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## THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: VOTING PATTERNS, CONTROVERSIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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**Abstract:** *Democracy is largely dependent on elections. Democracy might become less valuable and appealing without regular polls. Nevertheless, several factors, including technological anomalies, same-faith tickets, the aftermath of the End SARS pandemic, and the marginalisation of ethnic minorities, influenced the recently concluded 2023 presidential and national assembly elections. These factors also gave rise to several political prophecies and ecclesiastical innuendos, ethnic tension, a heightened level of ethnic politics, mutual suspicions among Nigerians, and mistrust of the political process. This paper's primary focus is on examining the numerous nuances that impacted the results of the 2023 presidential and national assembly elections. In addition to other reliable secondary sources such as books, journals, magazines, national dailies, and articles, the paper used a content analysis approach. When suitable, statistical data can also serve as empirical evidence. Our findings indicate that the winner-take-all scenario, fiscal centralization, and financial incentives tied to political positions are the primary reasons why most of the observed complexities are detrimental to free, fair, credible, and transparent elections in Nigeria. The report suggests that the impartial Electoral Commission (INEC) carry out a public and impartial assessment of its success in organizing credible and fair general elections in 2023 and expedite the development of a strong electoral process through technological advancements.*

**Keywords:** *elections, controversies, social media, youth participation, voting patterns*



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## INTRODUCTION

Having free and fair elections regularly is one of the fundamental components of a liberal and participatory democracy. Nation-building heavily relies on elections and electoral processes. How much elections contribute to the expansion and upkeep of democracy depends heavily on election-related influences on voters' decisions, particularly in developing countries (Ujo, 2008). Continuing from the last point, voting is seen as an important process in which every voter selects one choice from a range in a developing democracy, as well as a combination of aspects of a traditional election. On February 25, 2023, Nigeria held its eighth presidential election since regaining civilian rule in 1999. In addition, elections were conducted for 360 House of Representative seats and 109 Senate seats in the country's National Assembly (Mark & Jonnie, 2023).

Recent general elections have been identified as a major driver of Nigeria's political, religious, and socioeconomic development (Burke, 2023). Through the deployment of the Biometric Verification and Accreditation System, a technology-based system used in Nigerian elections to verify voter identities and prevent electoral fraud through INEC's electronic portal, IReV (IFES, 2023). The electoral body in Nigeria adopted the use of technologies for voter accreditation, voting, and transmission of election results. This system aims to alleviate and rectify the irregularities that often undermine the legitimacy and integrity of most Nigerian elections.

Some of the predominant features of the 2023 general elections are digital usage, religious conversations, ethnic mobilization, and the active use of social media in canvassing, sensitizing, and mobilizing the public, especially the youths who have been known to show voter apathy during elections. Youths should be sensitized to have a sense of responsibility in their societies (Ezebuilo, 2023; Osimen, Etoroma, Pokubo, & Adi, 2025). The way social media was significantly utilized in the elections shows how fast the Nigerian political system is yielding to the adoption of digital and social media technologies in critical national political and civil processes (Chukwu, 2023; Chukwudi, Osimen, Ezebuilo, & Adi, 2024). To ensure the legal backing of the 2023 general election, the Electoral Act of 2022 was put in place to promote an electoral legal framework in respect of the general elections. Election administration concerns, including logistics, training, voter education, technology, sensitization against vote buying, inclusive measures, and security, were anticipated to be covered by these (Musa, 2023). The goal of this study is to investigate the different nuances that influenced the voting patterns and controversies surrounding the results of the 2023 presidential and national assembly elections, considering these growing challenges and other competing forces.



All the data used in this paper came from secondary sources. The study drew upon reliable and authentic secondary sources, including books, journals, periodicals, articles, and national dailies. Nevertheless, statistical information was also utilized as empirical support where necessary. Several secondary sources were explored to enhance the study's validity and decrease the likelihood of error. This was used to analyze published papers, journals, articles, and other relevant data sources. The advantage of secondary data is that it is readily available from other sources and has already been collected. This data may also be available in circumstances where primary data is unavailable, and it can be accessed more quickly and cheaply than original data.

## MAIN TEXT

### **An Overview of Major Intricacies and Their Effects on the 2023 Presidential Election**

Out of the candidates representing eighteen political parties, the four main contenders for the presidency and several additional candidates for National Assembly seats engaged in fierce competition on February 25, 2023, the day of the elections. It was stated that the election's result was not unexpected given the anti-democratic practices that were evident in the run-up to the vote, including vote-buying, political intimidation, and political mobilization around religious and ethnic identities. These tactics also significantly impacted voter turnout and citizen participation (Adio, 2023). Following the previously mentioned, the general public's perspective of the 2023 Nigerian general elections was centered on the following themes, which had an impact on the way the elections for the National Assembly and the presidency were conducted and turned out (Hassan, 2023):

#### **Ethnicity and Regionalism**

Nigerians have historically manipulated elections by playing the ethnic and regional cards. The attitude has always been, "Let him do it; he's our son." There has been an unwritten rule since the Fourth Republic took office in 1999 that the North and South should alternate in the presidency every eight years. Sanctions should be applied to correct individuals or groups that violate established rules in the country (Aluko, Apeloko, Chukwudi, Paimo, 2023). Political leaders concur that because of the country's diversity, arrangements for power rotation are now required to address complaints of marginalization and domination and to provide equal power to ethnic groups (Omojuwa, 2023). Nigeria is the most populous Black nation, home to over 200 million people and over 250 ethnic groupings, as well as several sub-groups (Olayode, 2015). It is also among the nations with the widest ethnic diversity in the world. Despite these traits, Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo tribes control most of the nation's political landscape. Additionally, these ethnic groups and subgroups engage in politics in a way that either upholds the dominance of the majority groups or thwarts and resists the domination of the minority groups. By an odd coincidence, candidates from three major ethnic groupings dominated the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, which led to more controversy and animosity than ever before.

The 2023 general elections are expected to be the most competitive in post-colonial Nigeria, barring the manipulation of a high degree of unrest due to regional desires for secession. It was alleged that tensions between the three main ethnic groups—the Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo—had been rising before



the elections. The customary ethnic, regional, and religious divisions that have defined Nigerian politics since the country's independence were exacerbated by all of these reasons (Atanda et.al, 2018). This serves as the backdrop for a review of the degree to which ethnicity affected the Nigerian presidential election of 2023. A descriptive statistical analysis of election data provided by the Independent National Electoral Commission is used in the study to bolster the aforementioned claim. Tables were used to analyse the data to determine how voters' voting habits were influenced by their ethnicity and, in turn, how the election turned out.

### Presidential Election Result in Six Geo-Political Zones in Nigeria

Geo-Political Zones	APC	PDP	LP	NNPC
South West	2,279,407	941,881	846,478	16,644
Total Vote from the South West	17,958,966	17,958,966	17,958,966	17,958,966
	12.69%	5.24%	4.71%	0.09%

Geo-Political Zones	APC	PDP	LP	NNPC
South East	127,605	91,198	1,960,609	9,227
Total Vote from South East	10,907,606	10,907,606	10,907,606	10,907,606
	1.17%	0.83%	17.97%	0.08%

Geo-Political Zones	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP
North East	1,186,097	1,552,829	315,107	126,343
Total Vote from the North East	12,542,429	12,542,429	12,542,429	12,542,429
	9.46%	12.38%	2.51%	1.01%

Geo-Political Zones	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP
North West	2,652,235	2,329,540	350,182	1,268,250
Total Vote from the North West	22,255,562	22,255,562	22,255,562	22,255,562
	11.91%	10.47%	1.57%	5.7%

### Source: Authors' compilation with data from INEC (2023)

As can be seen from the above data, three of the four leading candidates for president in 2023 won their respective regions. In comparison to his performance in the other three zones, the fourth contender, NNPP, performs better in the North-West. The results of the presidential election imply that voters' decisions are influenced by their ethnic identification. The Labour Party's presidential candidate, Peter Obi, won the entire southeast zone and Delta and Edo in the south-south, upending the PDP's historical hold on the majority of votes in these geopolitical zones before this election. The APC could only win Rivers State, while the PDP could only win Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom. In 2023, Yobe, a region not previously affiliated with the PDP, cast their ballot for Atiku, a candidate from the North-East geopolitical zone. The outcome in Lagos, where Obi defeated Tinubu, gives hope for a generational shift away from the ethnic divisions that have traditionally dominated Nigerian politics.

## Zoning

Nigeria's power divide between North and South dates to the country's independence, and because to its diversity. Zoning has, for the most part, gone successfully, facilitating the smooth transition of power from Olusegun Obasanjo, the eight-year president, to Musa Yar' Yar'Adua, a Northerner. This prompted the APC candidate, who openly declared his support for Buhari to win the presidency, to cry out for "Emilokan," a phrase signifying that it was Yoruba time. The South-East is also not relenting in their presidential aspirations, as they see themselves as sufficiently marginalized since the restoration of civil government in 1999. This is said to have started the secessionist movement and led to Ohanaeze Ndigbo, the top sociocultural organization, endorsing the Labour Party's candidate.

Voting patterns are impacted by the zoning issue due to the agreement reached because of the alliance formed in 2015 between the CPC and ACN, which gave rise to the APC. To create the All Progressives Congress of Nigeria (APC), the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) broke away from the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP). The governor of Kaduna, El-Rufai, faced the Northern Cabals and insisted that they respect the zoning deal with Ahmed Tinubu according to the intra-party agreement. The Northeast, North Central, and Northwest areas gave the APC presidential candidate a landslide of votes because of the deal. When the PDP's zoning proposal was ruled unconstitutional, it split the party and led to the formation of G5, which ran against the party in the general election (Kabir, 2023). The tables indicated how zoning would affect the country's 2023 presidential election result.

## Religion

The outcome of the presidential election on February 25, 2023, was significantly influenced by religion. Nigeria is a multi-religious nation where Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions are the three main dominating religious groupings. The two main religions in the nation that have implemented power segregation (North and South) are mostly Christianity and Islam. From the foregoing, religion plays a significant role in shaping residents' spiritual practices as well as the political landscape in Nigeria (Agbor, 2019). The selection of President and Vice President has always been influenced by a Muslim-Christian/Christian-Muslim dichotomy, but this was disturbed when Yoruba Muslim Tinubu selected Kanuri Muslim Kashim Shettima as his running partner (Sulaimon, 2023).

Many Nigerians and Christian organizations widely condemned this move. Consequently, many voters set up camp with those who share their religious views. Some northern Christians protested in Abuja against the move and called it an insult to Nigerian Christians, while the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the umbrella organization for Christians in Nigeria, led by Mathew Kukah, the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, denounced the action. Thus, the circumstances laid the groundwork for the Labour Party, which used Muslim-Muslim sentiment to its advantage and centered its campaigns around Christianity. Peter Obi, the presidential candidate for the Labour Party, campaigned by visiting Christian churches and referred to himself as a "Christian War" candidate. The two political parties (APC & LP) and various religious antics decided the outcome of the 2023

presidential election. The table below shows how the political parties performed in two monolithic zones (Muslim and Christian-dominated states) in Nigeria (Sulaimon, 2023).

### 2023 Presidential Election Results by States

State	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP
<b>Ekiti</b>	201,494	89,554	11,397	264
<b>Kwara*</b>	263,572	136,909	31,166	3,142
<b>Osun</b>	343,945	354,366	23,283	713
<b>Ondo</b>	369,924	115,463	44,405	930
<b>Ogun</b>	341,554	123,831	85,829	2,200
<b>Oyo</b>	449,884	182,977	99,110	4,095
<b>Yobe*</b>	151,459	198,567	2,406	18,270
<b>Enugu**</b>	4,772	15,749	428,640	1,808
<b>Lagos</b>	572,606	75,750	582,454	8, 442
<b>Gombe</b>	146,977	319,123	26, 160	10,520
<b>Adamawa</b>	182,881	417,611	105,648	8,006
<b>Katsina*</b>	482,283	489,045	6,376	69,386
<b>Jigawa*</b>	421,390	386,587	1,889	98,234
<b>Nasarawa**</b>	172,922	147,093	191,361	12,715
<b>Niger*</b>	375, 183	284, 898	80,452	21,836
<b>Benue**</b>	310,468	130,081	30,8372	4,740
<b>FCT</b>	90,902	74,194	281,717	4,517
<b>Akwa Ibom**</b>	160,620	214,012	132,683	7,796
<b>Edo**</b>	144,471	89,585	331,163	2,743
<b>Abia**</b>	8,914	22,676	327,095	1,239
<b>Kogi</b>	240,751	145,104	56,217	4238



State	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP
<b>Bauchi*</b>	316,694	426,607	27,373	72,103
<b>Plateau**</b>	307,195	243,808	466,272	8,869
<b>Bayelsa**</b>	42, 572	68,818	49,975	540
<b>Kaduna**</b>	399,293	554,360	294,494	92969
<b>Kebbi*</b>	248,088	285,175	10,682	5,038
<b>Kano*</b>	517,341	131,716	28,513	997,279
<b>Zamfara*</b>	298,396	193,978	1,660	4,044
<b>Sokoto*</b>	285,444	288,679	6,568	1,300
<b>Cross River**</b>	130,520	95,425	179,917	1,644
<b>Delta**</b>	90,183	161,600	341,866	3,122
<b>Ebonyi**</b>	42,402	13,503	259,738	2,661
<b>Anambra**</b>	5,111	9,036	584,621	1,967
<b>Taraba**</b>	135,165	189,017	146,315	12,818
<b>Borno*</b>	252,282	190,921	7205	4626
<b>Rivers**</b>	231,591	88,468	175,071	1,322
<b>Imo**</b>	66406	30,234	360,495	1,552
<b>Aggregate</b>	<b>8,794,726</b>	<b>6,984,520</b>	<b>6,101,533</b>	<b>1,496,671</b>

**Source:** (TMG, *Vanguard*, 3 March 2023).

\* Muslim States

\*\* Christian States

With a few notable exceptions across the nation, the data above indicates that all political parties prevailed in the states where Muslims and Christians predominate. More than ever, biases based on race and religion were present in presidential elections. One of the candidates, Mr. Gregory Peter Obi of the Labour Party, frequently went to church events in an attempt to win over supporters of the APC's Muslim-Muslim ticket. Through political maneuvering, Bola Ahmed Tinubu was able to win the elections despite strong religious feelings and protests. Based on a variety of religious



shenanigans by the two political parties (APC & LP), it has been established that these religious issues are a tempest that might potentially drown an unskilled politician.

### **Social Media Usage and Youth Participation**

Social media has become a more pervasive platform for social and political engagements in recent years. This could be one of the reasons that new technologies are now defining crucial processes in Nigeria's political activities (Onyemachi, 2023). In line with this discovery, the National Bureau of Statistics' fourth quarter report for 2023 states that there were 154,847,901 active internet users worldwide. Youths make up the bulk of social media users, particularly those who will be old enough to cast ballots in the 2023 elections (Chukwu, 2023). Political parties and other actors made concerted efforts to engage youth and mobilize social media, and their efforts were successful. The information that is currently available indicates a notable rise in youth participation in the most recent election and voter registration. More than half of newly registered voters are young adults between the ages of 18 and 34, according to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Of the 9.4 million freshly registered voters, 7.28 million, or 76%, are young people (Akinmoju, 2023). The "not too young to run" movement's popularity is one element that contributed to the remarkable youth participation. This movement ultimately resulted in the bill being signed into law by former President Muhammadu Buhari in 2018. The amendments to 65, 106, 131, and 177 were guaranteed by the bill, which decreased the minimum age requirements for the following positions: senator, governor, and president from 35 to 30, respectively; member of the House of Representatives from 30 to 25, and member of the State House of Assembly from 30 to 25 (Tukur, 2018). When the PDP's zoning proposal was ruled unconstitutional, it split the party and led to the formation of G5, which ran against the party in the general election (Kabir, 2023).



According to Efetoboh (2023), among many other organizations, these have organized training, campaigns, grassroots advocacy, multi-stakeholder dialogues, community mobilization, and sensitization workshops. She also believes that these organizations have been strengthening and building the capacities of young people towards combating voter apathy and increasing awareness of the necessity of meaningful youth participation in the political and electoral processes. Prerequisites for membership in the State House of Assembly range from 30 to 25 (Tukur, 2018), the House of Representatives from 30 to 25, the governor from 35 to 30, and the senator from 35 to 30. When the PDP's zoning proposal was ruled unconstitutional, it split the party and led to the formation of G5, which ran against the party in the general election (Kabir, 2023).

Analysts have also proposed a link between the #Obidient campaign, which supports Labour Party presidential candidate Peter Obi, and the youth-led #EndSARS movement in Nigeria. Young middle-class Nigerians from metropolitan areas dominated both the #EndSARS and #Obidient movements (Akeredolu, 2023). The support for Obi grew because of youth dissatisfaction and distrust towards the APC and PDP leadership, as well as the general situation in the nation. The "Obedient Movement" became very popular and threatened the mandate of the ruling class and other bigger parties in the country. Even though many debates and doubts were expressed regarding the efficacy of social media and actual poll results, the 2023 election results have further proved that social media has become a strong platform in Nigeria's social-political activities, and even so Nigeria may experience a drastic shift and imminent political realignment to bring about a third force (Akeredolu, 2023 and Ndubuisi & Orjinmo, 2023).



## Statistics of top presidential candidates

Monitoring period – 1 January, 2023 to 23 February, 2023

Name	 Total Tweets	Avg. Replies	Avg. Likes	Avg. Retweet	 Posts	Avg. Interaction
Atiku	223	803	1.3K	312.6	162	8.4K
Kwankwaso	114	154	1.8K	348.7	140	5.02K
Obi	457	369	12.8K	3.5K	138	21.55K
Tinubu	84	461	2.8K	616.3	47	6.81K

(Source: EU Report, 2023)



## Nigerian 2023 Presidential Result: Source- (Kohnert, 2023)

It is clear from the results of all the presidential candidates and the ensuing disputes over the legitimacy of the election results that the rise of social media (Kohnert, 2023) and the attraction of a newcomer like Peter Obi into the race for president have given the youths of Nigeria newfound zeal and a fraction of unity in their pursuit of a new political order. The emergence of a strong opposition party in Nigeria's 2023 election has offered a unique model for the spread of democracy throughout Sub-Saharan Africa by placing a premium on individuals over parties or ethnic and regional affinities (Hassan, 2023).

Given this, the results of the 2023 presidential election, as announced by INEC, showed that 24,055,878 valid votes, or 27.55 percent, were cast out of 93.46 million eligible voters. In Nigeria, just 28.63% of eligible voters cast ballots, and of those who did, 27% selected the nation's president. With 8,794,726 votes, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC), Alhaji Atiku Abubakar (PDP), Mr. Peter Obi (LP), and Dr. Rabiul Kwankwaso (NNPP) were the four leading candidates. Only his state of Kano was won by Rabiul Kwankwaso, while the three front-runners each took home 12 states. When comparing the results of the indicators to the elections in 2011, 2015, and 2019, low voter turnout resulted (Teniola, 2023). From 53.7% in 2011 to 43.7% in 2015 and 34.75% in 2019, voter turnout declined (Sulaimon, 2023).

The low voter turnout was attributed to campaign trends that focused on fuel shortages, nationwide insecurity, and religious and ethnic affiliation (Hassan, 2023). Additionally, the CBN's October 2022



decision to redesign the naira caused currency shortages and the same faith syndrome. Their work (Adeagbo, 2023) revealed several tendencies that emerged from the country's election process, including violence and voter suppression, the aftermath of the EndSars protest that supported youth population dominance, and disinformation or online falsity. Every effort must be made to ensure that the rights of people to vote and to be voted for are protected (Chineyemba, Chukwudi, & Ezebuilo, 2024). Sulaimon (2023) referred to the zoning arrangements of the parties, personal aspirations, and regional marginalization that resulted in the formation of the G-5 and the youth-dominated Obidient and Kwankwaso movements.

As Shehu & Usman-ugwu (2023) previously noted, a variety of circumstances, such as same-faith tickets, the aftermath of the SARS outbreak, technological challenges, and an unusual quantity of political predictions and ecclesiastical innuendos, affected the 2023 presidential outcomes. These elements also fueled ethnic conflict, increased ethnic political polarization, distrust of the political system, and suspicion among Nigerians. On February 25, during Nigeria's presidential election, the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) issued a caution against inciting remarks, especially those made by clerics in the country. This required a range of provocative remarks from pastors who identify as Christian.

The 2023 presidential contest was proclaimed won by the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate (Shehu & Usman-ugwu, 2023). As a result, the NSCIA expressed concern about the high level of what it described as unsubstantiated claims, threats, and incitements coming from some parts of the country, particularly from people it said ought to be the preachers of peace and serve as a moral compass for the society. The level of unjustified provocation and needless politicking, which have the potential to sow division and jeopardise the security of the Nigerian people, prompted the security agencies to take the initiative and step up to the plate (Musa, 2023). The council urged politicians who were upset with the results of the elections to use the legal processes established by the Nigerian constitution and the Electoral Act to seek justice instead of using force or breaking the law. However, the introduction of social media during the 2023 presidential contest signaled a significant change in Nigeria's electoral landscape as well as the entry of young people into politics.

In recent years, social media has spread like wildfire as a venue for political and social interactions. Therefore, it may be concluded that the rise of social media and the attraction of a new candidate for president, Peter Obi, have given Nigeria's youths renewed zeal and a modicum of unity in their pursuit of a new political system dominated by the G-5's emergence and the youth (Adeagbo, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

This essay has looked at the dynamics and controversies that shaped the environment in which the 2023 presidential elections were held, as well as the behaviour and acts that shaped those elections. It states that typical electoral anomalies, such as political intimidation, do-or-die politics, ethnoreligious factors, and lopsided policy implementation, caused the 2023 presidential election to be thrown off course. The Biometric Verification and Accreditation System (BVAS) was unable to live up to the expectations of voters and INEC regarding election transparency. In light of this, the paper makes the following recommendations: the Commission should look for assistance in conducting more thorough and prompt background checks on prospective election officials before hiring and training them; security agencies and the government should also support INEC more

strongly, as it must carry out significant logistical operations in a challenging environment; the financial benefits associated with political offices in Nigeria should be addressed; and INEC and the judiciary should work together effectively to resolve complaints about the election process fairly. This will help to prevent significant instances in which candidates are "elected" by the courts rather than by the electorate, and security agencies assigned to election tasks should remain impartial and professional.

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