

## Manifestations of Ethnicity and Religion in 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Undoubtedly, the twin problems of African politics for ages reared their ugly heads in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. Thus, the thrust of this paper is basically to empirically demonstrate the manifestations of ethnicity and religion in the election. With the official results from the Election Management Body (EMB) that is Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), this paper has proved beyond reasonable doubt that Nigerian politics since independence in 1960 has not grown beyond pettiness of ethnicity and religion. In view of the debilitating impacts of the twin problems vis-à-vis national integration, the paper recommends that all efforts should be geared towards truncating the impact of the phenomena before another general election by public enlightenment if all efforts at national integration will not be a mirage after all. More so, there is a need to evolve appropriate electoral system that can help democracy survive in the face of deep cleavages of ethnicity and religion.

**Key words:** Election; Ethnicity; Religion; National Integration; Secularity

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### 1. FIRST WORDS

Since 1999 when democracy was inaugurated in Nigeria, after long spell of military interregnum, the 25 February 2023 presidential poll marked the seventh in the series. Before that time, Nigeria had witnessed two presidents stand down after serving the constitutional limit of two terms (2007 and 2023) as well as an electoral defeat for an incumbent (2015) (see, *Centre for Democracy & Development*, 2023, p.2). The election was a watershed in the sense that despite well-documented instances of insecurity in all six geopolitical zones of the country and notwithstanding the fuel and currency scarcity that threatened to derail the electoral process, Nigerians, particularly the youth, had shown a strong interest in participating in the election (ibid.). Of the 9.46 million voters added to the register by the Election Management Body (EMB), that is, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) before the 2023 election, over 70% were youth (aged, pp.18-34); meaning that they comprised 39.7% of the total electorate of 93.4million (ibid.). However, this election suggests that the twin problems of African politics for ages in terms of ethnic and religious identities remain important factors shaping voters' preferences. Whereas, in line with the 1999 constitution (as amended) Presidential elections in Nigeria, for example, require the winning candidate to gain support from different regions, thus helping to diminish claims of narrow parochialism or regionalism (Keily, 2002, p.156).

The total number of registered voters for the election was 93,469,008, with 23,337,466 total valid votes cast. In essence, just 27% voter turnout was recorded. Voter apathy was palpable in the election. The final result announced revealed vote distribution for the four leading candidates thus: Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC) scoring 8,794,726 votes, followed by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar (PDP) scored 6,984,520 votes, while Mr. Peter

Obi(LP) and Alhaji Rabiu Kwankwaso (NNPP) scored 6,101,533 and 1,496,687 respectively (see, Tinubu is President-elect, *The Nation*, Lagos March 1, 2023, p.1). While each of the three leading candidates won 12 states each, Rabiu Kwankwaso won only his home state Kano. With regards to the geographical spread of votes Tinubu secured 25% of votes cast in 29 states. Atiku secured same in 21 states, while Obi secured 25% in 16 states. As shall be empirically demonstrated later in this paper; the voting pattern glaringly manifested religious inclinations like the previous presidential election (see, Ojo, 2020, pp.136-155) that has necessitated the need for electoral reforms too (Ojo, 2021, pp.189-210a, Ojo, 2021, pp.48-65b). This is indeed a serious problem facing the nascent democracy more so, going by the historiography of Nigeria's religions which is as complex as its political, cultural and economic tapestry with its rich, vast cultural and religious diversities, 250 ethnicities, and over 400 languages. The religious landscape of this geopolitical entity is complex, fluid, and dynamic. It is characterized by a multiplicity of religious traditions, inclusive of local ethnic-based religions and world views, and various strands of Christianity and Islam, as well as newer spiritual science movements (Adogame, 2010, p.479). Another recent phenomenon within Nigeria's multifaith scenario is what has been described elsewhere as civil religion (Olupona, 2003 cited in Adogame, 2010, p.479).

With the above introductory remarks and the *problematique*, the following pages are organized into few sections. First, the conceptual framework of analysis to avoid misunderstanding; both ethnicity and religion are properly conceptualized without necessarily being definitional. The next section dwells on the great polemic as prelude to the election as regards Moslem/Moslem ticket which deeply polarized the country along religious lines. The paper focused on empirical evidences from the official results to establish the fact that both religion and ethnicity reared their ugly heads during the election. The paper however infers that the polity should encourage participation in politics for national figures with charisma to emerge for both religion and ethnicity to be down played in electoral processes, while public and political enlightenment is imperative as one of the functions of the Election Management Body-(INEC).

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## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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### 2.1 Ethnicity

Ethnicity and cultural affinity have great influence on humans and their socio-economic and political activities. By nature, human beings are inclined to identifying and associating with their ethnicity before nationality. Indeed, what Lord Lugard hurriedly put together in 1914 in a polity, later called Nigeria, was a conglomeration of over 250 ethnic groups that were linguistically and culturally

fragmented (Idang, 2017, p.246). The diverse ethnic groups brought together during the colonial era ranged in size and population from groups consisting of less than 100 people to groups numbering over five million people (Ibid.).

Historically, the word 'ethnicity' originated from the Greek adjective: '*Ethnikos*' which means 'heathen', while the adjective is derived from the noun '*ethnos*', meaning 'foreign people or nation'. Besides, ethnicity is a multifaceted concept, which builds the identity of an individual through kinship, religion, language, shared territory and nationality, and physical appearance (Santos, Palomares, Normando and Quintao, 2010). Therefore, it refers to the ethnic quality or affiliation of a group of people, which is normally characterized in terms of culture. Ethnicity, in the words of Hoffman and Graham (2009), also denotes a group of people bound by blood ties. Some countries, such as the United States of America, tend to characterise additional identities among people as ethnic distinctions rather than seeing them as different in nationality (Adeshina, 2017). Thus, native Americans, Hispanics, Jews and other Americans of European origins African and Asian origins are referred to as ethnic groups, not "nations". irrespective of their differences, they still identify themselves as Americans (Viotti and Kauppi, 1997). With this, ethnic group retains a separate identity within the larger, more ethnically-diverse nation. Although members of ethnic groups may speak the same language, share cultural values or even have physical similarities, however, all the groups still maintain an over-arching or common national identity. To Viotti and Kauppi (1997), the boundaries of states in much of Africa, Asia, and Latin America were determined by divisions agreed upon by the former colonial or imperial powers for reasons often having very little to do with national, tribal, ethnic or other local identities. This, according to them, was particularly true in Africa, especially Nigeria, where boundaries of its British colony include three separate ethnic groups (Ibo, Yoruba, and Hausa-Fulani). Therefore, ethnicity could be seen as a shared cultural heritage, through which people see themselves as members of a particular ethnic category based on common ancestry, language or religion which confers on them a distinctive social identity (Macionis and Plummer, 2005).

Reports indicate that ethnic conflict has, in the last decade or so, crept into the forefront of international political debate. According to Stremlau (1999, cited in *Thisday*, Lagos, April 21, 2021), polarisation between ethnic groups and the attendant conflicts between them, as they compete for resources, political and economic power and other goals, has spawned negative consequences of tremendous proportions, of which genocide, ethnic cleansing and civil war are but a few examples, having resulted in loss of several lives and livelihoods as well as displacements.

Ethnic conflicts in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general are said to be occasioned by scarcity of political resources, multi-culturalism, religion and militarisation of ethnicity, among others. These conflicts cannot be ignored, as they are oftentimes initiated by people benefitting from the control of state resources and power, which are the bases of their patronage networks, thus seeking to instigate violent ethnic conflicts to achieve their desired aims. The reason is that almost by definition, ethnic groups compete for the strategic resources of their respective societies (Williams, 1980, p.69).

Azeez, 2008 (cited in Adeshina, 2017), opines that the emergence and entrenchment of ethnicity in the country's politics has its manifestation within the various democratic experiments. He states further that the feeling of belonging and rejection became the basis for distinguishing individuals within the polity as evidenced in the behaviour of political elites, with lack of cohesiveness and threat to the unity of the country, suspense and conflict, ethnic consciousness increasing in scope while inter-ethnic tension continues to manifest in Nigeria, submitting, therefore, that ethnic consciousness became entrenched as a particular Nigerian ideology in the political process till date.

According to Kirk-Green (1969), Nigeria has over 400 ethnic groups, with Suberu (1998) asserting that it is one of the most ethnically-diverse countries in the world, with over 250 ethno-linguistic groups, some of which are bigger than many independent states of contemporary Africa. At the beginning of the sixties, there were over 3,000 tribes or ethnic groups in the world, with about 1,000 represented in the geo-political space called Nigeria. Of all the contemporary states in the international system, Nigeria's plural nature and character is unique. For instance, the former USSR had about 27 ethnic groups, China and India have more than 40 respectively, the United States of America (USA) has less than 50, excluding the Red Indians, and England has three, France about eight and Germany about 15. The only place in the entire world that has over 300 ethno-linguistic groups is Nigeria (Onwuejeogwu, 1995). Ordinarily, all these should have amplified Nigeria's rich culture. The reverse, however, appears to be the case, as the country has been battling with not just the problem of ethnicity but also, that of ethno-religious conflicts.

Giving the picture of the sorry pass which Nigeria has found itself, Osaghae and Suberu (2005) note that the meaning of regionalism in Nigeria has been reduced to "North for Northerners", "East for Easterners" and "West for Westerners", a discriminatory system under which people from other regions living in these areas were deprived of their rights and privileges and excluded from the political process due to the parochial definition given to the concept of indigeneship (see Bach, 1997, p.375). This, according to them, was how the infamous distinction between indigenes and non-indigenes was strengthened.

Although the erstwhile regions were abrogated in 1966, they remain crucial political cleavages for reasons which have already been advanced. They also provide the basis for new forms of exclusionary politics that have evolved alongside new political-administrative structures and reinforced discrimination against non-indigenes, namely 'statism' and 'localism' (Adeshina, 2017).

It is rather unfortunate and disturbing that Nigerian citizens are defined and recognized today along their ethnic affiliations in allocations of positions and opportunities. Ethnicity has been conceptualized, not only as theoretical ideology but as a weapon for the furtherance of ethnically-structured political objectives, to the detriment of national integration. Ethnic sentiment has become a veritable weapon for achieving narrow, parochial and micro-nationalistic objectives. This development has sadly permeated the various facets of national life, including churches, mosques, clubs, associations, work places and even in the academia. This ethnic problem, according to Adebisi (1998), is gradually assuming the status of cancerous growth that is terminally destroying Nigeria's body politic. Generally speaking therefore, a major problem currently staring Nigeria in the face is ethnicity. It has been argued that the effects of ethnicity supersede that of religion and that it cannot be divorced from the various political conflicts that had been and are still being witnessed in the country.

## 2.2 Religion

Religion is widely believed to be one of the most vexatious and contentious issues across the world. Besides, scholars are not of consensus of opinions on a universally-accepted definition of religion, as each of them views the concept from their respective prisms and world views. Indeed, Imo (1996), insists that the word 'religion' could not have had a single definition, as it is a combination of two things: the profane and the supernatural, hence his definition of the concept as the varied symbolic expression of, and appropriate response to, that which people deliberately affirm as being of unrestricted value for them, emphasizing that a good definition of religion has to take into consideration two things: specificity and inclusiveness. According to *google.com.ng*, religion is the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods. Religion, or more appropriately, religions are cultural phenomena comprising social institutions, traditions or practices, literatures, sacred texts and stories, and sacred places that identify and convey an understanding of ultimate meaning. It is said to be very diverse. McGee (1990) also views religion as a set of actions organized around the sacred, that is, a non-empirical source of power, transcendence, mystery and awe. Another attempt at defining religion was made by Durkheim (cited in Tylor, 1958, p.62). To him, it is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things

set apart or forbidden - beliefs and practices - which unite into a single moral community. Expatriating on Durkheim's proposition, McGee posits that the religious communities of human beings are often distinguished by reference to their central objects of worship. In the view of Anyauwu (2004), religion is human interaction with the supernatural in order to cope with life's crises, while Omoregbe (1999) states that it is essentially a relationship; a link established between two persons: namely a human person and a divine person believed to exist. Whereas, to Okereke (1983), religion is the sum total of man's relationship with God and the transcendent, that is, above normal or physical human knowledge.

Another interesting dimension was, however, introduced into the attempts at putting religion in proper perspective by Ogugua and Ogugua (2015). They assert that religion begins at the point where we are no longer too sure of ourselves, no longer in control, at the point we struggle in our conscious desire to succeed, in short, at the point of self-preservation, of course, not in idleness, but in our engagement with life by performing some activities. They further stress that it is within these activities that the connection between religion and politics is located; after all, as said by the great philosopher, Aristotle, man is a political animal, even though Jawondo stresses further man is both a religious and political animal. Skutch (1970) had earlier asserted that religion begins at its natural starting point, that is, the instinct of self-preservation, which has been called the first law of nature. He states further that the function of religion has been to deepen and broaden this natural impulse, adding "we are religious because we love life and cling passionately to our conscious existence, as religion is life's ceaseless effort to preserve and perfect itself, become, at least, self-conscious, foreseeing and, in consequence, fearful amid the thousand perils that beset it. In essence, man decided to accept religion as a means of preserving and fortifying himself.

Religion is equally said to be a concept which naturally evokes positive sentiments of goodness, kindness, love, rectitude, peace with God, with oneself and fellow-men, thus serving as a potent tool that can create integrity in the society (Olumide, 2021). Man is, therefore, arguably the only animal with a religion. If man is also a religious being, it then implies that religion is a universal activity, practised in all human societies, extremely varied in form and is regarded with great seriousness by those who adhere to it (McGee, 1990). In the words of Ogugua and Ogugua (2015), religion, in the hand of a villain, can be a cog in the wheel of progress and massaging of the ego and dehumanization of the people, while in the hand of a 'saint', it can become an instrument for humanization. At this point, they hold that religion can become a double-edged sword; a paradoxical instrument in the hands of a few or even the state. In his landmark work, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1962, pp.54-55) points out that the ancient Greek,

Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, and Japanese had no term that approximates what modern English speakers mean by 'religion'. The Romans had the term '*religio*'. But there was no distinction between religion and politics. How could there be when Caesar was considered a god? The term *religio* covered all sorts of binding obligations, including civic oaths and family rituals (see, Cavanaugh, 2011, p.125).

Focusing on the state of Nigeria as a typical example of religious pluralism, there are three dominant religious groups, namely: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR), with all of them widely believed to be impacting to breathe integrity into the society. Hence everybody practises one type of religion or the other, safe for the atheists (who disbelieve or lack belief in the existence of God or gods) and the agnostics (who hold the view that any ultimate reality, such as God, is unknown and probably unknowable). Intrinsic in religion is the characteristic of power. This power characteristic positions it inextricably from politics in Nigeria, as in other countries. More unfortunate is the fact that rather than religion functioning as a catalyst to man's ultimate problem, it has become a breeding ground for intolerance of one to the other or one group to the other. As Ekwunife (1992) argues, the government and its citizens are yet to accept fully, both in theory and practice, the stark realities of pluralism of religious beliefs and practices. And, the waves of religious crises and violence in recent years in the country seem to confirm the obvious but unfortunate phenomenon of religious intolerance. To Ekwunife, there is religious intolerance when any group in a society deliberately and violently sets out to stamp out what the members subjectively consider to be error in religious thought and practice; there is religious intolerance when members of the self-acclaimed true religion proclaim in practice that persons they consider to be in error have no right to live and no right to legitimate political, social and economic amenities unless they renounce their 'error' and be converted to the supposed true religious views and practices.

It should be stated that the perennial incidences of religious crises in Nigeria, which have led to maiming, loss of thousands of lives and destruction of property, are attributable to religious intolerance among religious adherents. The colossal loss to violent religious conflicts in the country, according to Jegede (2019), did not end with loss of lives and property. Rather, its attendant effects on peaceful co-existence, political stability and socio-economic development is beyond comprehension. He asserts that hardly can one speak of progress in Nigeria when our social, political, economic and religious systems fail to maintain at least a minimum level of social decorum, adding that sustainable and lasting religious peace across the nation have been aborted times without number, owing to the recurrent cases of religious conflicts. "As those religious conflicts linger on,

distrust and suspicion became the order of the day, more especially between the adherents of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, though there are records of occasional conflicts between African Traditional Religion (ATR) and other religions for a number of reasons, including superiority complex, that is, claim of superiority by both Moslems and Christians over the African Traditional Religious adherents and disregard and contempt for African Traditional Religion and institutions, Jegede (2019) submits that religion is the greatest threat to peaceful co-existence as well as economic and political development in Nigeria. Of a truth, religious conflicts oftentimes leave in their trail killing, maiming, arson, wanton destruction of property and disruption of socio-economic activities with attendant implications on productivity. There are instances of burning down of hundreds of churches, mosques, hotels, schools, private homes, public buildings and other structures, all in the name of needless religious conflicts, thus creating an atmosphere of national insecurity and uncertainty which are detrimental to the growth and development of the country.

In his view, Akeredolu (2022) notes that religion is currently being deployed most shamelessly by the elites to gain unmerited advantage. Continuing, he says that the situation is so bad that the downtrodden are clothed with ethno-religious identities which suit the political whims of the manipulators, expressing the regret that religious sentiment is usually employed as a weapon of mass mobilization to confuse the easily impressionable. "The real issues are relegated or taken down completely from political discourse and replaced with manipulative and emotive outbursts to achieve a desired end. The earlier we stop this dangerous and divisive campaign, the better it will be for everyone. Any war fought to establish the supremacy of a faith over others can only end in tears. The manipulative skills of politicians currently put to use will aggravate an already bad situation," he said. To Akeredolu (2022), "the solution to the challenges faced in the country will not be found in the faiths of individuals. A person's religious persuasion is based on personal conviction. It is essentially private. The public space must remain secular. Consequently, the current agitations for a faith-based political representation are anchored on certain misapprehension of the requirements for leadership in a multi-ethnic state such as Nigeria. It borders on plain mischief to set the people against themselves to attain political power. Any so-called religious leader, who ignores knowledge and competence as necessary criteria to measure leadership capacity is an apostate (Akeredolu, 2022).

It has also been observed that religious conflicts have been on the increase, particularly since the return to democracy in 1999, with scholars implicating political elite for deliberately promoting religious and ethnic differences in their struggle for power and political positions and currying favours in and around the corridors

of power. No wonder Aguwa (1993) points out that religion quite easily succumbs to politicization, as it inclines towards a dialogic relation with several other socio-cultural institutions. As succinctly put by Jegede (2019), it will not be incorrect to say there is hardly an appointment that is not tainted with religious inference made to it. This breeds mutual distrust, discrimination and a sense of general insecurity within the society, as the case is within the Niger Delta region and the northeastern region. The general opinion, therefore, is that the perennial religious crises between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria have resulted in dwindled economic fortune as well as social and political instability, which have, to a large extent, ridiculed Nigeria in the comity of nations, as no individual or corporate body would want to invest in a place where security and safety of his investment is not guaranteed.

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### **3. MUSLIM-MUSLIM TICKET: THE GREAT POLEMIC**

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The build-up to the 2023 general elections was marred by agitations and outcries over the religious affiliations of presidential candidates who emerged from the various political parties in Nigeria. The agitations and outcries were so deafening and ferocious to the extent that some watchers of events tended to conclude that the members of the political class had allowed themselves to be entangled by the unfortunate mindset that religious affiliations of candidates standing for elections must necessarily be a yardstick to determine their eligibility for election or their performances when they eventually get into political offices. Although this is not new in the history of the country's political trajectory, scholars and other stakeholders have, however, expressed serious concern over the dangerous and frightening dimension the issue of religious identity in political contest has assumed, fearing that if not properly and urgently addressed, it might further worsen the political process, particularly in a country already divided along ethnic and religious cleavages. According to Olaopa (2022), the fear is further heightened by alleged fulanization or jihadist agenda that might have been playing out in Nigeria since the beginning of the President Muhammadu Buhari administration in 2015. The fear, he says, is given some backing by ostensible permissiveness with which the Federal Government had been handling the rampaging criminalities of the Boko Haram insurgents, herdsman-farmers carnage as well as the sundry banditry and kidnapping that have made Nigeria a most insecure place to live in the last decade.

However, as stated earlier, the agitation for religious representation in political leadership is not new in Nigeria, as it has been a formidable part of the country's political development or under-development, as the case may be, since the time of Chief Obafemi Awolowo as Premier of

the old Western Region in the First Republic to the June 12, 1993 presidential election debacle of Chief M.K.O. Abiola. For instance, one of the factors that appeared to have worked against the victory of Awolowo of Unity Party of Nigeria in the 1979 presidential election was the choice of his running mate. Awolowo, a Christian from the South, picked Philip Umeadi, another Christian also from the South, as his vice presidential candidate. Nnamdi Azikiwe, a Southerner and Christian, also faced similar challenge when he ran the same 1979 presidential election on the platform of Nigerian Peoples' Party (NPP) with Prof. Ishaya Audu, a fellow Christian and pastor from the North. The defeats suffered by both Awolowo and Azikiwe were tied to what was generally believed to be their lack of respect for religious balancing in the choice of their running mates or overlooking the role of religion in the country's political process.

The same scenario also played out in 1993 when the then Social Democratic Party (SDP) presented Chief M.K.O. Abiola, a Muslim from the South and Alhaji Babagana Kingibe, another Muslim from the North. Although their election was adjudged to be the freest and fairest in the annals of Nigeria's history, it was, however, annulled by the General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida military junta even before the formal announcement of the result by the then electoral umpire, National Electoral Commission (NEC). According to *The Guardian*, in its editorial, there was no record of protest from the Christian population in the country then (*The Guardian*, Lagos, June 17, 2022). Hence since the present political dispensation in 1999, virtually all the major political parties have avoided fielding Christian-Christian or Muslim-Muslim presidential and vice-presidential candidates in apparent moves to balance the prevalent religious sentiments in the country. In addition, the level of distrust and suspicion between the two major religions in Nigeria has become so high as to making it implausible, unrealistic and unwise for any political party to field a same-religion presidential joint ticket. What is new in Nigeria today, according to Ibrahim (2022), is the climate of suspicion and fear over what many Christians see as an Islamisation agenda. Olaopa (2022) corroborates this assertion when he says that religious identity is receiving renewed and more frightening dimension against the background of national fear, especially about an alleged fulanization or jihadist agenda that might have been playing out in Nigeria.

Interestingly, it was in the midst of this *cul-de-sac* that Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a Muslim from the South and the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), after some political horse trading, came up with a fellow Muslim from the North as his vice-presidential candidate, an action seen by Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and some other stakeholders as a slap on the face of Nigeria's religious dynamics, which is represented across the entire six geo-political zones of Nigeria, from the South-East with an all

Christian tickets in all the states, to the North-West with an all Muslim tickets, and all the other zones with a mixed configuration (Olaopa, 2022).

It was, therefore, not surprising the massive level of heat generated by the Tinubu-Shetima Muslim-Muslim ticket. Leading the pack of the critics of what was described as the APC misadventure was the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) which said that Christians across the country would consider the decision as a declaration of war against the freedom of religion as well as the peace and security of the country. CAN, in a statement issued by its General Secretary, Rev. Joseph Bade Daramola, said such a move would amount to a deliberate action to plunge the country further into religious violence and extremism, and equally destroy the unity of Nigeria. "Therefore, we give notice to all political parties that we will protect the religious diversity of the Nigerian state and will mobilise politically against any political party that sows the seed of religious conflict by presenting to Nigeria a presidential ticket that is Muslim-Muslim or Christian-Christian (*Thisday*, Lagos, June 3, 2023). Similarly, the Catholic Church in Nigeria said foisting a Muslim-Muslim presidency on the country would threaten the existing fragile unity and cohesion among the people. The church, in a joint statement issued by Very Rev. Fr. Zacharia Nyantiso Samjumi, and Director, Social Communications, Very Rev. Fr. Michael Nsikak Umoh, said: "With the present glaring crisis and division in the nation, a Muslim-Muslim ticket would be most insensitive and a tacit endorsement of the negative voices of many non-state actors, who have been threatening this nation's unity and peaceful coexistence without an arrest" (Ibid.) It, therefore, strongly advised those political parties toying with divisive agenda to have a rethink by presenting a more inclusive ticket, while calling on all people of goodwill to resist 'this budding injustice' that may be hatched against a cross section of the people. The church, which said political parties must not lose sight of the fact that the unity of the country had over the years been maintained by a delicate balancing of the religious and the regional, posited that "even in the despotic military era, most juntas ensured a balance of the religious architecture in their regimes. For instance, we had Murtala-Obasanjo, Obasanjo-Yar'adua, Babangida-Ebitu Ukiwe, Abacha-Diya. The church, however, noted that it was only during the General Muhammadu Buhari era as military Head of State (Dec. 31, 1983-Aug. 27, 1985) that Nigeria had a Muslim-Muslim military dictatorship (*Thisday*, Lagos, June 3, 2023). It should, however, be added here that the Muslim-Muslim military dictatorship also extended to the Buhari-Idiagbon regime. A former General Secretary of Nigerian Baptist Convention, Rev. Supo Ayokunle, even queried Tinubu on his choice of Shettima: "In a country with 100 million people in each religion, are you saying there is no competent Christian who can be your partner?", adding: "If

you are picking a Muslim, it means you have an agenda” (Ibid).

Another notable individual, who did not hide his fierce condemnation of the APC Muslim-Muslim ticket, was a former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Babachir Lawal, who described the move as a direct attack on Christians, stating that the Planning and Strategy Committee of the Tinubu Campaign Organisation, which he led, recommended that the benefits and demerits of Muslim-Christian ticket outweighed those of a Muslim-Muslim ticket. “Our report was very detailed about the implication of religion in this coming election. In the report, both scenarios were viewed and analysed and the report made provision for the advantages of the Muslim-Muslim ticket, and the disadvantages,” the APC chieftain said. According to him, “Nobody should aspire to be president of Nigeria if he ignores the religious dichotomy in the system. We know that religion is a major factor in this country and it’s a divisive factor. And anybody wishing to lead this country ought to be concerned that he is going to kick start his government in a manner that is divisive, in a manner that is antagonistic to a certain segment of the society.” Also commenting on the issue, a former Catholic Church Archbishop, Anthony Cardinal Olubunmi Okogie, was emphatic that sentiments about ethnicity and religion are key in Nigerian politics, urging the electorate to vote for political parties and their candidates in the 2023 general elections based on these sentiments. On whether competence and not ethno-religious factor should determine who governs Nigeria, Okogie, a former President of Christian Association of Nigeria, said: “Competence should be the defining factor for any government and not ethno-religious sentiments. Unfortunately, ethno-religious sentiments play a key role in Nigeria’s politics,” he said, urging the voters to express their choices by either voting for or against any candidate or political parties based on whatever impression and/or expression they have about such candidates or political parties. To the Chairman of Gombe State Chapter of Christian Association of Nigeria, Rev. Fr. Joseph Shinga, the Muslim-Muslim ticket of APC, was nothing but an attempt geared towards disintegrating the country, arguing that the current political temperature does not support the same religion ticket, while the Vice President-General of the apex Igbo socio-cultural organisation, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, observed that the development showed that APC did not care about the fragile unity and peaceful co-existence of Nigeria (*The Punch*, Lagos, July 15, 2022).

While the criticisms were raging, Festus Keyamo, the then Minister of State for Labour and Spokesman for Tinubu Presidential Campaign, said it was about balance of power (Ibid). According to him, Christians feared losing power at the centre if Tinubu became president with Shettima, a fellow Muslim, as his vice-president. This, he said, was misguided because the vice-president is powerless (Ibid). His argument was, however, quickly

punctured by a popular columnist, Olu Fasan, who said that it was not about balance of power. “Everyone knows that the Nigerian presidency is not a duopoly; that the president is all-powerful. Yet, you can’t have a president without a vice-president,” he said. Fasan, who pointed out that Christians account for nearly 50 percent of Nigeria’s population, thus making up over 100 million, wondered how their non-representation in either of the two offices, president and vice-president, that jointly embody Nigeria’s sovereignty, promote national unity and command national loyalty (*Business Day*, Lagos, September 5, 2022). But to Adams Oshiomhole, a former Governor of Edo State and former National Chairman of APC, the challenges confronting Nigeria is beyond religion, urging Nigerians to be more concerned about the characters of the candidates fielded by political parties for political offices and not their religious affiliations. “I think Nigeria’s challenges are beyond religion. If religion is the answer, we have both churches and we have more mosques. I think the issue before us which we have to spend time discussing is: what will any of the presidential candidates do differently to expect a different outcome? I want to look at their backgrounds because none of them is new or a stranger to public service. I want to be able to evaluate what they did before to convince me as to what they will do differently if given the opportunity. I think these are the issues and given the serious situation we are in, in terms of the economy, security, you name it, I think this is what we should devote them to, to be honest, for me is dysfunctional, and evidence exists that Nigeria was probably at his best where religion did not feature whether under military rule and even thereafter,” he said (*Premium Times*, Lagos, August 3, 2022). A Political Scientist and Senior Fellow, Centre for Democracy and Development, Professor Jibrin Ibrahim, also toes this line of argument, saying that the reason the Muslim-Muslim ticket generated so much controversy was because what was at stake was not the strategic concerns about winning permutations, but the real anger within the Christian community against the imbalance in political appointments under President Muhammadu Buhari. The argument is that a Yoruba candidate from the South-West needs to generate electoral support from the core Northern Muslim electorate to win. The reasoning in the APC camp is that the 2023 elections might be a close call, with the Labour Party taking significant Southern and Christian votes and Kwankwaso’s New Nigeria People’s Party (NNPP) taking a big chunk of the Kano and core Muslim votes,” said Ibrahim (*Premium Times*, Lagos, July 15, 2022). It could, therefore, be safely concluded that the APC Muslim-Muslim ticket and the balanced ticket of other political parties, particularly Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party were borne out of political expediency. Each political party would opt for whatever strategy it thinks best to win election. And since Tinubu was in the race to win, he might have thought that the choice of Shettima

was inevitable, given the circumstances then. According to Olaopa, turning religion into political positioning abandons its significant essence as a private enterprise and does not serve any governance purpose (Olaopa, 2022). Scholars and watchers of political events in Nigeria have even argued that political leadership should be about who has the ability and capability to improve the wellbeing of the people, rather than their religious beliefs. It would seem that this is the only way that the secular status of the country can be duly protected, electoral contests made less rancorous and divisive tendencies along religious line permanently nipped in the bud. It was within that great polemic that the February 25, 2023 presidential election took place; which, no doubt, reflected both religious and ethnic inclinations.

#### 4. EMPIRICAL INDICATIONS OF BOTH RELIGION AND ETHNICITY IN 2023 ELECTIONS

The 2023 presidential election is not really different from the previous one in terms of voters' behavior vis-à-vis religious inclinations. However, the addition to the albatross of elections in the country is the manifestation of ethnicity combined with religious biases in making electoral choices. As empirical data glaringly revealed, across the country by states, candidates were far from being elected based on their competence and capability but rather the unwholesome religious and ethnic sentiments. Table 1 reflects how the major candidates stand state by state, while also running commentaries on why voters opted for the winner in each state.

**Table 1**  
**How They Stand**

States	Tinubu APC	Atiku PDP	OBI LP	Kwankwaso NNPP	
EKITI (C)	201,494*	11,397	264	89,554	This is a Christian state but ethnicity played dominant role in voters' preference of Tinubu's candidature.
KWARA (M)	263,572*	31,166	3,142	136,904	This is a predominantly Moslem state, religion and agitation for power-shift i.e. ethnicity aided the winner.
OSUN (Mix)	343,945	23,283	713	354,366*	This is a state with a mix of both Christians and Moslems. Voting pattern did not reflect ethnicity as APC candidate hailed from the state and still to a Northerner because of the lackluster performance of APC government in the state.
ONDO (C)	369,924*	44,405	930	115,463	This is a Christian dominated state. Ethnicity determined voting pattern here in favour of Tinubu of APC.
OGUN (Mix)	341,554*	85,829	2,200	123,831	It's a mixed state in terms of Religion but ethnicity held sway in voting pattern. Tinubu was elected.
OYO (Mix)	449,884*	99,110	4,095	182,977	A mixed state too but ethnicity became a slogan that our own should be voted. Tinubu won on the ground of ethnicity.
YOBE (M)	151,459	2,406	18,270	198,567*	This is mainly a Moslem state. PDP candidate won because of both religion and ethnicity.
ENUGU (C)	4,772	428,640*	1,808	15,749	This is mainly a Christian state. LP candidate (Obi) won being a Christian and on ethnic ground.
LAGOS (Mix)	572,606	582,454*	8,442	75,750	Unexpected happened in Lagos during the presidential election as both ethnicity and religion influenced votes; Youths and indigenes revolt against the candidate of APC (Tinubu) of which Lagos is the stronghold of his party. Protest votes assisted Labour Party here. In terms of the slogan 'Lagos-for- Lagosians campaigns.
GOMBE (M)	146,977	26,160	10,520	319,123*	Religion and ethnicity count much here as Atiku of PDP won.
ADAMAWA (M)	182,881	105,648	8,006	417,611*	Being the home state of PDP candidate, both ethnicity and religion influenced voting pattern.
KATSINA (M)	482,283	6,376	69,386	489,045*	Religion swung vote here as PDP candidate from the North was discountenanced and Tinubu of APC was voted.
JIGAWA (M)	421,390*	1,889	98,234	386,587	Religion aided APC candidate in this state rather than ethnicity.
NASARAWA (Mix)	172,922*	191,361	12,715	147,093	This is a mixed state with many as Moslems, they voted Tinubu of APC.
NIGER (M)	375,183*	80,452	21,836	284,898	The state is predominantly Moslems, thus voters preferred APC candidate being a Moslem.
BENUE (C)	310,468*	308,372	4,740	130,081	It is predominantly a Christian state, but APC candidate won narrowly with Obi of Labour a Christian candidate following closely.
Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (Mix)	90,902	281,717*	4,517	74,194	With glaring resentment against the APC in previous elections, though in North Central, Obi of Labour carried the day in the election.
AKWA IBOM (C)	160,620	132,683	7,796	214,012*	Ethnicity and religion did not count here as PDP candidate won being their stronghold.
EDO (Mix)	144,471	331,163*	2,743	89,585	Ethnicity and religion played significant roles in the election though a mixed state in terms of religion. But closeness to the East aided Obi of Labour party.

States	Tinubu APC	Atiku PDP	OBI LP	Kwankwaso NNPP	
ABIA (C)	8,914	327,095*	1,239	22,676	Religion and ethnicity aided Obi of Labour being a south eastern state.
KOGI (Mix)	240,751*	56,217	4,238	145,104	With slightly more Moslems Tinubu won bringing the influence of both Religion and ethnicity with the clamouring for power shift.
BAUCHI (M)	316,694	27,373	72,103	426,607*	Religion and ethnicity was visible as Atiku of PDP is both a Moslem and Northerner.
PLATEAU (C)	307,195	466,272*	8,869	243,808	Religion visibly played major role as Obi a Christian and South Easterner won convincingly
BAYELSA (C)	42,572	49,975	540	68,818*	This is a PDP strong hold, both religion and ethnicity did not really count.
KADUNA (Mix)	399,293	294,494	92,969	554,360*	Ethnicity and religion aided Atiku of PDP to have won in Kaduna.
KEBBI (M)	248,088	10,682	5,038	285,175*	Ethnicity and religion added Atiku of PDP to have won in Kebbi a predominantly Moslem state.
KANO (M)	517,341	28,513	997,279*	131,716	The twins problem of ethnicity and religion played out as NNPP candidate Kwankwaso won convincingly being an indigene of Kano and a Moslem.
ZAMFARA (M)	298,396*	1,660	4,044	193,978	Religion played out but not ethnicity as Tinubu of APC is not from the North just a Moslem.
SOKOTO (M)	285,444	6,568	1,300	288,679*	Ethnicity and religion played out in Sokoto state.
CROSS RIVER (C)	130,520	179,917*	1,644	95,425	Ethnicity and religion favoured Obi of Labour Party who won convincingly in C/River state.
DELTA (C)	90,183	341,866*	3,122	161,600	Ethnicity and religion played out much as Labour candidate Obi hailed from that zone.
EBONYI (C)	42,402	259,738*	2,661	13,503	Ethnicity and religion played out much as Labour candidate Obi hailed from that zone.
ANAMBRA (C)	5,111	584,621*	1,967	9,036	This Obi's home state both ethnicity and religion played out with convincing votes for their own.
TARABA (C)	135,165	146,315	12,818	189,017	The state is a strong hold of PDP. They voted Atiku despite being a Christian state. Ethnicity was a factor too as both Adamawa and Taraba were one before the creation of Taraba from Adamawa.
BORNO (M)	252,282*	7,205	4,626	190,921	Religion and ethnicity played out. The VP was nominated from the state. It is a predominantly moslem state too.
RIVERS (C)	231,591*	175,071	1,322	88,468	Though a PDP state fell to APC in a revolt of the G-5 governors vis-a-vis power shift. Thus both religion and ethnicity did not play out.
IMO (C)	66,406	360,495*	1,552	30,234	Obi of Labour won on the grounds of religion and ethnicity. He is from the zone.
AGGREGATE	8,794,726	6,101,533	1,496,671	6,984,520	

\*Source: Compiled from The Nation, 1 March, 2023 p. 1. See also, Vanguard, Lagos, March 19 2023-<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023-presidential-election-results-by-states/>

M = Moslem for either candidate or states that are predominantly Moslem state.

C = Christian for either candidate or states that are predominantly Christian.

**Table 2**  
**Howthey Stand (Zone: North- East)**

States	Tinubu APC	Atiku PDP	OBI LP	Kwankwaso NNPP	Total
Adamawa	182,881	417,611	105,648	8,006	714,146
Bauchi	316,694	426,607	27,373	72,103	842,777
Borno	252,282	190,921	7,205	4,626	455,034
Gombe	146,977	319,123	26,160	10,520	502,780
Taraba	135,165	189,017	146,315	12,818	483,315
Yobe	151,459	198,567	2,406	18,270	370,702
Total votes	1,185,458	1,741,846	315,107	126,343	3,368,754
%	35.2*	51.7	9.4	3.7	

However, the result is best analysed on zonal basis. Nigeria is divided into six geo-political zones for administrative convenience, with the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) standing on its own but now subsumed in North Central Zone of the country (see, Ojo, 2009, p.163). Starting with the North-East Zone of the country which

comprises of six states viz: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe states; voting patterns in the zone reflected the influence of both religion and ethnicity. In Adamawa state, the PDP candidate Atiku Abubakar scored 417,611 votes to beat his closest opponent Bola Ahmed Tinubu of APC who garnered 182,881 votes. Obi of Labour Party a Christian scored 105,648 votes and Kwankwaso of NNPP got paltry 8,006 votes. Atiku is from Adamawa state who was favoured because of his religion and having hailed from the state. In Bauchi state Atiku got 426,607 votes and Tinubu scoring 316,694 votes, Obi got 27,373 votes and Kwankwaso 72,103 votes. In Borno, Tinubu got 252,282 votes followed closely by Atiku with 190,921 votes. The Vice Presidential candidate of APC came from the state. In Gombe Atiku got 319,123 votes and Tinubu 146,977 votes. Peter Obi got paltry 26,160 votes and Kwankwaso 10,520 votes. In Taraba state Atiku led with 189,017 votes, Tinubu got 135,165 votes with Obi 146,315 votes because of the high number of Christians in that state. Kwanwkaso got just 12,818 votes.

In Yobe same zone, Atiku led with 198,567 votes, Tinubu 151,459 votes; Obi got 315,107 votes and Kwankwaso 126,343 votes. In terms of percentile, Atiku of PDP led with 51.7%, followed by Tinubu with 35.2% while Obi and Kwankwaso got 9.4% and 3.7% respectively. It is instructive to note that Atiku of PDP hailed from that zone. See Table 2.

**Table 3**  
**Howthey Stand (Zone: North-Central)**

States	Tinubu APC	Atiku PDP	OBI LP	Kwasnkwaso NNPP	Total
Benue	310,468	130,081	308,372	4,740	753,661
Fct	90,902	74,194	281,717	4,517	451,330
Kogi	240,751	145,104	56,217	4,238	446,310
Kwara	263,572	136,909	31,166	3,142	434,789
Nasarawa	172,922	147,093	191,361	12,715	524,091
Niger	375,183	284,898	80,452	21,836	762,369
Plateau	307,195	243,808	466,272	8,869	1,026,144
Total	1,760,793	1,162,087	1,415,559	60,057	4,398,474
%	40*	26.4	32.2	1.4	

North-West zone comprises seven states that are predominantly Muslim, to the extent that Islam has become ‘an unofficial state religion’ (Bienen, 1986, p.60 also cited in Agbaje 1990, p.291). Commencing from Jigawa state APC candidate Tinubu got 421,390 votes followed by Atiku of PDP scoring 386,587, Kwankwaso got 98,234 votes and Obi a Christian got paltry 1,889 votes. In Kaduna Atiku led with 554,360 votes followed by APC of Tinubu with 399,93 votes, Obi got 294,494 votes and Kwankwaso with 92,969 votes. In Kano the home state of Kwankwaso NNPP led with humongous votes of 997,279, Tinubu of APC followed with 517,341 votes and Atiku of PDP garnering 131,716 votes while Obi of Labour Party scored 28,513 votes suspected to be Igbos in that state that are majorly Christians. After the governorship election in Kano State, the governor that won from NNPP has demolished as much as N126 billion naira structures in two weeks. Surprisingly, a five-star Daula Botique Hotel and the 160 million Golden Monument, which the government said it pulled down because it carried the CROSS in a state with a large Muslim population! (see, *The Nation on Sunday*, Lagos, ‘Outrage as new governor demolishes N126b structures in two weeks’, June 18, 2023, p.1) what an example of religious intolerance? In Katsina state the home state of President Buhari, Atiku of PDP led with 489,045 votes with Tinubu of APC scoring 482,283 votes, Obi a Christian candidate got 6,376 votes while Kwankaso garnered 69,386 votes. In Kebbi Atiku got 285,175 votes, Tinubu followed with 248,088 votes Peter Obi got paltry 5,038 with Kwankwaso 5,038 votes. Sokoto is another very strong Moslem state where Atiku got 288,679 votes, Tinubu followed with 285,444 votes with Obi and Kwanwaso scoring 6,568 and 1,300 votes respectively.

One could easily recall that Zamfara state was the first to be declared a Sharia state few years back demonstrating being a core Muslim state. Tinubu of APC got 298,396 votes, Atiku followed with 193,978 Obi got paltry 1,660 votes and Kwankwaso of NNPP scoring 4,044. In terms of percentile, Tinubu of APC scored 40.2%, Atiku of PDP 35.3%, Obi secured 5.3% with Kwankwaso getting 19.2%. See Table 3.

The voting patter in North-Central axis is quite different. This zone no doubt comprises both states that are predominantly Muslim and those that a dominated by Christians. State by state analysis revealed that in Kogi state, APC of Tinubu got 240,751 votes, PDP of Atiku secured 145,104 votes while Obi and Kwankwaso got 56,217 and 4,238 votes respectively. In Kwara, APC of Tinubu got 263,572 votes; Atiku of PDP got 136,909 votes Obi and Kwankwaso secured 31,166 and 3,142 votes respectively. Nasarawa state reflect 172,922 votes for Tinubu, 147,093 votes for Atiku and 191,361 votes for Obi with Kwankwaso getting 12,715 votes. In Niger state another predominantly Muslim state, Tinubu got 375,183 votes; Atiku 284,898 votes Obi 80,452 votes with Kwankwaso securing 21,836 votes. In Plateau state a Christian dominated state Tinubu got 307,195 votes, Atiku 243,808 votes; Obi of Labour Party a Christian got 466,272 votes beating Kwanwaso too a Muslim who got 8,869 votes. On percentile Tinubu got 40%, Atiku 26.4%, Obi 32.2% and Kwankwaso 1.4% in the zone. See Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**Howthey Stand (Zone: South-East)**

States	Tinubu APC	Atiku PDP	OBI LP	Kwankwaso NNPP	Total
Abia	8,914	22,676	327,095	1,239	359,924
Anambra	5,111	9,036	584,621	1,967	600,735
Ebonyi	42,402	13,503	259,738	2,661	318,304
Enugu	4,772	15,749	428,640	1,808	450,969
Imo	66,406	30,234	360,495	1,552	458,687
Total	127,605	91,198	1,960,589	9,227	2,188,619
%	5.8	4.2	89.6*	0.4	

Nevertheless, electoral behavior was glaringly tainted by both religious and ethnic inclinations in the South-East zone of the country. All the five states viz: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo are predominantly Catholic Christians. The candidate of Labour Party, Peter Obi, hails from that zone. Expectedly, he got 327,095 votes in Abia with Tinubu of APC 8,914 votes, Atiku of PDP 22,676 votes with Kwankwaso of NNPP garnering paltry 1,239 votes respectively. In Anambra state where Obi hails from and once governed as governor for eight years, he led with 584,621 votes, Tinubu 5,111 votes, Atiku 9,036 votes and Kwankwaso 1,967 votes. Ebonyi state also towed same line of voting pattern with Obi getting 259,738 votes, Tinubu 42,402 votes, Atiku 13,503 votes and Kwankwaso NNPP candidate got 2,661 votes. The influence of both

ethnicity and religion was so percolating in the zone that in Imo state, Obi got 360,495 votes, Tinubu that followed got 66,406 votes and Atiku 30,234 votes, Kwankwaso got 1,552 votes in all. In percentile, Obi a Christian from the zone led with 89.6% of the total votes from the South-East zone. Tinubu that won the presidential poll could only garner 5.8%, Atiku 4.2% and Kwankwaso garnering 0.4 per cent. See Table 5.

**Table 5**  
**Howthey Stand (Zone: South-West)**

States	Tinubu APC	Atiku PDP	OBI LP	Kwankwaso NNPP	Total
Ekiti	201,494	89,554	11,897	264	303,209
Lagos	572,606	75,750	582,454	8,442	1,239,254
Ogun	341,554	123,831	85,829	2,200	553,414
Ondo	369,924	115,463	44,405	930	530,722
Osun	343,945	354,366	23,283	713	722,307
Oyo	449,884	182,977	99,110	4,095	736,066
Total votes	2,279,407	941,941	846,978	16,644	4,084,972
%	55.8*	23.1	20.7	0.4	

Meanwhile, the South-West zone is well known for its progressive politics and consists of a significant mixture of both Muslims and Christians with latter being the most dominant religious group (see Agbaje, 1990, p.291). This is the zone of the APC candidate a Yoruba man and a Moslem, but religion did not count but rather ethnicity. In Ekiti state which is predominantly a Christian state, Tinubu a Moslem led with 201,494 hinging their choice of him on ethnicity. See Table 6.

**Table 6**  
**Howthey Stand (Zone: South-South)**

States	Tinubu APC	Atiku PDP	OBI LP	Kwankwaso NNPP	Total
Akwa-Ibom	160,620	214,012	132,683	7,796	515,111
Bayelsa	42,572	68,818	49,975	540	161,905
Cross-River	130,520	95,425	179,917	1,644	407,506
Delta	90,183	161,600	341,866	3,122	596,771
Edo	144,471	89,585	331,163	2,743	567,962
Rivers	231,591	88,468	175,071	1,552	496,682
Total votes	799,957	717,908	1,201,675	17,397	2,745,937
%	29.1*	26.2	44.1	0.6	

The South-South zone voting pattern did not deviate much from both religion and ethnicity. In Akwa-Ibom state Tinubu got 160,620 votes, Atiku 214,012 votes, Obi 132,683 votes and Kwankwaso garnered 7,796 votes. In Bayelsa state, Tinubu got 42,572 votes, Atiku 68,818 votes, Obi 49,975 votes and Kwankwaso secured 540 votes. In Cross River state, Tinubu scored 130,520 votes, Atiku got 95,425 votes, Obi garnered 179,917 votes with Kwankwaso securing 1,644 votes. In Delta state Tinubu of APC got 90,183 votes, Atiku of PDP 161,600 votes,

Obi led with 341,866 votes and Kwankwaso of NNPP last with 3,122 votes. Edo state gave Tinubu 144,471 votes, Atiku got 89,585 votes, Obi secured 331,163 votes with Kwankwaso getting 2,743 votes. Rivers state reflected 231,591 votes for Tinubu, Atiku got 88,468 votes, Obi garnered 175,071 votes and Kwankwaso of NNPP got 1,552 votes. On percentile, Obi led with 44.1%, Tinubu followed with 29.1%, Atiku came third with 26.2% and Kwankwaso with 0.6%. Expectedly, Obi a Christian in a Christian dominated zone where he comes from got the highest number of votes.

**Table 7**  
**How They Stand (Zone: North-West)**

States	Tinubu APC	Atiku PDP	OBI LP	Kwankwaso NNPP	Total
Jigawa	421,390	386,587	1,889	98,234	908,100
Kaduna	399,293	554,360	294,494	92,969	1,341,116
Kano	517,341	131,716	28,513	997,279	1,674,849
Kastina	482,283	489,045	6,376	69,386	1,047,090
Kebbi	248,088	285,175	10,682	5,038	548,983
Sokoto	285,444	288,679	6,568	1,300	581,991
Zamfara	298,396	193,978	1,660	4,044	498,078
Total	2,652,235	2,329,540	350,186	1,268,250	6,600,207
%	40.2*	35.3	5.3	19.2	

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS: DEBILITATING IMPACTS OF ETHNICITY AND RELIGION

From the foregoing empirical analysis, one can easily deduce the fact that the twin problems of African Politics glaringly reared their ugly heads in the 2023 Presidential election. To compound the problem, Nigeria is a plural and deeply divided society, with a babel of voices (Ojo, 2009). In a society like this that is yearning for national integration that compelled federal solution (Osaghae, 2006, p.5) election ought to be a unifying factor. This is not unconnected with the fact that “elections especially presidential elections are approached in zero sum and warlike terms that deepen centrifugal forces (Osaghae, 2021, p.33). This is particularly true in Nigeria where elections have tended to make the country more divided, breeding grounds of global terrorism and disorder (Ibid.).

Despite the “dwindling public place of religion in modernity” (Vasquez, 2011, p.10), the reverse is the case in Nigeria’s religious outlook which has called to question its claim to secularity in the 1999 constitution (as amended) (see, Agbaje, 1990). The dilemma in Nigeria is the fact that Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR) are popular amongst the citizenry and could be ‘perceived in three levels of analysis: the individual level, the group level and the societal level’ (Vasquez, 2011, p.22).

Nevertheless, on the one hand, with the breakdown of Western Christendom, Churches contributed to the rise of the system of nation-states by seeking to fuse religious identity with polity and with linguistic, cultural and national identities. On the other hand, Christianity's constitutive missionary '*imaginaire*', which is reflected by the Great Commission, the injunction of the Gospel of Matthew 28:19) to 'go forth and make disciple of all nations', always lay ill at ease within the 'straight jacket of sovereign state' (Casanova, 2001, p.429), particularly as the state became increasingly dominated by secular elites inspired by Enlightenment ideals (Vasquez, 2011). However, "the fact that Islamists 'mix' religion and politics is therefore considered to be the source of their militancy..." (Cavanaugh, 2011, p.127). Thus one can deduce intolerance by the two major religions in the world and particularly in Nigeria which is being exacerbated by elections.

Aside from ethnicity which has always been a source of commotion if not well managed in a plural society like Nigeria, academic exploration of religion and violence generally assume as fact the notion that religion has a peculiar tendency to promote violence. They began their investigations by asking why this is the case and the explanations tend to fall into three overlapping categories: religion is absolutist, religion is divisive, and religion is non-rational. For other scholars the inherent divisiveness of religion-its tendency to separate us from them-is the key to understanding the violence of religion (Cavanaugh, 2011, p.122). Intolerance is written into the fact that religious identities are mutually exclusive: one cannot be both a Christian and a Muslim. A third group of scholars tends to emphasize the non-rational nature of religion and the consequent way that fervor, rage and fanaticism are evoked in the religionist believer. It is high time Nigeria devised appropriate electoral system that can help democracy survive in the face of deep cleavages of religion, language, or ethnicity to dissuade "winner-take-all" syndrome (Reilly, 2002, p.156).

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