

Ethnicity and Elections in Nigeria: An Assessment of 2015 Presidential Elections.

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Abstract

This study examined the role of ethnicity in the voting pattern of Nigerian electorates in the 2015 presidential election. It adopted both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative method involved data that was collated from secondary sources while the quantitative method involved data obtained from the INEC website concerning the 2015 general election results. Information and data from these sources were cogently described, explained, and analyzed within the context of the subject matter under investigation. In some instances, calculations were made using simple percentages, and in this way, deductively informed conclusions were made. The findings revealed that ethnicity was the number one factor that influenced the voting pattern of Nigerian electorates in general and the outcome of the 2015 general election in particular. Based on this finding, the paper recommended, among other things, that the zoning option be strengthened to discourage ethnicity in voting patterns.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Democracy, Competitive Election, Opposition Party, Incumbent President

Introduction

Since the return to democratic government in 1999, it has become a constitutional ritual that the citizens come out every four years to elect their leaders through competitive elections, in line with the core values of liberal democracy (Ikegbu & Bassey 2019). In this regard, elections were held in 2003, 2007 and 2011. These elections were generally satisfactory insofar as they led to a smooth transfer of power from one administration to the other. However, the extent to which these elections actualize that goal significantly depends on whether citizens' voting pattern is based on objectivity or some primordial sentiments such as ethnicity. Given the above, considering the 2015 presidential election is worthwhile. The importance of this election cannot be overemphasized, for, it was the first time in the nation's political history that an opposition party, All Progressive Congress (APC) defeated the incumbent president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the results were accepted with no litigations (Olayode, 2015).

The 2015 presidential elections can therefore be considered a watershed in Nigerian politics. The PDP was headed by the incumbent president; Goodluck Ebele Jonathan from Otueke (Bayelsa State) from the minority ethnic group, contested under the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). On the other hand, Rtd. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari hails from Katsina State from the majority ethnic group of Fulani-Hausa extraction. The 2015 general election results as announced by then INEC chairman Prof. Atahiru Jega showed that General Muhammadu Buhari of APC won with 15,424,921 votes against the incumbent president, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) who scored 12,853,162 votes (Mudasiru, 2015; Olayode (2015) has pointed out that the voting pattern in the elections was influenced by ethnicity. Thus, from the presidential, and gubernatorial

elections, national and assembly aspirants were largely chosen based on ethnic-regional identity. Given the foregoing, this paper aims at assessing the role of ethnicity in Nigeria's democratic process. This is important to provide the ways and means of strengthening the nation's democracy.

Conceptual Clarification

The key concepts in this paper are ethnicity and elections. To recall the minds of readers, we must begin with the operationalization of the key terms.

Ethnicity: This is a process by which individuals or groups are identified and rewarded according to their tribal or ethnic origins. This reward may take the form of employment and appointments to the government or state. This process in recent times has become too common and functionaries have perverted all areas of society. It may also be seen as a shared political culture among different ethnic configurations in Nigeria which is reflected in the choices while struggling in any given situation or circumstance. This is the political power of two or more political parties, with each party presenting its presidential candidate. In this context, we regard the 2015 presidential elections as competitive elections because they had more than two political parties. However, the two major political parties were the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) with the incumbent president, Goodluck E. Jonathan and the All-Progressive Congress (APC) with Muhammadu Buhari as its president.

Competitive Election: An opposition party is a party which does not control the machinery of government. It arises because, after every competitive election, such as in Nigeria, only one party is expected to win even though with a simple majority. In the case of Nigeria, the PDP is the major opposition party after losing the 2015 general elections.

Opposition Party: This is a political party which in terms of ranking is next to the party that controls the government at the centre and also has the highest number of members at the national assembly. In this context, the All-Progressive Congress (APC) is regarded as an opposition party that contested the 2025 presidential election with the government-in-power party known as the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The major role of an opposition party in a democratic society is to checkmate the activities of the government party. It can also place itself as an alternative party if the party in power failed to meet the wishes and aspirations of the electorates.

Incumbent President: Means the current holder of the presidential office in a democratic society. The emergence of the incumbent president is through a democratic process of election. In this context, the incumbent president was Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who was elected as president of Nigeria in the 2011 general election. At the expiration of his tenure and also in line with the provision of the 1999 constitution, he was seeking a second term in office in the 2015 general election.

Democracy: A system of government where electorates of a country who are eligible come out periodically to elect their Representatives from local, state and federal governments. In this context, 2015 was also another opportunity for the Nigerian electorates to elect their Representatives especially the office of the president. It was at this juncture that the incumbent president was defeated for the first time in the political history of Nigeria and the opposition party took over the mantle of leadership.

Research Method

This study adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method involved the extraction of information and data from secondary sources; textbooks, journal articles, newspapers, government publications, and the Internet etc. Information and data gotten from these sources were cogently described, explained and analyzed within the context of the subject matter under investigation. The quantitative method involved; data obtained from the INEC weblink concerning the voting pattern of the 2015 general elections. In some instances, calculations were made using simple percentages and, in this way deductively informed conclusions were made.

Theoretical Framework

The importance of a theoretical framework for any study cannot be overemphasized for, apart from its explanatory potency, a theory provides a guide and predictive relevance for any study. In light of the above, this study is anchored on the structural theory. Advocated for this theory include; Lipset and Rokhem (1962), Horowitz (1985), and Daddieh and Fair (2002) among others. The trust of structural theory is that social identity such as ethnicity exerts a strong influence on the behavioural pattern of citizens during an election. The choices individuals make during competitive elections are largely influenced by the ethnic group to which aspirants belong. The importance of this study is to show that contrary to Western conventional thought that the outcome of any election is a function of campaign strategy, the popularity of candidates, the influence of money or Godfatherism in the case of Nigeria, ethnicity is a single most important aspect to consider when it comes to Nigeria. The theory is relevant because it prefigures what could be done to strengthen our nascent democracy.

Literature Review

Elections based on ethnic groupings in Nigeria are as old as the country itself. Various social critics have highlighted this primal electoral mindset as the scourge of Nigeria's democracy consolidation efforts. When the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) was created in 1944, it was the only party without an ethnic orientation, but it received support from all sections of the nation. It wasn't until the practice of carpet-rising made it difficult for Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe to win a seat in the west, where he had won elections in 1953, that he was forced to go to the east, and the party's fellowship became increasingly Igbo ethnic. (Post (1963:13) suggested that beginning in 1951, participation in political parties signified a more primitive worldview. As a result, almost all of the NCNC's supporters were Igbo. Most Yorubas, on the other hand, supported the Action Group (AG) led by their kinsman, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) remains the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group's party (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). Nonetheless, according to Ken Post (1963), the decision to vote in the 1959 federal elections was to be taken as a member of a community rather than as an individual. As a result, the results of the 1959 federal elections demonstrated the dominance of racial sentimentalism, with all political parties performing well among their ethnic constituencies. In the northern and eastern regions, the NCNC won over 75% of the election seats or constituencies, respectively. AG held more than half of the seats in the western area, as predicted (Post, 1963).

Similarly, significant ethnic emotions were present in the 1979 election, having played a critical role in the country's electoral crisis in 1965, which undoubtedly demanded the excessive incursion of the military into secular politics. The 1979 federal elections also showed notable successes in the ethnic base of party candidates or flag bearers. The UPN won all the Yoruba states, the NPP won the Igbo states of Anambra and Imo, and the NPN won a sizable chunk of the Hausa/Fulani states. This is a re-enactment of the situation from 1959 (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). Nonetheless, the general election in the failed third republic revealed a different image of electoral behaviour than prior elections. The voting pattern was largely devoid of primal emotions, which had appeared to be a regular way of life in previous elections. This most recent change in our election behaviour might be attributed to the deliberate policy action of simplifying the party system into two-party structures rather than the normal multi-party system during the First and Second Republics. In the same way, the 1999 federal election yielded a similar result, which was also seen during the abortive third republic election, where candidates won outside of their ethnic strongholds. The final election winner did not even win in his home state but rode to victory with votes from across the country (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). The 2015 general election followed the traditional pattern of a deep-seated primordial pattern of electoral behaviour. Apparently, in an interview, a maritime and foremost human rights activist, Olisa Agbakoba (SAN), acknowledged the

pernicious effects of ethnic formations on our democracy and advocated for “balanced voting in Nigerian elections to deepen the nation’s democracy,” just as he criticized voting along ethnic lines in certain geopolitical zones in the 2015 presidential and national assembly polls (<http://www.informationng.com/2015/>). The 2015 general election in Nigeria was the fifth quadrennial election held since the end of military rule in 1999. The presidential election was conducted on March 28, 2015, with fourteen candidates and political parties competing.

However, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), which was also the ruling party, the All-Progressive Congress (APC), which was the primary opposition, and the African People’s Alliance were the three frontline parties (APA). After the election, the APC candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, was declared the winner with 15,424,921 votes, representing 53.95 percent of the total votes cast, while President Goodluck Jonathan, the PDP candidate and incumbent president, received 12,853,162 votes, representing 44.96 percent of the votes cast. While the APA’s Adebayo Ayeni received only 53,537 votes, (Wikipedia.com). Given the foregoing, there is little doubt that ethnic sentimentalism has dominated socioeconomic operations in Nigeria. This trend may be traced back to the colonial period. Power sharing has been a distinguishing feature of political action, economic adventurism, and people’s social liberation. Political power is gained, particularly in Nigeria, with the support of the candidates’ ethnic and maybe religious communities. Furthermore, ethnicity played a significant part in choosing the victor or winner of Nigeria’s presidential election in 2015. The presidential election results show that the PDP candidate, Goodluck Jonathan, originates from Bayelsa State in Nigeria’s southern half, and indeed, the south-south geopolitical zone, having won in all south-south and south-east states. The results of the elections in each zone are shown in the tables below:

Data Presentation

Table 1: Showing the result of the 2015 presidential election for the two key contestants in the South-South region of Nigeria

S/N	Name of State	APC- Buhari Score	APC- percentage score	PDP- Jonathan score	PDP percentage score	Total votes cast
1	Akwa-Ibom	58,411	5.8%	953,304	94.2%	1,011,715
2	Bayelsa	5,195	1.4%	361,209	98.6%	366,404
3	Cross-River	28,368	6.4%	414,863	93.6%	443,231
4	Delta	48,910	3.9%	1,211,408	96.1%	1,260,31
5	Edo	208,469	42.1%	286,869	57.9%	495,338
6	Rivers	69,238	4.4%	1,487,075	95.6%	1,556,313
TOTAL		418,591 (8.25%)		4,714,728 (91.75%)		5,133,319

Source: INEC Website 2015

The table above (table one) reflects the voting pattern in the 2015 presidential elections. It is noticed that out of the total votes of 5,138,512, Gen. Mohammadu Bihari of the APC pulled 423,784 votes representing 8.25% while Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of PDP scored 4,714,728 votes representing 91.75%. A breakdown of state by state indicates that Gen. Mohammadu

Buhari of APC scored 5.8% in Akwa Ibom while Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of PDP pulled 94.2%. In Bayelsa state, APC scored 1.4% while PDP scored 98.6%. In cross river State, APC scored 6.4% of the votes cast while PDP scored 93.6% votes cast. In Delta State, APC scored 3.7% of votes cast while PDP Scored 96.1% of the votes cast. In Edo State, APC scored 42.1% of the votes cast while PDP scored 57.9% of the votes cast. In Rivers State, APC scored 4.4% of the votes cast while PDP scored 95.6% of the votes cast. From the above, it is clear that Goodluck Jonathan of PDP won overwhelmingly in areas where his ethnic kinsmen voted to the disadvantage of Gen. Buhari of APC who comes from the Hausa-Fulani Ethan group.

Furthermore, in affirmation of ethno-regional sentiments in voters' behaviour by observing that there was no sharp departure in the voting behaviour of the south-east from those of their counterpart in the south-south region with statistical proof below;

Table 2: Showing results of the 2015 presidential election for the two key contestants in the South-East region

S/N	Names of State	APC-Buhari score	APC percentage score	PDP-JONATHAN Score	PDP percentage score	Total votes cast
1	Abia	13,394	3.5%	368,303	96.5%	381,696
2	Anambra	17,926	2.6%	660,762	97.4%	618,688
3	Ebonyi	19,518	5.6%	326,653	94.4%	346,171
4	Enugu	14,517	3.6%	553,603	96.4%	567,520
5	Imo	133,253	19.2%	559,185	79.8%	692,438
	Total	198,603 (7.4%)		2,467,906 (92.6%)		2,666,514

Source: INEC Website 2015

From the above table, it can be easily concluded that General Mohammadu Buhari scored a total of 198,248 representing 7.4% of the total votes cast for APC in South East geographical zone while the incumbent president Goodluck Ebere Jonathan scored 2,467,906 representing 92.6% of the total votes cast for PDP. A breakdown of state by state shows in Abia State Gen. Mohammadu Buhari of the APC scored 3.5% of the total votes cast while the then-president scored 96.5%. The situation was not different in Anambra State where the PDP represented Goodluck Ebere Jonathan scored 97.4%, while General Mohammadu Buhari of the APC scored 2.6% of the total votes cast. In Ebonyi state, General Mohammadu Buhari of the APC scored 5.6% while Goodluck Ebere Jonathan of the PDP scored 94.4% of the total votes cast. In Enugu State, General Mohammadu Buhari of the APC scored 3.6% of votes cast while Goodluck Ebere Jonathan scored 96.4 % of votes cast. In Imo state Gen. Mohammadu Buhari of the APC scored 19.2% of the total votes cast while Goodluck Ebere Jonathan scored 79.8% of the votes cast. From the above analysis, it was clear that Goodluck Ebere Jonathan of the PDP hasan edge over his counterpart Gen. Mohammadu Buhari of the APC on the total number of votes cast in his favour. It was argued that right from the returned democratic government, the South East geographical zone favours the PDP as a party than other political parties.

Table 3: Showing the result of the 2015 Presidential Election for the two contestants in the South-West region

S/N	Names of States	APC-Buhari score	APC percentage score	PDP-Jonathan score	PDP percentage score	Total votes cast
1	Ekiti	120,331	40.5%	176,466	59.5%	296,797
2	Lagos	792,460	55.6%	632,227	44.6%	1,424,787
3	Ogun	306,290	59.5%	207,950	40.5%	514,240
4	Ondo	299,889	54.4%	251,368	45.6%	551,257
5	Osun	383,603	60.5%	249,929	39.5%	633,532
6	Oyo	528,620	63.5%	303,376	36.5%	831,996
	Total	2,431,193 (57.1%)		1,821,416 (42.9%)		4,252,609

Source: INEC Website 2015

From the above table, 3 reflects the voting pattern from South West geographical zone. The votes cast for the two prominent presidential candidates were 4,254,609 million. Out of which, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari of the APC scored a total of 2,433,193 votes representing 57.1%, while Goodluck Ebere Jonathan of the PDP scored a total of 1,821,416 votes representing 42.9%. In addition to that, a breakdown of votes cast by individual states in the zone. In Ekiti state, APC scored 40.5% of the votes, while PDP scored 59.5% votes. In Lagos State, APC scored 55.6% of the votes, while PDP scored 44.1% of the votes. In Ogun State, APC scored 59.5% of the votes, while PDP scored 40.5% of the votes. In Info state, APC scored 54.4% of votes cast, while PDP scored 45.6 votes. In Osun State, APC scored 65.5% of the votes, while PDP scored 39.5% of the votes. In Oyo state, APC scored 57.1% of the votes, while PDP scored 42.9% of the votes. It is imperative to posit that there was no marginal victory. There was, however, a twin play of ethnic and religious factors in determining the voting behaviour of electorates in this region. While the PDP had no serious presidential candidate from this region, the APC had its vice-presidential ticket given to the region. This, therefore, underscores the slight victory of the party in this region.

Table 4: Showing the result of the 2015 presidential election for the two key contestants in North-Central Region

S/N	Names of State	APC-Buhari score	APC percentage score	PDP-Jonathan score	PDP percentage score	Total votes cast
1	Benue	373,961	55.1%	303,737	44.9%	677,698
2	FCT	146,399	48%	158,195	52.0%	304,594
3	Kogi	264,851	63.8%	149,987	36.2%	414,838
4	Kwara	302,146	69.4%	132,682	30.6%	434,748
5	Nassarawa	236,838	46.4%	273,460	53.6%	510,298
6	Niger	657,878	81.5%	149,222	18.5%	807,100
7	Plateau	429,140	43.8%	549,615	58.2%	978,755
	Total	2,411,213 (58.4%)		1,712,818 (41.6%)		4,128,031

Source: INEC Website 2015

Similarly, the result in the North-central region was also a very competitive one and more reflective of the voters' wishes. While they were some elements of ethnic sentiment, religious bigotry was also noticeable. The tables below explain better. The total votes for the key candidates, Buhari and Jonathan was 4,123,831, which is 14.4% of the total valid votes cast. APCs Buhari scored 2,411,013 about 58% while the PDPs Jonathan scored 1,712,818 about 42% of the total vote cast. A breakdown of State by State of votes garnered by two major political parties shows that APC scored 55.1%, while PDP scored 44.9 of votes in Benue state. In FCT, APC scored 48% of the votes, and PDP scored 52% of the votes. In Kogi state, APC scored 63.8% of the votes, while PDP scored 36.2% of the votes. In Kwara State, APC scored 69.4% of the votes, while PDP scored 30.6% of the votes. In Nassarawa State, APC scored 46.4% of the votes, while PDP scored 53.6% of the votes. In Niger state, APC scored 81.5% of the votes, while PDP scored 18.5% of the votes. In the plateau, APC scored 43.8% of the votes, while PDP scored 56.2% of the votes. Jonathan lost here because he is a Southerner and the Northerners wanted a return of power to the North. There was a similarity in voters' behaviour in this region like it was in the South-West.

Table 5: Showing the result of the 2015 Presidential election for the two keys contestants in the North-East Region

S/N	Names of State	APC-Buhari score	APC percentage score	PDP-Jonathan score	PDP percentage score	Total votes cast
1	Adamawa	374,701	59.8%	251,664	40.2%	625,365
2	Bauchi	931,598	91.5%	86,086	8.5%	1,017,684
3	Borno	473,543	94.8%	25,640	5.2%	499,183
4	Gombe	361,243	97.3%	96,664	2.7%	370,907
5	Taraba	261,326	38.8%	310,800	61.2%	672,126
6	Yobe	446,265	94.5%	25,526	5.5%	471,791
	Total	2,848,676 (78.1%)		796,380 (21.9%)		3,645,056

Source: INEC Website 2015

The two frontline candidates and parties scored a total of 3,645,055 votes. The result from the region indicates that the APC won in five states, pooling 2,848,676 votes which represents 78% of the total valid votes, while the PDP won one state from this region-Taraba, pooling 796,379 about 22% State by State breakdown shows that, in Adamawa state, APC scored 59.8% of the votes, while PDP scored 40.2% of the votes. In Bauchi State, APC scored 91.5% of the votes, while PDP scored 8.5% of the votes. In Bornu State, APC scored 94.8% of the votes, while PDP scored 5.2% of the votes. In Gombe State, APC scored 97.3% of the votes, while PDP scored 2.7%, of the votes. In Taraba State, APC scored 38.8%, of the votes, while PDP scored 61.2% of the votes. In Yobe State, APC scored 94.5% of the votes, while PDP scored 5.5% of the votes. APC presidential candidate performed very well by defeating PDP presidential candidate in North East geographical zone. Although PDP won the state of Taraba, it was not enough for him to make a meaningful impact in the zone. There was a show of ethnic bias in the choice and acceptance of the candidates.

TABLE 6: Showing the result of the 2015 presidential election for two key contestants in the North-West Region.

S/N	Names of State	APC-Buhari score	APC percentage score	PDP-Jonathan score	PDP percentage score	Total votes cast
1	Jigawa	885,988	86.1%	142,904	13.9%	1,028,812
2	Kaduna	1,127,760	69.9%	484,085	30.1%	1,611,845
3	Kano	1,903,997	89.8%	215,779	10.2%	2,119,776
4	Katsina	1,345,441	93.1%	98,937	6.9%	1,444,378
5	Kebbi	567,883	84.9%	100,937	15.1%	668,855
6	Sokoto	691,926	81.9%	152,199	18.1%	844,125
7	Zamfara	612,202	80.8%	144,833	19.2%	757,035
	Total	7,135,197 (84.1%)		1,339,709 (15.9%)		8,474,906

Source: INEC Website 2015

From the table, the total valid vote cast in this region was 8,474,908 which represents about 30% of the final result. APC scored 7,135,199, representing 84%, while, the PDP scored 1,339,709, which is 16% of the valid votes. A breakdown of State-by-State results shows in Jigawa State APC scored 86.1% of the votes, while PDP scored 13.9% of the votes. In Kaduna State, APC scored 69.9% of the votes, while PDP scored 30.1 of the votes. In Kano State, APC scored 89.8% of the votes while PDP scored 10.2% of the votes. In Katsina State which was General Mohammadu Buhari's home state and candidate of APC, the party scored 93.1% of the votes while PDP scored 6.9% of the votes. In Kebbi State, APC scored 84.9% of the votes while PDP scored 15.1% of the votes. In Sokoto State, APC scored 81.9% of the votes while PDP scored 18.1%, of the votes. Finally, in Zamfara state APC scored 80.8% of the votes while PDP scored 19.2% of the votes. Just like the South-South zone, the victory for the APC candidate, Buhari was prodigious. There was a high sentimental attachment to the APC candidate who hails from the region. In this region, none of the states was won by the PDP, even in Kaduna where Namadi Sambo, the PDP's vice-presidential candidate hails from.

In summary, it is important to note that religion is not the primary motivator for voting in southwest Nigerian politics; rather, ethnic interest is revered. Because the Yorubas felt more protected in the APC due to their second crucial position, they mobilized and voted more for the APC and Buhari. Furthermore, the North was unable to vote for their kinsman, Namadi Sambo, who was a vice-presidential candidate for the PDP, because the Hausa/Fulani ethnic nationality felt that power had shifted from them (north) to the South for so long and desired their president at all costs to protect their ethnic interests. This decision was based on a cost-benefit analysis based on rational choice theory (Sheriff, Abdullahi and Kabiru 2015). However, this does not imply that ethnicity was the only factor that influenced the electoral behaviour of Nigerians during the 2015 presidential election, as other factors such as corruption, the popularity of candidates and parties, the country's precarious security and economic situation, as well as the desire for change, all played a significant role in shaping voters' behaviour.

Conclusion

According to the research, the nation was highly ethnicized up to the second republic. The election results of the failed third republic and the fourth republic have all demonstrated a progressive tendency with a drastic departure from the previous republic's predisposition. Furthermore, research shows that the fewer political parties are accessible, the better and less ethnically predisposed the voter becomes. This was clear during the third republic election

when the number of parties was limited to two. Finally, we urge that voting decisions be made based on party ideology and competence. Furthermore, the law-making institution should, as soon as possible, begin a constitution review process of the party systems we have in place to reduce the proliferation of political parties and, if possible, adopt a two-party system to mitigate the negative manifestations of ethno-regional cleavages during elections. As a result, if Nigeria is to make political development, the voting people must reject accepting ethnicity and other primordial characteristics as the foundation for political choice. This is because it promotes ethnocentrism and mediocrity in governance.

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