

VOTING PATTERN AND THE CHALLENGE OF DEMOCRATIC
CONSOLIDATION: A STUDY OF THE 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

This study adopts qualitative method of data analysis and elite theory to examine the voting pattern in the just concluded 2019 presidential elections and to link it to Nigeria's democratic consolidation as a pathway to growth and development. The 2019 presidential elections was globally acknowledged as free and fair, yet, it came with a lot of challenges, not quite different from the type witnessed in previous elections. The 2019 presidential elections remind political observers about the deep rooted divide and polarization found within the Nigerian body polity. Consequently, this paper argues that, religion, ethnicity and money played a very important role in determining the pattern to which voters tilted their votes. Finally, the study recommends among other things that Politician should avoid using religion and ethnicity and money to play on the sentiments of the electorates; rather, they should focus on issue-based campaigns when they go to canvass for votes and Our election commission must improve its capacity to deliver credible elections and our political parties must play according to the rules.

Keywords: Election, voting behavior, ethnicity, religion.

Introduction:

Nigerian politics from pre-independence right into independence was regional and ethnic based. This same pattern was observed in the subsequent republics that emerged as a result of different military interregnums the country suffered which further created blocks of tribalism, religiosity, favoritism and nepotism among others.

Similarly, Ibrahim, Liman&Mato (2015) observed that Nigeria has been a country characterized by great history and great people of divergent culture and traditional values. These have initially been adopted to maintain unity in diversity and a strong federal constitution. But one major obstacle that has been in Nigerian federation is ethnicity, tribalism, regionalism and strong religious affiliations that embedded the political system, democratic processes, the civil service and even the economic sphere of the country (relating to employment, banking sector and other financial agencies and institutions).

At the inception of the fourth republic in 1999, these negative cultures were transferred from our hitherto defunct third republics into our body polity. It was expected that at the beginning of the new republic in 1999, Nigeria would be ushered into a new paradigm, unfortunately, just like in the first republic and the formation of political parties of the NCNC, AG and NPC, the second republic and fourth had the same level of party coloration. The trajectory and evolution of political party development in the fourth republic toed similar ethnic and religious coloration. The PDP gained extreme acceptance from the eastern part, so was APGA which was founded by the late Igbo conduit and leader of the defunct Biafra state OdumegwuOjukwu, the ANPP and later CPC and the AD were more popular in the northern and western regions in the country respectively. Aside these, transactional politics (money politics) characterized by votes buying and selling, election rigging, thuggery, political assassination, ballot snatching etc... have also formed part of the electioneering process in Nigeria.

Yakubu& Ali (2017) observed that, the history of presidential elections in Nigeria have taken place eleven times; twice during the First Republic, twice during the Second Republic, once in an aborted Third Republic and six times in the present Fourth Republic, they observed that these elections have been characterized with impunity, religious bias, ethnicity, regionalism, tribalism and rigging. Interestingly, at each election electioneering period, many of the aforementioned factors have determined to a very great extent the voting pattern of Nigerians, chief among these factors have been ethnicity and religion.

Similarly, Olayode (2015), Metumara (2010), &Rufa" I (2011) in Yakubu& Ali (2017)observed thatelections in Nigeria are marred with a political behaviour of rigging, the manipulation of religion, ethnicity, regionalism and nepotism. Votersare voting during elections based on their affinity with leaders that belong to the same religious groups, ethnic cleavages, region and other sentiment, this is because, when voting patterns are observed during elections, southerners are more likely to vote for fellow southerners and vice versa. Elections were marred with the culture of rigging, malpractices, intimidation of both voters and opposition, use of violence and political thuggery(Olayode (2015), Metumara (2010), &Rufa" I (2011) in Yakubu& Ali (2017). This at times invited military to overthrow the civilian regimes. This process led to many Republics in the country emerging and disappearing constantly.

Mudasiru (2015) observed that ethnicity has always been a factor in Nigeria's politics. It is why Ibrahim, Liman&Mato (2015)argued that“parties in democratic politics are analogous to entrepreneurs in a profit-seeking economy. So as, to attain their private ends, they formulate whatever policies they believe will gain the most votes, just as entrepreneurs produce whatever products they believe will gain the most profits for the same reason”.

This paper examined the voting pattern in the just concluded 2019 presidential elections and attempts to link it to Nigeria's democratic consolidation. To do this, the paper made clarification on the concept of election viz a viz political behavior, used the elite theory to create a basis for the paper, discussed the crux of the matter as regards the voting pattern in the 2019 presidential election and came out with sustainable recommendations going forward.

Methodology

This paper is based entirely on secondary sources of data. These sources include relevant textbooks, journals, articles and online materials on the 2019 general elections in Nigeria; therefore, conclusion emerged from content analysis. Content analysis is a research technique used to make replicable and valid inferences and coding textual material by systematically evaluating text (Content analysis as a research technique, n.d.).

Theoretical Framework

This research adopts the Elite theory of power. This theory can be traced back to the 19th century and was popularized by Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Roberto Michels (Elite Theory, 2016). The elite theory accepts a broad division of society into dominant and dependent groups. To this school, the people are necessarily divided into two groups; the rulers and the ruled. The ruling class controls most of the wealth, power and prestige in society and exercises it, in whatever form of government might be adopted. Michels for instance insisted that majority of human beings are apathetic, indolent and slavish and they are permanently incapable of self-government. Leaders take advantage of these qualities to perpetuate themselves in power. They employ all kinds of methods; oratory, persuasions, playing upon sentiment in order to fool them (Elite Theory, 2016).

Applied to the context of this paper, it can be observed that the behavior and character of the Nigerian political elites over the years have demonstrated their nonchalant attitude, their lack of patriotism, their ineptitude and their disdain for the followership class, this is the reason they continue to employ any form of divisive strategy and tact to woo the people during electioneering periods without minding the negative aftermath of these kinds of tact afterwards. The reason they mostly use ethnicity, religiosity and non-conventional forms to acquire power.

It is aligning to this that Sanusi (1999) opined that “this nation has the misfortune of having produced an elite whose selfishness and greed know no bounds. Unless they are able to agree on how to accommodate each other they are willing to tear this country apart and lead us into a meaningless war”. He argues further that “when we blame our elite for ethnic chauvinism and religious intolerance, therefore, we blame them, not for the caducity, but for the endurance of these reactionary ideologies. The tragedy of Nigeria does not lie in its diversity, or in its population, or in its resources. Our tragedy lies in the lack of a truly nationalist and visionary leadership, an elite that harnesses the diverse streams that flow into the melting pot called Nigeria” (Sanusi, 1999).

Conceptual Clarification

Election:

Election has become the most acceptable means of changing leadership in any given political system. There are elements that make electorates vote or not to vote in an election. These elements are different and dependent on the socio-cultural, economic, and political background of the nation and voters at one point or the other. In Nigeria, this is rampant, not necessarily because the electorates are apolitical, but the circumstances and the ways in which the context are fixed, forced them to accommodate other considerations (Iwundu, 2011).

Election is a formal decision making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office (Wikipedia, 2015). Elections constitute an important element in liberal democracy. They are a viable means of ensuring the orderly process of leadership succession and change and an instrument of political authority and legitimation (Adejumobi, 2000).

Elections are instruments of democracy to the degree that they give the people influence over policy making. One of the fundamental roles of elections is the evaluation of the incumbent government. Citizens use elections to reward or punish the incumbents (Powell 2000 in Cho 2007).

Elections according to Free Black Law Online Dictionary is the “act of choosing or selecting one or more from a greater number of person, things courses or rights. The choice of an alternative. Election is the internal, free, and spontaneous separation of one thing from another, without compulsion, consisting in intention of will. Election is also the selection of one man from among several candidates to discharge certain duties in a state, corporation or society (Free Black Online Dictionary, 2015).

Political Behaviour

Settle (2014) argues that Political behavior is the study of the way people think, feel, and act with regard to politics. It touches on the major areas including public opinion, ideology, partisanship, political knowledge, participation, campaigns, the media, and polarization.

Similarly, Sule, Sani& Mat (2017) opined that Political behaviour is a view that there is no polity without a belief system inherent in the people. The rising and the falling of a polity is a product of a kind of political beliefs, dispositions, and orientations that run in the psyche of the people and their leaders. Further, they argue that Political Behaviour determines electoral process and voting pattern in every democratic regime. In Nigeria, the political and socioeconomic settings as well as historical background of the country shaped the behaviour and voting pattern of the electorates in the Presidential elections that took place in the history of the state so far. Having conceptualized election and political behavior, it is now time to look at the crux of the matter.

Voting

According to Alonge (2005) Election is the mode of selecting representatives into the legislature or executive arms of government.

Democratic consolidation

According to Schedler(1998) Democratic consolidation can be as the challenge of securing and extending the life expectancy of new democracies, of building immunity against the threat of regression to authoritarianism and reverse waves.

Ademola(2011)defines democratic consolidation as an identifiable phase in the process of transition from authoritarian to democratic system that is critical to the establishment of a stable, institutional and lasting democracy.

Summarily, Ogundiya (2009)summarizes democratic consolidation as maintenance of regime regarding the key political institution as the only legitimate framework for political contestation and adherence to the democratic rules of the game.

Voting Pattern and the Challenge of Democratic Consolidation:

Before we delve into discussing the 2019 presidential elections, it is imperative to reflect previous elections. Olowojolu (2015) opined that,the political parties that emerged shortly before 1979 General Elections also followed the patterns of Nigeria's First Republic. The National Party of Nigeria was the successor party to the defunct NPC. The Unity Party of Nigeria rode on the success of AG in Western Nigeria, while the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) took the baton of Eastern region politics from NCNC. Results of the Presidential Elections of 1979 and 1983 respectively showed that Nigerians voted along ethno-religious configurations. The 2011 Election epitomized ethno-religious divide in Nigeria. The emergence of President Goodluck Jonathan from the Christian South- South minority ethnic group sparked large scale violence in the Muslim dominated Northern states of Nigeria. Several Christians and Southerners were unjustly killed after the announcement of the results. The aforementioned was not farfetched during the build up to the 2015 general elections as top politicians were seen to have used religion and ethnicity as propaganda in order to appeal to the consciousness of Nigerians (Olowojolu, 2015).

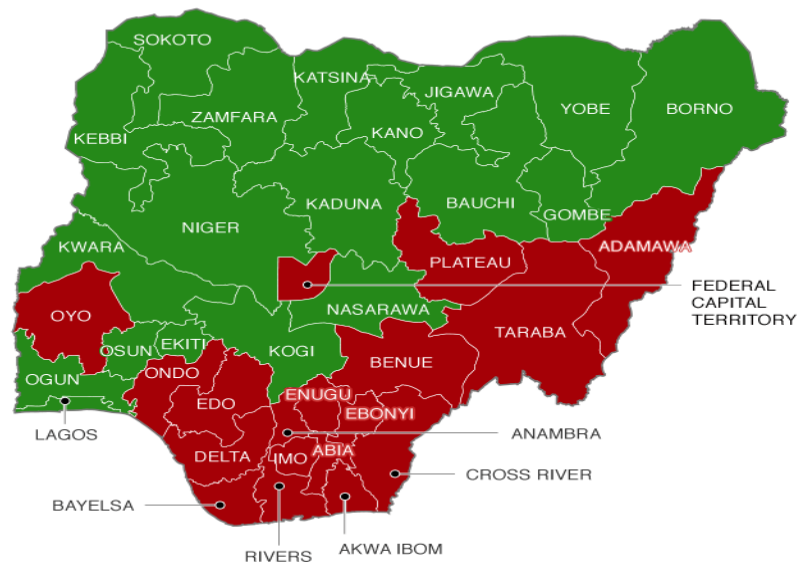
The 2019 presidential elections came with a lot of challenges, not quite different from the type witnessed in previous elections; however, the 2019 presidential elections continue to remind political watchers about the deep rooted divide and polarization found in the Nigerian body polity. Religion, ethnicity and

money played a very important role in determining the pattern to which voters tilted their votes. The problem with the aforementioned is the challenge it poses to the democratic process and consolidation in Nigeria. It can be observed from the voting pattern as seen in the map showing voting pattern below the sentiments and loyalties of voters during the 2019 presidential elections.

Nigerian election results

Winning party in each state

■ APC ■ PDP



Source: INEC

BBC

Ukiwo (2004) observed that since Nigeria's political independence in 1960, ethno-religious factor determines largely who becomes what in Nigerian politics. Similarly, Onapajo (2012) believed that Nigerians are more loyal to religion than state. This according to him can be observed from the trend of what he termed "Religiosity of politics" where religious affinity determines the outcome of election in a democratic dispensation. This affects voting behaviour of the electorates and one can never imagine doing away with the influence of religion in Nigerian election. Very important to note is the very peculiar situation of the 2019 presidential elections as both presidential candidates were northerners and Muslim. The usual pattern that accompanies the north-south divide was taken off the table and the voters had to look at other parameters to watch out for like who were the running mates, who were the religious leaders supporting as better "religious" persons.

Ayantayo, (2009) cited in Iwundu, (2011) observed that when religion comes calling as a determinant in elections, "we hear of Christian/Muslim or Muslim/Christian ticket. This is common where we have two positions running concurrently such as those of President and Vice President, Governor and Deputy Governor. Voting of candidate had always been considered on religious basis. Citizens vote candidates of the same religion more than others. This practice is evident in the leadership of the nation as narrated by Ayantayo as cited in Iwundu, (2011).

- i. NnamdiAzikiwe/TafawaBalewa (Christian/Muslim) 1960-1966
- ii. ShehuShagari/Alex Ekwueme (Muslim/Christian) 1979-1983
- iii. Buhari/Idiagbon (Muslim/Muslim) 1983-1985
- iv. Babangida/EbituUkiwe, Aikhomu (Muslim/Christian) 1985-1993

- v. Shonekan/Abacha (Christian /Muslim) 1993-1997
- vi. Abacha /Diya, (Muslim/Christian) 1997-1998
- vii. Abubakar/Akhigbe (Muslim/Christian) 1998-1999
- viii. Obasanjo/Atiku (Christian / Muslim) 1999-2007
- ix. Yar'Adua/Jonathan (Muslim/Christian) 2007-2010
- x. Jonathan/Sambo (Christian/Muslim)
- xi. Buhari/Osibanjo (Muslim/Christian) 2015 to date.

The above trajectory of past and present Nigerian leaders shows how religion plays an important role in the politics of Nigeria. The reason the voting pattern of states in the 2019 presidential election took a religious and ethnic pattern.

Majority of those in the south south and southeast of Nigeria voted overwhelmingly for a particular political party against another. Many have argued that their voting pattern wasn't borne out of genuine concern for the capacity and capability of the candidates and political parties to deliver, but because of ethno religious sentiments and bias. During the 2019 Presidential elections as with other elections, another fundamental pattern that has the capacity and capability of changing electors and voting patterns is transactional money politics, characterized by votes buying and selling.

This parameter called money behaves like the swing states in American politics; it can change the fate in favour or against a candidate in the slimmest possible time, in many elections, electorates become sellers of commodities in the market that are ready to sell to the highest bidder, in some cases a votes can go as high as N10,000 and as low as N250 Or even N500. Kwaghga&Tarfa (2015) observed with disdain that "paradoxically, money itself has become a dominant factor in African politics. Money seems to have taken the centre stage in the political process in most countries and in the Nigerian politics. It is, sadly, now playing an increasingly critical role. It even appears to be so dominant in the electoral process to such an extent that the word 'money politics' with a pejorative connotation, has crept into the country's political lexicon". They observe further that The role that money and vote buying play in Nigeria politics today have earned them a dominant position in the election of officers into position of authority where they can authoritatively decide who gets what, when and how (Kwaghga&Tarfa, 2015).

To further buttress the above point Chul, Bin ismail& Ku Samsu (2017) commented that "unfortunately, unlike money use in electoral and political process of the advanced societies strictly within legal limits, Nigerian politics become excessively monetized, with widespread, often illegal and undetected use of money by politicians in elections taking the front burner, under guises such as 'dividends of democracy; 'votes buying' 'food or stomach politics' 'money bags' 'god father' etc. the legal regime funnel is full of holes, allowing politicians to refuse to keep, and disclose, full and accurate records of all election finances in accordance with the electoral (Amendment) Act 2011, and political finance and manual 2011".

Furthermore, Danjibo and Oladejias cited in Chul, Bin ismail& Ku Samsu (2017) opined that "money politics make politicians to see themselves as investing in a greater political harvest, thereby encouraging the entrenchment of corruption in the polity which does away the very basis of democratic governance". This is why Ojo as cited in Chul, Bin ismail& Ku Samsu (2017) concluded that "where candidates have invested much before being elected or appointed into public office, simple economic rationality will propel them to make the money they have invested in as many folds as possible. Where that is the case, accountability and transparency known to be hallmark of good governance and democracy becomes jettisoned to the detriment of the system".

The power and prestige attached to transactional politics in Nigeria has become too prominent that when politicians come into politics without adequately equipping themselves financially, they are called “unserious politicians”. The reason many who come into politics do so as though they were venturing into a business and the end objective is profit. The reason real and genuine growth and development has simply become a mirage.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that development is not a one-way traffic, it is multi-faceted and interconnected, development cannot be achieved based on ascribed values, development and genuine political growth and development, building a virile political culture requires a holistic approach rather than a parochial one. The reason, the Nigerian electorates must look beyond religion and ethnicity and pennies when making their electoral choices at the polls. Scholars have argued that ethnicity and religion have considerable influence on the voting patterns of the Nigerian electorate. Therefore, leaders should be elected not according to religious or ethnic affiliation but according to what it is they can offer for the betterment of society.

Recommendations

The paper makes the following recommendations;

- i. Our election commission must improve its capacity to deliver credible elections and our political parties must play according to the rules. YIAGA argues that failure to do so could fundamentally threaten our democracy.
- ii. That's religious and traditional leaders must use their pulpits to preach to their congregations that hunger, poverty and underdevelopment does not understand the language of religion and ethnic affiliation, it is not a respecter of creed and language or region, it tentacles affects both Muslims and Christians, therefore, they should encourage their congregations to make choices based of their perceived and known capacities and capabilities of those who present themselves for elective offices.
- iii. Government and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) must intensify advocacy on voter education, serious advocacy is required to help change the perspective and world view of electorates. Awareness and sensitization should be geared towards reorientation of the electorate as regards the dangers of focusing on ascribed values rather than achieve values. The reason this paper aligns with Olaniyi, (2017) opined that Nigerian voters should be exposed to political education that will make them promote national interest.
- iv. Politician should avoid using religion and ethnicity and money to play on the sentiments of the electorates; rather, they should focus on issue-based campaigns when they go to canvass for votes. The work also aligns with Nyiayaana, (2019) observes that liberal democratic elections that swept across Africa in the 1990s in the so-called third wave of democratisation, which emphasize individualism are yet to be creatively adjusted to the historical, cultural, and practical realities of communalism and ethnicity in Nigeria. There is still a pervasive sense of collective identity built around primordial conceptions of ethnicity, one that is also intensely instrumentalised by political elites who appeal to voters, weeping ethnic and religious sentiments in a bid to capturing and retaining power. Ethnicity, thus, continues to condition people's social, economic and political relations, for example, in the unfair distribution of power and opportunities amongst ethnic groups as well as voting choices expressed during national elections. More so, politicians must see politics as service to humanity rather than a

business venture, anybody who's interested in becoming the next Dangote has no business in politics, and therefore, should look elsewhere.

- v. The electorates must learn to see beyond their sentiments and refused to be played by these politicians who do not have their interest at heart, if not, why would a person intending to genuinely represent their people play on their primordial and religious sentiments? This in itself show ulterior motive and should be resisted at all cost.
- vi. This paper also aligns with the thoughts of Olowojolu (2015) when he said ethno-religious sentiments must be discouraged among Nigerian politicians. Anti-ethnic/religious sentiments bill should be passed into law in Nigeria. Politicians that sponsor or incite the voters under the umbrella of ethnicity and religion should be either be disqualified or face jail terms.

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