Ethnicity, Religion and Party Politics in Nigeria: An Evaluation of the 2023 General Elections

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Abstract

Since the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in Nigeria in 1999, ethnicity and religion are arguably the most profoundly complex issues that have influenced the electioneering process in the country. This study therefore seeks to find out the extent to which these twin factors influenced the 2023 general elections. It is methodologically structured using qualitative and quantitative methods. Both methods draw their information and data from secondary sources- textbooks, journal articles, publications from international institution, INEC portal, newspapers and internet sources. These were presented in tabular form and analyzed using simple percentages, described and explained within the context of the subject matter under investigations. Discussions were focused under four political parties; APC, PDP, LP and NNPP. In making this choice, the paper recognized the importance of the mandatory 25% constitutional provision as a condition for the declaration of the winner of any presidential elections in the country. The results reveal that ethnicity and religious factors played a role in the voting patterns of Nigerians in certain areas, but the eventual outcome was determined by non-compliance of INEC with electoral laws, weaknesses in opposition parties, and the politicization of the judiciary. Therefore, it recommended that unless these anomalies are strengthened, future presidential elections will continue to be mirage.
Keywords: Ethnicity, Religion, Party Politics, Elections

Introduction

Since the reintroduction of multiparty elections in Nigeria in 1999 the country has had a long history of the interplay of ethnicity and religion as the two most profoundly deeply rooted factors that have shaped the political dynamics of the country. This explains why many scholars-(Olawojolu, 2015; Adamo, 2018; Abumbe & Alagh, 2022; Moshoad and Orunbon, 2023), are of the opinion that these twin factors are key in determining the political dynamics of Nigeria. This was to be expected, given that the country is a cross-cultural political entity made of more them 250 ethnic nationalities heterogeneously yoked together in 1914 to form what is today known as Nigeria. Given the cultural diversity of over 200 million people, who have been inspired by section 38(1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), there was little wonder that the country also had different religious groups. Despite, the multiplicity of these religious sects, Christianity and Islam are the two dominant religions that have taken the center stage in defining the political arithmetic in Nigeria whether calculated vertically or horizontally. Christianity is predominantly practiced in the South East, South-South and parts of the West while Islam is mostly practiced in the Northern part of Nigeria. The issue of ethnicity and religion as key factor that shape the direction of elections in Nigeria is not new and as Isiag, Adebiyi and Bakare (2018) have pointed out these have had a significant influence in elections in Nigeria since independence.

However, in contrast to previous elections, there was seemingly justifiable reasons to suggest that the 2023 general election were going to be different from the ethnic and religious plaque that had bedeviled previous elections. First, the economy witnessed a dramatic down turn occasioned by massive unemployment, corruption by public office holders, galloping inflation and insecurity. Secondly, unlike previous elections where only two political parties dominated the political scene and campaigned on the bases of ethnicity and religion, Peter Obi of Labour Party (LP) presented a third force. Thirdly, there was the introduction of advanced technology; the use of BIVAS and IREV (Abumbe & Owa, 2024) became recognized by many Nigerians as the joker that could perfect the electoral process. Understanding these particularities provides us with a clear aim- to determine whether ethnicity and religion played significant role on the political dynamic of the many political parties that were involved in that election. Our focus is on four political parties; the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) with Bola Ahmed Tinubu as the presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar – Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), Peter Obi's Labour Party (LP) and Rabiu Kwankwaso's New Nigeria Peoples' Party (NNPP). To achieve this sole objective, the paper will be organized into parts; introduction, literature review, theoretical foundation, research method, Data presentation, Analysis, analysis of findings, conclusion and recommendations.

Literature Review

Literature on the influence of ethnicity and religion into the Nigerian electoral process has attracted writings and commentaries from scholars (Isia, Adebiyi & Bakare,2018, Abumbe, Alagh & Adejumo, 2022, Mohammade, 2023) These authors have agreed on one point; that elections based on ethnic and religious inclination in Nigeria are as old as the country itself. However, it was only the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) which was established in 1944 that had no ethnic inclination, because it received support from all sections of the nations. It was not until the practice of carpet crossing which made it difficult for Dr. Nnamdi Azikewe to win a seat in the West that he was compelled to retire to his ethnic group in the South East, thus making the party to increasingly become Igbo ethnic party (Abumbe, Alagh & Adejumo 2022). As a result of this, most Yorubas in the South West supported the Action Group (AG) led by their Kinsman; Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Meanwhile, the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) remains a party for the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group (Salahiu and Hassan 2011). Nevertheless, the decision to vote in the 1959 federal election was to be taken as a member of a community rather than an individual. The result of ethnic bias manifested in the 1959 elections, where the two dominant political parties; NCNC and NPC won over 75% of electoral seats and more than half respectively in their areas (Post, 1963). But the question which is usually ask by many social carpenters is why has ethnicity and religion influenced politics in Nigeria.

A number of authors have provided divergent answers. Goldberg (2014) for example have explained the influence of religion in determining the voting behaviour of Nigerians in terms religion socialization.   In order words, Nigerians who live in a predominately Christian environment are more likely to vote for a candidate who is a Christian than a Muslim in any election and this has been a recurrent trend of voters since 1960 (Schmitt 1984). However, Mohammed (2023) have look at the influence of ethnicity and religion from the point of the structure of the Nigerian State. Tracing the history of the Nigerian state from the Berlin Conference in 1884-1885 to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorate in 1914, which he considers a "mistake" brought together different ethnics entities with diverse history together that laid the foundation for ethnic and religious bigotry. Even the colonialist themselves knew the potent danger this could bring in future Nigeria (Akinnola, 1988). Besides, the structure of Nigerian society is made up of more than 374 ethnic groups (Salawu, 2010) with over 200 million people, religiously divided into Christianity and Islam, in the south and North respectively (Mohammed, 2023).   The amalgamation of these diverse ethnic entities with

different religious inclinations made it easier for Nigerian political processes to be influenced by these factors. This is even made worse given that the political elite have continually used these factors as tools for political manipulation, resources control and identity politics. The result of all these is that, the country process of candidates' selection, voter mobilization, campaign messaging, voting pattern and policy priorities are always shaped ethnic and religious colouration.

Despite the above, it must be restated that the 2023 presidential election like other election source the advent of multiparity party democracy in Nigeria was significantly influenced by ethnicity and religion (Marshall, 2009, Onapajo, 2012 and Obienafuna 2018). Despite this, the phenomenon of money politics has also been introduced by Isiag, Adebiyi and Bakare (2018). Though not essentially known in Nigerian Politics, the 2023 presidential election was arguably the first in history of the country to be organized with limited cash in circulation. This was because of the federal government "Naira Predesign" policy which was aimed to stop corrupt politicians and limit vote buying (Fourchard, Sikirn, 2023). Despite this, the process leading to the February 2023 election especially during the primaries leading political parties, APC and PDP, shocked observers and threaten to fully manitise in advance, the Nigerian process of primaries and party nomination, (Mindashir, Agabi, Aliyu, Oloyede, Shuaibu, 2002). This might not have influenced voting pattern of Nigerians directly, but also goes to project the Nigerian political process as largely influenced by money.

The above exposition no doubt has shown the influence of ethnicity and religion in the Nigerian election generally and in the 2023 in particular. The figures in table I, II and III above attest to this. However, the outcome of the election was largely influenced as indicated in our earlier section by INECD failure to keep to the rules of the game (Abumbe & Inah, 2024), the character of Mr. Tinubu before and after the APC primaries, the weaknesses in the opposition camp and the judiciary. These four factors to a large extend determined the eventual outcome of the 2023 presidential election.

Theoretical Framework

One way by which one can adequately understand the party politics in the 21st century, Nigeria is by the use of an appropriate theory. In this regard this paper has utilized the knowledge put forth by with intersectionality theory. The theory was first coined by an American civil rights advocate in 1989 by Kimbele William Crenshaw. The thrust of the theory is on its emphasis on the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class religion and ethnicity. Within the context of Nigerian political landscape, the theory holds that multiple factors intersect and through intersection and interaction usually influence individual experiences and political behaviours.

What this theory suggest correctly is that, one cannot fully comprehend party politics in Nigeria without making nuance analysis that considers multiple and complex interaction between ethnicity, religion and other social factors. When applied to the 2023 general elections, the theory allows individuals and researches to examine how intersecting identities in Nigeria influenced party structures, candidates' selection process, campaign strategies and voters' perception during the events leading up to the 2023 general elections (Lynch, Flucks, Essop and Kooyan, 2020).

The utility of this theory to this paper are three folds. First, it allows us to conduct a holistic analysis of the 2023 general election that goes beyond a single-crisis explanations of political phenomenon, so that a more nuanced understanding of Nigeria's electoral system can be improved. Second, it provides a contextual relevant framework for studying the complexities of identity-based politics in Nigeria. Thirdly, the theory provides valuable insight for policy makers, and electoral stakeholders seeking to address the issues related to ethnicity and religious tension

that have bedeviled Nigerian party politics since 1979. It is for this there reasons that the intersectionality theory is adopted as the theoretical frame for this study.

Prelude to the 2023 General Elections

Preparation for the February 25, 2023 general elections in Nigeria gained an unprecedented momentum in 2022. First, the electoral Act of October, 2022 was passed into law and the four contending political parties held their primaries that same year. (Abumbe & Inah, 2024). Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Sen. Kashim Shettima emerged presidential and vice-presidential flag bearers respectively for APC, Atiku Abubakar and Governor Ifeanyi Okowa emerged for PDP, Peter Obi and Sen. Yusuf Datti Baba Ahmed emerged for (LP) while Rabiu Kwakanso and Pastor Isaac Idahosa emerged as candidates for (NNPP). (The Guardian, 30th May, 20022, Dennis, 2022, and Idowu, 2022). As the 2023 drew nearer, the major political parties began to use religious and ethnic inclinations to converse for positions. Within the ruling APC there was a clear departure from the unscripted political tradition of "Muslims-Christian ticket" or Christina-Muslim ticket to Muslim-Muslim ticket (Salahu, 2023), while the PDP also reneged from its earlier position to a Southern president as stated by the former Kaduna State governor, Malam El-Rufai,

> *We have agreed on a zoning formula for all the six geopolitical zones and essentially, we swapped; northern zones will take the position of southern zones had in the last eight years and vice versa. So, very simple, equitable and fair (Premium Times April 24, 2022).*

Failure of APC to subscribe to "Muslim-Christian tike" and the unwillingness of the PDP to adhere to Southern presidency arrangement, fanned ethnic and religious sentiments. Prominent socio-cultural and religious groups such as southern governors Forum (SGF), Ohanaeze Idigbo of South East, Anenifere of South West, PAANDEF of South-South and Middle Belt Forum and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) began to openly call for Southern Presidency (Premium Time, 2023), Salam, 2023). Despite appeals from concerned APC members and Christian community for the party to shelf the idea of muslim-muslim presidential ticket the APC presidential candidate jettisoned because the appeal hoped muslim-muslim ticket will enable him to get block votes from North Western and North Eastern which are predominantly muslims (Salam, 2023). This refusal heated up the polity and Christian communities openly challenged the presidential candidate and the APC party.

Having secured a Muslim-Muslim ticket for the APC, they were political maneuverings to secure the PDP ticket and ethnic and religion sentiments intensified. Nyesom Wike of Rivers State had hoped to secure the PDP presidential ticket by relying on the former Governor of Sokoto state; Aminu Tambowal, his political protégé and friend. However, the result of the PDP primaries which said Vice president, Atiku Abubakar clinching to ticket reflected ethic and religious sentiments as may delegates from the North whom Nyesom Wike had hoped for the overwhelming voted for their kins man; Atiku Abubakar. Once this was achieved the coast was now clear for either Southern muslim or a Northerner to become to next president. Meanwhile smaller parties such as labour party (LP) which become recognize as the "Third Force" and the New Nigeria Peoples' Party (NNP) remained strategically patience waiting to feed from the disputes and fall out within the two major political parties by selling their tickets to the aggrieved losers from the primaries.

Research Method

This research adopted both the qualitative and quantitative methods whereby data were drawn from secondary source. This involved data generated from the INEC's saver of the 2023 results. The result of the four major political parties, APC, PDP, LP and NNPP, were generated as reflected on the six geopolitical sentiments and reported from the thirty-six states and FCT. It

considered the constitutional requirement of 25% of votes form the 36 states and FCT as a precondition for declaring winner in the 2023 presidential election. These were contently analysed using simple percentages to determine the level of influence of ethnicity and religion on the electoral outcome of the 2023 presidential elections. To augment this quantitative method, data were also drawn from textbooks, journal articles, newspapers and internet sources. These were cogently described, explained and analysed within the context of the subject matter under investigation. For the purpose of this study, this paper relied on result of four political parties, as announced by INEC. These include; Bola Ahmed Tinubu's APC which pulled 8,794,726 (36.615%) of total; votes cast, Atiku Abubakar's PDP which pulled 6,984,520 (29.09%) Peter Obi's LP which pulled 6,101,533 (25.4%) and Rabiu Kwankwaso's NNPP which pulled 2,496,687 (6,33%) Abumbe & Inah, 2023, Enweremadu, 2023).

Data Presentation and Analysis

To avoid inconsistencies, it is important to present the 2023 presidential election result as announced by INEC on the early hours of March 1st, 2024. These results are tabulated according to the six geopolitical zones and states for easy analysis. It must be restated that the purpose of this study is to determine the influence of ethnicity and religion on the political party dynamics of the 2023 presidential election. Although there were about eighteen (18) political parties that took part in 2023 presidential election, we are only interested in four (4) political parties because they were the political parties that significantly influenced the outcome of the elections. Below is a table containing the presidential result as generated from the INEC portal.

Table 1: Zonal performance of the fur in respect of the 25% threshold for the presidential elections

Zones	APC		PDP		LP		NNPP		Winner
North Central	1,760,993	40.03	1,62,087	26.42	1,415,557	32.18	60.056	1.37	APC
North East	1,185,458	35.19	1,741,846	51.71	315,107	9.35	126,343	3.75	PDP
North West	2,641,306	40.08	2,329,540	35,35	350,182	5.31	1,268,250	19.25	APC
South East	127,605	5.83	91,198	4.17	1,960,589	89.62	8,227	0.38	LP
South South	799,957	29.13	917,908	26.15	1,210,675	44.09	17,167	0.63	LP
South West	2,279,407	55.77	941,941	23.04	849,423	26.78	16,644	0.41	APC

Source: INEC Report, 2023

The data in Table 1 above represents the result of the four frontline political parties in the 2023 presidential elections as provided by INEC report. However, in order to have a more wholistic view as to the influence of ethnicity and religion on the voting pattern of the elections, we need to present a tabular presentation of the contestants and the ethnic and religious affiliation as presented on table II below.

Table II: Ethnic and religious affiliation of presidential and Vice-presidential candidates of the four (4) frontline parties in the 2023 elections.

S/N	Political parties	Presidential candidate	Ethnic & Religious affiliation	Vice Presidential candidate	Ethnic & Religious affiliation
1.	APC	Bola Tinubu	South West/Muslim	Kashin Shetima	North East/Muslim
2.	PDP	Atiku Abubakar	North East/Muslim	Ifeanyi Okowa	South-South/Christian
3.	LP	Peter Obi	South East/Christian	Dati Ahmed	North West/Muslim
4.	NNPP	Rabiu Kwankwaso	North West/Muslim	Isaac Idahosa	South South/ Christian

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 1 and II represents the trend of thought in this paper; to determine the influence of ethnicity and religious on the voting pattern and the eventual outcome of the 2023 presidential elections. The frontline political parties were APC, PDP, LP and NNPP. The result proved that the election

was a tight contest between these parties. Out of a total of 24,025,520 total valid votes cast APC pulled 8,794,726 (36.61%) votes, PDP pulled 6,984,520 (29.09%) votes, LP pulled 6,101,533 (25.4%) votes while NNPP pulled 2,496,689 (6.33%) (Enweremadu, 2023; Abumbe & Inah, 2024). The overall result shows that Bola Ahmed Tinubu who ran the contest on a muslim-muslim ticket won the election. But, can this be attributed to religion, ethnicity or both? To answer this question, we did our analysis based on table 1 and II because the latter represents the ethnic and religious affiliation of the contestants.

The All Progressive Congress (APC) party had Bola Ahmed Tinubu as the presidential flag bearer and Kashin Shettima as Vice President. Both men are muslims and are from South-West (Yoruba) and North East (Hausa-Fulani) ethnic groups respectively. Perhaps it explains why APC won three out of the six geopolitical zones with a total of 6,681,706 (27.81%) of total valid votes cast. The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) candidate, Atiku Abubakar is from the North East and a Muslim and Ifeanyi Okowa from the South-South and a Christian. The PDP won only in the North East with a total of 1,741,846 (7.2%). There is the possibility that Atiku's kins men voted for him. However, it is noticed that the margin of lead was between PDP and APC was 556,388 votes which meant that a significant number of voters in the North East voted for APC (Bola Ahmed Tinubu) who was from the South West). Labour Party (LP) won in two geopolitical zones (South-South and South East) with a total of 3,171,264 (13.2%). The margin of lead with the APC was 2,243,702. Also, it may be suggested that the candidature of Peter Obi who hails from the South East and a Christian might have influenced his victory in the two geopolitical zones. The New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP) did not win in any of Table III: 2023 presidential election results: State by state as declared by INEC geopolitical zones, even in a muslim dominated zones and where he has an ethnic affiliation. This suggest that something more than ethnicity and religion might have influenced the political dynamics of the 2023 presidential election in those areas. This picture can be made clearer if we consider the voting pattern on state-by-state basis as seen on table III below

Table III : 2023 presidential election results: State by state as declared by INEC

State	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP
Ekiti	201,494	89,554	11,397	264
Kwara	263,592	136,909	31,166	3,142
Osun	343,945	354,366	23,283	713
Ondo	369,924	115,463	22,405	930
Ogun	341,554	123,831	85,829	2,200
Oyo	449,884	182,977	99,10	4,095
Yobe	151,459	198,567	2,406	18,270
Enugu	4,792	15,749	428,640	1,808
Lagos	572,606	95,750	582,454	8,442
Gombe	146,977	319,125	26,160	10,520
Adamawa	182,881	417,611	105,648	8,006
Katsina	482,283	489,045	6,376	69,386
Jigawa	421,390	386,587	1,889	9,823
Nasarawa	172,922	147,093	191,361	12,715
Niger	375,183	284,898	80,452	1,836
Benue	310,468	130,081	308,372	4,740
FCT	90,902	74,194	281,717	4,517
Akwa Ibom	160,620	214,012	132,683	7,796
Edo	144,471	89,585	331,163	2,743
Abia	8,914	22,676	327,095	1,243
Kogi	240,751	145,104	56,217	4,238
Bauchi	316,694	426,607	27,373	71,103
Plateau	307,195	243,808	466,272	8,869
Bayelsa	42,572	68,818	49,975	540
Kano	517,341	131,716	28,513	997,279
Zamfara	298,396	193,978	1,660	4,044
Sokoto	285,444	288,699	6,568	1,300
Cross River	130,520	95,425	179,917	1,644
Delta	90,183	161,600	341,866	3,122
Ebonyi	42,402	13,503	259,738	2,661
Anambra	5,111	9,036	584,621	1,969
Taraba	135,165	189,019	146,315	12,818
Borno	252,282	190,921	7,025	1,322
Rivers	231,591	88,468	175,071	1,322
Imo	66,406	30,234	360,495	1,552
Aggregate	**8,794,726**	**6,894,520**	**6,101,533**	**1,496,691**

Source: 2023 Presidential Election Result declared by INEC

The above is a state by state presidential election result as reported by INEC. We can now use it to confirm whether or not ethnicity and religion influenced the voting patterns of the electorates and the eventual outcome. The APC won 14 states including 6 of the 7 South Western state. Although, the APC lost Lagos state to Labour Party (LP) the margin of lost was insignificant; 572,606 votes for APC against 882,454 votes for LP, suggesting that some voters in his ethnic groups were favourable dispose to vote their kinsman Bola Ahmed Tinubu and his APC. If this point is to be valid, then it becomes hard to explain why the APC presidential and vice presidential candidates are from Yoruba and Hausa-fulani ethnic group respectively won in Rivers State; a predominantly Christian state. The PDP in the other hand won in Gombe, Adamawa, Katsina, Bauchi, Taraba, Bayelsa, Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom States with a total of 2,152,690 (8.9%). It seems curious that Atiku Abubakar from the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group won Akwa Ibom State (14,012 votes) and Bayelsa states which are predominantly Christian states. The Labour Party (LP) won in Enugu, Lagos, FCT, Edo, Abia, Plateau, Cross River, Delta, Nasarawa, Ebonyi, Anambra and Imo states with a total vote of 4,325,339 (18%). Interestingly, LP and Peter Obi from the Igbo ethnic group and a Christian, won in Nasarawa and Plateau states which are predominantly muslims from the Hausa-fulani ethnic extraction. Kabiu Kwankwaso's NNPP won only in Kano state with 999,279 (4.1%), Peter Obi's LP defeated NNPP in some key muslim state with predominantly Hausa-Fulani extraction. These include Gombe, Adamawa, Niger, Sokoto, Plateau which suggest that the voting pattern in these states were influenced by ethnicity or religion consideration. The above suggest that, ethnic and religious consideration might night have influence elections in Nigeria since independence (Bakare, 2018). But in the 2024 presidential election their role was minimal and did not determine the outcome of the election what this determined the outcome of the election of 2023.

Key Determinants of the 2023 Presidential; Elections

The Roles of Independent National Electoral Commission
There is no doubt that INEC played a key role in the outcome of the 2023 presidential elections. Prior to February 2023, the election had gained an unprecedented momentum in October 2022 with the passing of the electoral Act into law (Abumbe & Inah, 2024). On its part, INEC had promised Nigerians a free, fair and credible elections that would be acceptable by all and the received more than 300 billion naira from the federal government of Nigeria (Moses, 2023, Guardian, 2022). Times without number the commission's chairman, Prof. M. Yakubu assured Nigerians that all the results from the polling units were going to be transmitted electronically into the commissioner's portal) REV within recorded time.

Unfortunately, these premises were not kept by the commission. Halfway into the elections, INEC adhoc staff at the polling units were only able to electronically upload the results for senate and House of Representatives. INEC claimed there was a technical glitch resulting to the inability for the result of the presidential elections to be electronically uploaded into the commission's portal. This flaw led to manual computation of election results, which in most cases were manipulated. This partly explain why there was public outcry in many states denouncing the outcome of the 2023 presidential elections.

The Character of Bola Ahmed Tinubu
The nature and character of Bola Ahmed Tinubu played a crucial role in his victory at the polls. His actions before and after the APC primaries speak volumes. In the run-up to the APC convention that was expected to choose its presidential candidates, certain policies taken by the Buhari administrations were interpreted to mean the then president did not want Mr. Tinubu as his successor. First there was the rumour purportedly coming from the presidency that Ahmed Lawan (Then senate president) was a consensus candidate for APC. Second, there was the implementation of the controversial naira redesigning which plunged millions of Nigerians into

untold hardship. Political commentators and even APC party faithful viewed this as a deliberate attempt to demarked the APC and make its candidate vulnerable at the polls (MOjeed, 2023). Despite these, Tinubu managed his relationship with Buhari well, refusing to attack him, rather blaming the people around him. He kept his temperament and remain focused on the campaign and this kept the party untied and focused. Attacking the president would have worsen the situation. Eventually he got the ticket at the primaries.

Weaken Opposition
In 2019, there was a credible opposition; the PDP and Peter Obi then as the running mate to Atiku could galvanizing the opposition. Unlike the 2019 election, the opposition approached the 2023 election from a relative weak position. This was exacerbated by Peter Obi who left PDP for Labour Party and inspired hope but lack structure. The lack of a united front between Atiku Abubakar's PDP and Peter Obi's Labour Party made it easier for Mr. Ahmed Tinubu to win as the Governor of Anambra;Charles Soludo puts it;

> *If I were Asiwaju Tinubu, I will even give Peter Obi money as someone heading one of the department of his campaign because Obi is making Tinbu's pathway to victory much easier by indirectly pulling down PDP. It is what it is (The Nation, February 18, 2023).*

The above statement by Governor Charles Soludo depicts clearly what happen in the 2023 presidential election. Had, the Obi's labour party which had inspired millions of Nigerians merged with Atiku's PDP which had relatively good structures in the ground, perhaps the outcome would have been difference.

The Judiciary

The judiciary, it is said is the last hope of the common man. Taken the 2023, presidential elections into consideration, the aggrieved persons or group of persons were expected to take their electoral issues to the presidential election petition tribunal and finally to the supreme court. This explains why 2023 presidential elections therefore provided us with an unprecedented massive petitions. There were over 527 petitions involving electoral fraud in respect to the 2023 presidential elections. Four contending issues were involved before the Supreme Court and the judiciary assured Nigerians that the judiciary was going to decide the cases brought before it by merit not technicalities.

First was the case of 25% of roles in the FCT as a mandatory requirement for any candidate to be declared winner of presidential election in Nigeria. Second, was the inability of INEC officials to upload presidential result from the pulling units to INEC portal, IREV as required by the electoral law of October, 2022. Third, was the issue of violence, intimidation and result manipulations. Lastly, but not the least was the case of certificate forgery by the APC candidate.

Despite massive evidences provided, the Supreme Court held that there was no ambiguity in the provision of Section 134(2) and that even if there was ambiguity, the court was bound to adopt a position that was just, reasonable and sensible (Abumbe & Inah, 2024). It argued that it will not be reasonable and sensible for a candidate who won 36 states and failed to secure 25% of votes case in FCT to be denied victory. All other issues brought before the court were simply dismissed for lack of substantial evidence. This judicial decision sealed Tinubu's victory.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We have in the preceding demonstrated the extent to which the twin issues of ethnicity and religion influenced the general elections in Nigeria with particular reference to the 2023

presidential elections. Achieving our work on intersectionality theory, we were able to show that it is the interaction of different sections of the society such as race, ethnic groups and religious group that shape the political dynamics of every nation. While this has been the trend of events throughout the Nigerian political space since independence, it cannot be said to entirely the trend in the 2023 presidential elections. The presentations in Table I, II and III above lead credence to this. Peter Obi, from an Igbo ethnic extraction and of Christian denomination won Plateau, Nasarawa and Taraba states which are dominated by Hausa-Fulanis and Islamic denomination.

Similarly, Bola Ahmed Tinubu from Taraba ethnic group and a Muslim won in Rivers and pulled a significant number of votes in the South-East and South-South while former president Atiku Abubakar also won in some states in the South-South. It seems save therefore to state that ethnicity and religion. INEC's inability to conduct a free and fair election, the nature and character of Mr. Tinubu, which kept the ruling party united, weak opposition and the politization of the judiciary are some key factors that profoundly determined the outcome of the 2023 presidential elections. Therefore, while efforts should made by government to minimize the influence ethnicity and religion in our political space. The electoral act should be amended to make electronic uploading of result from polling units mandatory, so as curb the inconsistencies. Besides, efforts should be made security agencies to tackle the issues of vote buying during elections. Above all, the judiciary should be made to be more proactive in the dispense of justice. The judges should not be appointed by partisan basis but by the National judicial council. Unless these recommendations are implemented, future elections in Nigeria are likely to follow the same pattern.

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