubakar of PDP came third with 717,908 votes which is 26.2% of the votes cast. On the percentile, Obi led with 44.1%, Tinubu followed with 29.1%, and Atiku came third with 26.2%.

Lessons Learned from the 2023 General Election's Campaign and Way Forward

Ethnicity, religion, and politics as can be deduced from this chapter have been wrongly manipulated by the political class in Nigeria and have become the clog in the wheel of national development and progress in Nigeria stifling any hope of national integration and consciousness. The centrifugal tensions brought about by the menace of ethno-religious politicking continue to dampen any hope of true nationalism in the country and have enveloped national growth.

The Nigerian national development project continues to face challenges from ethno-religious cleavages as manipulated by the political class. These political dynamics have weakened and hampered the establishment of the national structures that are essential to promote the national project. The menace of ethnic chauvinism, ethnic politics, political disorientation, ethnic awareness, ethnic sentiment, religious bigotry, and religious fanaticism in Nigeria must be reduced to the barest minimum if the country's democracy must translate to national growth and development. There is a need to arouse a supra-national consciousness among Nigerians which will shift their national value away from their ethnic and regional cum religious groups to a new Nigerian nation. This does not in any way imply an eroding of Nigeria's socio-cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, but rather that all Nigerians must contribute to the development of a single nation that includes all ethnicities (majorities, minorities, and sub-minorities alike), taking advantage of our multiculturalism, multi-religiosity, and multiple identities.

If we are to enjoy our existence as a nation, due consideration must be given to the plurality of our ethnic identities in which case, the values of federalism must be respected, political power must be distributed equitably among the constituent ethno-cultural groups, and resources for growth. The nation needs a zealous leadership that places the people at the centre of a political project without resorting to ethnic chauvinism and sees the acquisition of political power as not a goal itself but a means to ensure the people's collective well-being regardless of their ethnic origin.

Leaders of different religious organizations and their followers are encouraged to embrace, dialogue tolerance, and admiration for one

another as well as the tents of their faith which promote peaceful co-existence, love, and brotherhood of all mankind. The content and structure of the Nigerian constitution should be strictly applied, practiced, and utilized as provided. This will go a long way to strengthen and empower the potency of government in the art of governance in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This chapter has been able to give an insight into the historical underpinning of the issue of ethno-religious politics in Nigeria. The 2023 general election having been contested on the heat wave of a heavy adversarial atmosphere resulted in one of the most contentious and divisive elections in Nigeria's fourth republic, as the three major contenders got the majority votes from their respective zones. The chapter concludes by encouraging government and politicians at national and regional levels to promote national values instead of spreading ethno-religious conspiracies for political points.

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CHAPTER FOUR MULTI-PARTY POLITICS AND POLITICAL CONTESTS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The practice of liberal democratic politics presupposes the existence of a multi-party electoral system that provides the citizenry with the latitude to belong to a spectrum of political parties, to express themselves, and to participate in the governance of their affairs. Yet, the character of political parties and political contests in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the nature of multi-party politics and political contests in Nigeria. To achieve these, the study adopted a documentary analytical methodology to generate and analyze appropriate data for the work. More so, the work adopted the neo-Marxist theory of the post-colonial state, as a framework of analysis for understanding the nature of party politics and the character of political contests in Nigeria. The study concluded that political parties, especially multi-party systems are the most fundamental instruments for determining a feasible and stable democracy. Despite these, multi-party politics in Nigeria is bedeviled with a lack of ideology, money politics, women exclusion, and violence. Again, political parties in Nigeria remain instruments of capturing power through fair or foul means. All these manifested in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The study recommended, among others, that there is a need for political parties to be ideologically based and that measures be put in place to ensure strict internal laws that will govern the affairs of party members and curb their excesses. It also recommends the institutionalization of these instruments of democratic governance to mitigate the preponderance of strong individuals.

Keywords: Democracy, Elections, Multi-Party Politics, Political Contests, Post-Colonial State.