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2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria: Voting Patterns, Controversies, and Recommendations

Election is an important component of democracy. In fact, without periodic and regular elections, democracy may lose its value and appeal. Notwithstanding, a lot of dynamics were determined by the just-concluded 2023 Presidential and National Assembly elections, such as ethnoreligious marginalisation, same-faith ticket, End-SARS aftermaths, and technological irregularities, which also resulted in a series of ecclesiastical innuendos, ethnic tension, mutual suspicions among Nigerians, and distrust of the political process. The main thrust of this paper revolves around interrogating various intricacies that influenced the outcome of the 2023 Presidential and National Assembly elections. The paper relied on a content analysis approach and other valid secondary sources such as books, journals, national dailies, and articles. Statistical data shall also be used where appropriate as empirical evidence. Our findings reveal that most of the intricacies observed are detrimental to free, fair, credible, and transparent elections in Nigeria due to financial emoluments attached to political positions, and fiscal centralisation. The paper recommends, among other things, that the INEC conducts an independent transparent review of its performance in the 2023 general elections while exploring opportunities for institutional reforms in ensuring the nation's future free, credible, and fair general elections and enhancement of robust electoral process.

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

Introduction

Elections are widely recognised as a cornerstone of democratic societies, allowing citizens to choose their leaders through a transparent and accountable process. Beyond the fact that it permits people to select their leaders and afford a choice of a transparent process to elect a popular leader, it also embodies key human rights principles, civil participation, and adherence to the rule of law specific to each society. To be more specific, elections remain a fair attempt and the most compelling way to make the people feel involved in the process of governance and express their will in any system or government; a clear way to amplify their voices and choices (United Nations- Human Rights Office 2021).

Given the above, elections are important to democracy and remain the principal way by which citizens exercise their right to participate in public affairs. All the contemporary concepts that explain representative democracy have highlighted participatory and contested elections, as a critical legal mechanism for translating power transition. In the views of Ayanleye (2013). Citing the National Democratic Institute (NDI) notes that genuine elections are more than a technical formality; they represent a fundamental human right connected to broader institutions and individuals' capacity to exercise other civil and political rights. Furthermore, elections are a barometer of democratic health and a stage for the contestation of political power within a country, that needs to be free and fair to reflect populace choice. Periodic free and fair elections constitute one of the fundamental realities that characterise a liberal and participatory democracy. The importance of election and electoral processes in the course of nation-building is enormous. The extent to which elections contribute to the development and sustenance of democracy, particularly in developing countries, is largely dependent on factors which influence the electorates in making their choices (Tukur 2018).

As a corollary to the above, voting is seen as a composite element of a standard election and an essential process in which an individual electorate's choice is made from various alternatives in a nascent democracy. On February 25, 2023, Nigeria held its seventh presidential election since the return to civilian rule in 1999. The country also conducted elections into the two chambers of its National Assembly – 109 seats in the Senate and 360 seats in the House of Representatives Mark-Jonnie (2023). The recent General Elections became a critical determinant of Nigeria's socio-economic, religious and political advancements (Burke 2023).

To assuage and address the anomalies that often mar the credibility and integrity of most elections in Nigeria, the electoral body in Nigeria adopted the use of technologies for voter accreditation, voting and transmission of election results through the deployment of Biometric Verification and Accreditation System, which is a technology-based system used in Nigerian elections to verify the identity of voters and prevent electoral fraud, while the result transmission and viewing were strictly to be accessed INEC's electronic portal-IREV Akeredolu (2023). Some of the predominant features of the 2023 general elections are digital usage, religious conversations, ethnic mobilisation and the active use of social media in canvassing, sensitising and mobilising the public, especially the youths who have been known to show voter apathy during elections. The way social media was significantly utilised 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). 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. These were expected to have covered issues on election administration which focuses on logistics, training, voter education, technology, sensitisation against vote buying, inclusive measures and, security Adeagbo (2023). With these emerging issues and other contending factors, the focus of this study is therefore, to examine various intricacies that influenced voting patterns and controversies of 2023 presidential and national assembly election outcomes.

The data for this paper was generated entirely from secondary sources. The paper relied on authoritative and valid secondary data such as books, journals, magazines, national dailies, and articles. However, statistical data were also used where appropriate as empirical evidence. To improve the validity of the study, multiple secondary sources were used to minimise the risk of error. This was used to analyse published reports, journals, articles, and other relevant sources of data. The advantage of secondary data is that the data have been already collected and are readily available from other sources. Such data are cheaper and more quickly obtainable than the primary data and also may be available when primary data cannot be obtained at all.

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

Nigerian elections have always generated various issues and drawn attention beyond the shore of Africa due to the various irregularities, conflicting interests and endemic corruption that often characterise the electoral process. Other issues are encapsulated in institutional inadequacies, voter apathy, election violence and other issues Omojuwa (2023). Nigeria has continued to witness what can be described as growing disappointment and apprehension in its inability to conduct peaceful, free, fair, and open elections whose results would be widely accepted and respected across the board. The February 25, 2023, the Presidential and National Assembly elections were keenly contested among the four major presidential election contestants, out of the eighteen political parties' candidates, and several other contestants for the National Assembly offices. The outcome of the election was said not to be surprising, based on undemocratic tendencies played out during the pre-election phase such as vote-buying, political intimidation and political mobilisation around religious and ethnic identities equally had a significant impact on the outcome of the election, especially about citizens' participation and voters' turnout Adio (2023). Consequent to the foregoing, the general perception of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria was centred on the following thematic areas which shaped the conduct and outcome of the Presidential and National Assembly elections (Hassan 2023).

Ethnicity and Regionalism

Nigeria is an inherently volatile blend of tribes and ethnic groups. This has undoubtedly given rise to the phenomena of ethnic politics, a dilemma that is worthy of careful consideration given

Nigeria's multi-ethnic affiliations. The nation has been beset by chronic ethnic fractionalisation which can be directly linked with parochial values and other complex issues, which severely threaten the country's democratic values. To a significant extent, the controversies that divide Nigeria along ethnic lines can be traced to the period of colonialism. The British took advantage of the dominant ethnic groups in the country as tools of political control and created a system around those ethnic lines to allocate resources and national wealth. Efetoboh (2023). The nation has about 250 ethnic groupings, 350 native languages, and other socio-cultural divisions, making it one of the most culturally varied countries. Nigeria is a melting pot of ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, who account for over 70% of the population. There are several additional prominent groups with over a million members, including the Kanuri, Tiv, and Ibibio. The remaining 20% of the population consists of nearly 300 smaller ethnic groups Agaba-Orngu (2016); Gov.UK (2024). These realities have contributed mostly to the recent socio-cultural, political and economic developments in Nigeria, and have undoubtedly influenced many outcomes of elections in the country. It is a known fact that Nigerians have always played the ethnic and regional cards in elections. It has always been the case of "the person is our son, let him do it". Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, there has been an unwritten law that presidential power should rotate every eight years between the North and South, political leaders agree that due to the heterogeneous nature of the country, power rotation arrangements have become necessary to address complaints of marginalisation and domination and to give equal power to ethnic groups Babatunde (2023). In terms of ethnicity, Nigeria is one of the most heterogeneous countries in the world with a population of over 200 million and also the most populous black nation with over 250 ethnic groups and several sub-groups Olayode (2015). Despite these characteristics, the political scene in the country is dominated by three major tribes, namely Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. Furthermore, politics is played by these ethnic groups and sub-groups in such a manner as to maintain the domination by the majority groups or to prevent and resist domination by the minority groups.

The 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, by some interesting coincidence, was dominated by representatives from three major ethnic groups, and generated more tension and controversies than ever before. Apart from the orchestration of a high level of insecurity as a result of regional demands for disintegration, the 2023 general elections have been described as the most competitive election to be held in post-colonial Nigeria. It was claimed that before the elections there had been increasing tension among three major ethnic groups Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo. All these factors aggravated the traditional ethnic, regional and religious cleavages which have characterized Nigerian politics since independence Atanda-Adebisi-Bakare (2018). This is the background to an examination of the extent to which ethnicity influenced the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. To buttress the argument above, the study uses a descriptive statistical analysis of election data provided by the Independent National Electoral Commission to justify the argument. Data was analyzed through the use of tables to ascertain the effect of ethnicity on the voting behaviour of the electorate and consequently on the election outcome.

From the table above, the outcome of the 2023 presidential shows that three out of four major contenders won in their respective regions. The fourth candidate, NNPP improves in the North-West compared to his performance from the other three regions. The presidential election sug-

Table no. 1: 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 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 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 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 from (INEC 2023)

gests that ethnic identity plays a determinant in voters' choices. Before this election, PDP had always controlled the majority of votes in the South-East and South-South geopolitical zones, but strong support for the Labour Party presidential aspirant disrupted these dynamics, as Peter Obi won the entire southeast zone and Delta and Edo in the south-south. The PDP could only win Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom, while the APC could only win Rivers State. Likewise, Yobe, which had never voted for a PDP candidate, did so in 2023, with Atiku from North-East geopolitical zone. However, the result from Lagos, where Obi was able to edge out Tinubu offers some optimism for a generational change independent of the ethnic cleavages that have historically dominated Nigerian politics.

Zoning

Nigerian politics has always been characterised by ethnicity, tribalism, religious intolerance, and election malfeasance. To this end, many concerned parties and groups in the country's polity advocated for a modified presidential system of government to accommodate the country's diversity, while upholding peace, political stability, and inclusive involvement in politics for all

areas. This move was very strategic to address the recurrent marginalisation that has characterised the presidential election, which has historically been dominated by northern inhabitants, with minimal representation of other regions (Teniola 2023).

Nigeria has longed to employ a transparent and equitable way to distribute political powers during each election year. The whole idea was to develop a broad and universally accepted framework for crisis-free and non-controversial transfer of power, through a rotational method among the six (6) key geographical groups known as North East, North West, North Central, South West, South East, and South-South of that make up the geo-political zones of Nigeria (Omoleke, 2013 in Igbokwe-Walter-Maximus (2023). This arrangement is supposed to assuage the aggrieved regions (which are mainly in the minority) infuse some level of trust and repair the political conflict arising from each region due to the perceived inequality and uneven allocation of power. To fashion out a new formula to build a basis for the equitable distribution of political power through the electoral process, one such recommendation was the proposal for the principle of the zoning system, which may not directly stem from the Constitution but has come to be accepted in principle and to reflect the uniqueness of the Nigerian State.

As a result, the Zoning Formula, which was designed to provide both the northern and southern regions equal odds of producing a president, was first used by Shehu Shagari's second republic in 1979. The 'zoning' approach suggests a consensus-based distribution of political positions among regional tribal and sectional groups at all levels of Nigeria's three tiers of government. Since 1999, political parties in Nigeria have made this a primary criterion when allocating political offices. Zoning appears to be a variation of the consolidative principle of elite coalition and 'proportional representation' (Okonkwo 2015). This zoning formula takes into consideration other sensitive issues and the volatile ethnoreligious tensions that exist between Northern Nigeria (which is Muslim-dominated) and Southern Nigeria (majorly Christian).

The power dichotomy in Nigeria has been between North and South right from independence due to the heterogeneous nature of the country. Zoning to some extent has worked smoothly, leading to a seamless transfer of power from former president, Olusegun Obasanjo who ruled for eight years, to Musa Yar'Adua, a Northerner. During the 2023 election, however, to disrupt the ambition of the North from sponsoring a Northern candidate for the presidential seat, the proclamation of the 'Emilokan' creed (a terminology indicating that it was the time of Yoruba) by a Southern aspirant resonates the underlying power struggles between the North and South. Within these controversies, other marginalised voices have boldly expressed displeasure over the application of the zoning principle. The South-East of Nigeria has been virulently fighting and agitating for the presidency because they believe that they have been sidelined well enough since the return of civil rule in 1999. It is believed this was what led to the call for secession and the call by the apex socio-cultural group, Ohanaeze Ndigbo that endorsed the Labour Party's candidate. The issue of zoning influences voting patterns due to the agreement reached as a result of the alliance formed in 2015 between CPC and ACN that gave birth to APC. Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) along with a breakaway faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) formed a coalition and established the APC. The intra-party zoning arrangement resulted in the confrontational challenge of Northern Cabals by El-Rufai the former Governor of Kaduna asking them to fulfil the

zoning agreement with Ahmed Tinubu and the aftermath of the agreement gave APC presidential candidate overwhelming votes from North West, North Central and North East. The nullification of the zoning idea in the PDP led to disunity within the political party and the formation of G5 which worked against the party in the general election. The tables above signified the influence of zoning on the outcome of the 2023 presidential in country (Ndubuisi-Orjinmo 2023).

Religion

Nigeria is a very religious country. That is why the influence of religion is very obvious in the Nigerian politics. It is almost impossible to discuss Nigeria's political development without touching the intricate sensitivities and effects of religion. This is because it provides the majority of the citizens with strong ideologies and most of the beliefs they uphold, and in effect shapes the mentality and attitude of Nigerians. Religion has a substantial influence on Nigerian politics, including governance styles, policy formation, and electoral procedures Tukur (2018). Religion and politics are tightly intertwined in the country's social fabric, reflecting the power dynamics inherent in various religious institutions.

Many evidences show that Nigeria's religious affiliation is somewhat tied to Nigeria's ethnic diversity. There are roughly equal numbers of Christians (mostly in the South) and Muslims (primarily in the North), with some studies indicating a slight majority of Muslims. There are active congregations of different faiths, such as Hindu, Baha'i, Buddhist, Indigenous and traditional religious beliefs, as well as their leaders, who have a significant influence wield influence in their respective spaces Berkely (2020). The study of Oshelowo-Maren (2015) established that religion has become a political instrument in Nigeria to the extent that the nation can no longer maintain the core ideals of a secular state. Nigerian politics has frequently used religion as a tool to deepen the pre-existing suspicions, strife, controversies and sectional differences in the society. The use of religion to further the interests of politicians and parties has been a significant obstacle. Religious leaders frequently support politicians and parties based on their religious affiliations, rather than their views and programs. This has polarised the electorate based on religion, resulting in violence and divisions (Ekanem 2023).

As you can see from the above Table, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) ran a balanced religious ticket for president and vice president in 1992. However, this same-faith ticket was cancelled by the military regime of then-head of state, retired General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, and did not go forward. With the advent of Bola Ahmed Tinubu as president and Kashim Shettima as the All Progressive Congress (APC) vice presidential candidate in the 2023 presidential election, the topic of same-faith tickets has just lately gained significant traction in the political arena. It was viewed as an incorrect political calculation that is out of the ordinary for a secular nation such as Nigeria. The significance of the ruling party's decision is highlighted here because, despite the constitution's silence on religion's influence over the election of the nation's president and vice president, it nevertheless requires inclusive sovereignty to uphold national loyalty and foster national unity. By demeaning Christianity and Christians, that will not occur. The APC's decision to field a Muslim-Muslim ticket was perceived as a break from an

Table no. 2: Historical Evolution of Political Parties President and Vice President Candidates in Nigeria

Regimes	Year of Election	Political Party	Name of candidates and vice	Religious faith
Parliamentary Democracy	1963	Northern People Congress(NPC)/ National Council of Nigeria citizens	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa/Nnamdi Azikiwe	Muslim/Christian
Presidential Democracy	1979	National Party of Nigeria (NPN)	Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari/ Alexander Ifeanyichukwu Ekwueme	Muslim/Christian
Presidential Democracy (Annulled)	1993	Social Democratic Party(SDP)	Moshood Kashimawo Abiola Baba Gana Kingibe	Muslim/ Muslim
Presidential Democracy	1999	People Democratic Party(PDP)	Olusegun Obasanjo/ Atiku Abubakar	Christian/Muslim
Presidential Democracy	2003	People Democratic Party(PDP)	Olusegun Obasanjo/ Atiku Abubakar	Christian/Muslim
Presidential Democracy	2007	People Democratic Party(PDP)	Umaru MusaYar'Adua/ Goodluck Ebele Jonathan	Muslim/Christian
Presidential Democracy	2011	People Democratic Party(PDP)	Goodluck Ebele Jonathan/Namadi Sambo	Christian/Muslim
Presidential Democracy	2015	All People Congress (APC)	Muhammadu Buhari/ Oluyemi Osinbajo	Muslim/Christian
Presidential Democracy	2019	All People Congress (APC)	Muhammadu Buhari/ Oluyemi Oluleke Osinbajo	Muslim/Christian
Presidential Democracy	2023	All People Congress (APC)	Bola Ahmed Tinubu/ Kashim Shettima	Muslim/ Muslim

Source: Authors' Compilation 2024

unwritten rule that states that political parties must field a Christian and a Muslim on each ticket (International Crisis Group 2023). The Nigerian Christian community strongly denounced this move, seeing it as an attempt to Islamize the nation.

From the above argument, religion proved to be an important factor that determined the outcome of the February 25, 2023 presidential election. Nigeria is a multi-religious society with three major dominant religious groups, Christianity, Islam and traditional religions. Majorly, Christianity and Islam have been two dominant religions which are practised two power segregation (north and south) in the country. It is obvious from the above that religion is a strong factor not only in the spiritual practice of citizens but also a determining factor in the Nigerian political sphere Agbor (2019). Since 1999, careful consideration has always been given to the selection of President and Vice President in terms of the Muslim-Christian/Christian-Muslim dichotomy to keep the balance and power-sharing along the religious divide. However, the emergence of Tinubu, a Yoruba Muslim who decided to choose Kashim Shettima, a Kanuri Muslim, as his

running mate posed a huge threat and generated heated controversies in all quarters Sulaimon (2023). This action led to widespread condemnation from many Nigerians and Christian bodies. Thus, many voters pitched their tents with people of their religious inclination. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), an umbrella body for Christians in Nigeria, led by Mathew Kukah, the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese condemned the action while some northern Christians protested in Abuja against the action and labelled it as an insult to the Nigerian Christians. The situation therefore set the foundation for the Labour Party which capitalised on Muslim-Muslim to set its campaigns along Christianity. The Labour Party presidential candidate Peter Obi visited Christian congregations for his campaign and tagged the campaign as a 'ChristianWar' candidate'. The outcome of the 2023 presidential election was determined by various religious shenanigans by the two political parties (APC & LP). The table below shows how the political parties performed in two monolithic zones (Muslims and Christians dominated states) in Nigeria (Ekanem 2023).

Table no. 3: 2023 Presidential Election Results by States

State	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP
Ekiti	201,494	89,554	11,397	264
Kwara*	263,572	136,909	31,166	3,142
Osun	343,945	354,366	23,283	713
Ondo	369,924	115,463	44,405	930
Ogun	341,554	123,831	85,829	2,200
Oyo	449,884	182,977	99,110	4,095
Yobe*	151,459	198,567	2,406	18,270
Enugu**	4,772	15,749	428,640	1,808
Lagos	572,606	75,750	582,454	8, 442
Gombe	146,977	319,123	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	98,234
Nasarawa**	172,922	147,093	191,361	12,715
Niger*	375, 183	284, 898	80,452	21,836
Benue**	310,468	130,081	30,8372	4,740
FCT	90,902	74,194	281,717	4,517
Akwa Ibom**	160,620	214,012	132,683	7,796

State	APC	PDP	LP	NNPP
Edo**	144,471	89,585	331,163	2,743
Abia**	8,914	22,676	327,095	1,239
Kogi	240,751	145,104	56,217	4238
Bauchi*	316,694	426,607	27,373	72,103
Plateau**	307,195	243,808	466,272	8,869
Bayelsa**	42, 572	68,818	49,975	540
Kaduna**	399,293	554,360	294,494	92969
Kebbi*	248,088	285,175	10,682	5,038
Kano*	517,341	131,716	28,513	997,279
Zamfara*	298,396	193,978	1,660	4,044
Sokoto*	285,444	288,679	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	1,967
Taraba**	135,165	189,017	146,315	12,818
Borno*	252,282	190,921	7205	4626
Rivers**	231,591	88,468	175,071	1,322
Imo**	66406	30,234	360,495	1,552
Aggregate	8,794,726	6,984,520	6,101,533	1,496,671

Source: (Musa 2023)

* Muslim States

** Christian States

The data above shows that all the political parties won in their respective Muslim and Christian-dominated states with some exceptional cases in the country. It was more than ever before that a presidential poll was tied around religion and ethnic biases. One of the candidates, Mr Gregory Peter Obi, of the Labour Party, regularly visited church gatherings to seek votes amid the widespread condemnation of the Muslim-Muslim ticket of the APC. Bola Ahmed Tinubu's political strategy was able to manoeuvre through the religious sentiments and uproars to win the elections. These religious concerns have been determined to be a storm that could potentially drown an inexperienced 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). True to this revelation, the fourth quarter report of the National Bureau of Statistics-NBS (2023) indicates that the total number of active internet subscribers stood at 154,847,901. The majority of the social media users have been known to be youths; especially youths who are within the eligible age to vote during the 2023 elections Akeredolu (2023). The cohesive efforts that were committed to social media mobilisation and youth engagements by various political parties and other political actors paid off. Available data show a significant increase in voter registration and youths’ active involvement in the recent election. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reports that young people between the ages of 18 and 34 make up more than half of the newly registered voters. Young people make up 7.28 million, or 76 per cent, of the 9.4 million newly registered voters Akinmoju (2023). One factor that also engendered such impressive youth turnout is the popularity of the “not too young to run” movement, which eventually led to the passing of the bill to law in 2018 by the former President, Muhammadu Buhari. The bill ensured the amendment of 65, 106, 131, and 177. This lowered the age requirement for president from 40 to 30, for governor from 35 to 30, for senator from 35 to 30, for membership in the House of Representatives from 30 to 25, and for membership in the State House of Assembly from 30 to 25. (Igbokwe-Walter-Maximus 2023).

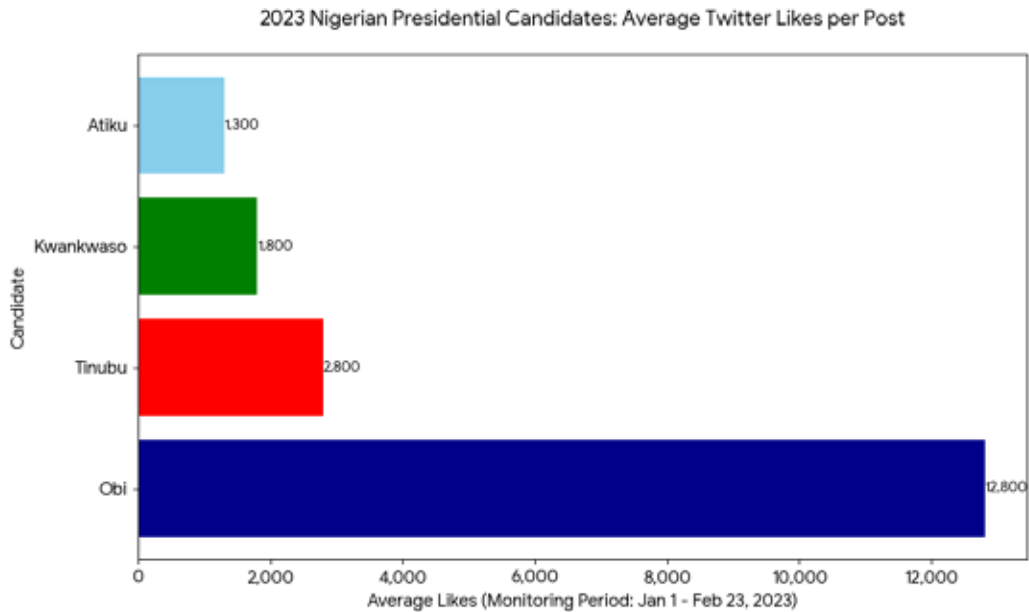
In the views of Ikre (2023), she believes civil society organisations and other organisations have been enhancing and building the capacities of young people towards combating voter apathy and increasing awareness of the necessity of meaningful youth participation in the political and electoral processes, these among many others have organized training’s, campaigns, grass-roots advocacy, multi-stakeholder dialogues, community mobilisation, and sensitisation workshops. 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 of Obi grew as a result of youths’ dissatisfaction and distrust towards the APC and PDP leadership, as well as the general state of affairs in the nation. The “Obidient Movement” became very popular and threatened the mandate of the

Table no. 4: Statistics of Top Presidential Candidates

Name	Total Tweets	Avg. Replies	Avg. Likes	Avg. Retweet	Posts (Facebook)	Avg. Interaction (Facebook)
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: (Sunday et al 2024)

Figure 1: Nigerian 2023 Presidential Result



Source: (Kohnert 2023)

ruling class and other bigger parties in the country. Even though many debates and doubts were expressed towards 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; Ndubuisi-Orjinmo 2023).

Consequent upon the final results of each of the Presidential candidates and the resultant controversies that trail the validity of the election outcomes, it can be established that the growth of social media. Kohnert (2023) and the appeal of a new entrant like Peter Obi into the presidential race have given the youths new enthusiasm and some measure of solidarity in pursuing new political order in Nigeria. The emergence of a powerful third party in Nigeria's 2023 election has offered a unique precedence in focusing on individuals rather than parties or regional and ethnic affiliation, for the growth of democracy throughout Sub-Saharan Africa (Ayanyele 2013).

Therefore, the outcomes of the 2023 presidential election results as announced by INEC showed that a total number of 24,055,878 valid votes (27.55%) were cast out of 93.46m eligible voters. Only 28.63% of all eligible voters in Nigeria participated in the election, out of which 27% of voters decided who would become Nigeria's president with the four leading candidates, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC) scoring 8,794,726 votes, followed by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar (PDP) who scored 6,984,520 and Mr Peter Obi (LP) scoring 6,101,533, and Dr Rabiu Kwankwaso (NNPP) scoring 1,496,687. While each of the three leading candidates won 12 states each, Rabiu Kwankwaso won only his home state Kano. Sunday et al (2024). The af-

termath effects of the above-mentioned indices resulted in low turnouts of voters compared with the 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections. In 2011, 53.7% of voters turned out, but dropped to 43.7% in 2015 and 34.75% in 2019 Ekanem (2023). Ayanyele (2013) connected the low turnout of voters to campaign patterns channelled along religious affiliation, ethnic affiliation, insecurity across the country, lingering fuel scarcity and the October 2022 decision of the Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) to redesign the naira, which created currency shortages and same faith syndrome. The work of Adeagbo (2023) identified violence and voter suppression, the aftermath effect of the Endsars protest which encouraged dominance of the youth population, and disinformation or online falsehood – all of which provided reflections on emerging trends from the nation's election process. Ekanem (2023) alluded to regional marginalisation, parties' zoning arrangement, and personal ambitions which led to the establishment of Obidient and Kwankwaso movements dominated by the youths and the emergence of G-5.

As was mentioned by Shehu-Usman (2023) ethnoreligious marginalisation, same-faith ticket, End-SARS aftermaths, and technological hiccups affected the 2023 presidential outcomes and resulted in an unprecedented avalanche of political prophecies and ecclesiastical innuendos, ethnic tension, a heightened level of ethnic politics, mutual suspicions among Nigerians, and distrust of the political process. This called for various inciting statements from Christian Clerics and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) cautioned against inciting statements, especially by clerics in the country, during the February 25 presidential election. NSCIA expressed worry over the high level of what it described as unsubstantiated claims, threats and incitements emanating from certain quarters of the country, especially, from people it said ought to be the preachers of peace and serve as moral compass for the society, consequent to the declaration of the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) as the winner of the 2023 presidential election Shehu-Usman (2023). The level of unwarranted provocation and unnecessary heating up of the polity, which are capable of creating disunity and threatening the security of the Nigerian nation called on the security agencies to be proactive and rise to their responsibility. Akinmoju (2023). The council called on politicians, who felt aggrieved by the outcome of the elections, to seek redress through appropriate legal channels, as provided for in the Electoral Act and the constitution of Nigeria, rather than resort to violence and unlawful acts. However, the advent of social media in the 2023 presidential election reflected a major shift in Nigeria's electoral map and the incursion of youths into politics. Social media has become a more pervasive platform for social and political engagements in recent years. It can be established therefore that the growth of social media and the appeal of a new entrant like Peter Obi into the presidential race have given the youths new enthusiasm and some measure of solidarity in pursuing a new political order in Nigeria. (Adeagbo 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has attempted an interrogation of the conduct and actions that shaped the 2023 presidential elections and examined the dynamics and controversies that shaped the landscape on which the elections were held. It notes that the 2023 presidential election was derailed by normal

electoral abnormalities such as ethnoreligious factors, political intimidation, politics of do-or-die affairs, and lopsided implementation of policy that failed the Biometric Verification and Accreditation System (BVAS) to meet the promise of INEC and the expectations of citizens on the transparency of the election. It revealed further that the new electoral technology did not meet the promise of INEC and the expectations of citizens on improved transparency in the results collation process in particular, while the digital landscape continued to amplify existing tensions, with narratives that played up identities and party affiliations and question INEC's performance and credibility. The paper, therefore, recommends that INEC needs to, as a matter of urgency, conduct an independent transparent review to evaluate its performance in conducting the 2023 elections, while exploring opportunities for institutional reforms in ensuring free, credible and fair elections in the future. Updates of the voter register should not just be limited to the addition of new voters but the removal of the deceased and those no longer eligible before each election cycle, to better reflect the levels of voter turnout.

To further build the capacity of INEC ad-hoc staff in the conduct of polling day activities, the Commission should seek support to undertake more robust and timely background integrity checks on potential electoral officials before recruitment and training, particularly when it comes to the use of technology, to ensure that only those with an unblemished record are engaged and that knowledge is used on the day of the election. Security agencies and the government must also provide stronger support to INEC, which has to undertake significant logistical operations in a difficult environment, by working to address prevailing insecurity and ensuring that INEC has the financial resources at its disposal in sufficient time. INEC needs to ensure that the different stakeholder groups that it often draws ad-hoc personnel from, such as the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), should have robust training schemes to mirror its efforts.

INEC also needs to ensure a dedicated and prompt page for communicating updated decisions or positions around election day. This includes, but is not limited to, reports around postponed elections, reassigned polling units and logistical delays. Also, investigations into voting day violence and those involved in voter suppression and vote buying should be thorough and result in convictions where proven. Effective collaboration between INEC and the judiciary in properly adjudicating complaints concerning the election process should be crucial to avoid significant instances of candidates being 'elected' by the courts, rather than by the electorate. INEC should carry out rigorous background checks on permanent and ad-hoc staff and should take overt steps to facilitate the prosecution of electoral officers (both ad-hoc and staff) who have been discovered to be engaged in electoral fraud.

Social media companies need to expand their ability to respond promptly to falsehoods circulating on their platform, particularly on election day and immediately after. There should be improved collaboration with recognized fact-checking platforms to allow for quick response and action. Security agencies deployed for election duties should maintain neutrality and professionalism, and deliver effective proactive/preventive policing rather than reactive policing. Electoral offenders of any kind must be punished under the laws of the country to dissuade others from perpetrating electoral offences in Nigeria. Issue-based campaigns must take root in the political process in Nigeria rather than rely on the identity mobilisation of voters. The place of debates

must take a legal place in the system to create room for healthy discussion and citizens' accountability. EFCC and ICPC should continue with their good work to reduce the commercialisation of vote buying and arrest the enablers, middlemen, and receivers during the upcoming elections.

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