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INFLUENCE OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS IDENTITY ON VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN 2023 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
This research investigate the influence of ethno-religious identity on voting behaviour in 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State. Survey research design was used in conducting the research as such questionnaire was administered in collecting information from the respondents. The study population consists of all residents in Lagos East Senatorial District, Lagos State. A sample of 200 respondents was selected. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical method to analyse the formulated hypotheses. Findings from this study revealed that there is significant relationship between ethnic identity and voting behaviour in 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, ($r = .783$; $N=200$; $p< .05$) and also there is significant relationship between religious identity and voting behaviour in 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, ($r = .719$; $N=200$; $p< .05$) In conclusion, the study has shown that ethnicity and religion do influence the voting behaviours in the 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos state and analysis of the vote showed that there was variation in the voting patterns of the people as is tilted towards ethnic and religious inclination. Finally, the study recommended, The winner of 2023 governorship election should form all ethnic inclusive government and ensures that no ethnic group would complain of marginalization and also the government should sustain unity among ethnic group in Lagos State and discourage disunity.

Keyword: Ethnic Identity, Religious Identity, Voting Behaviour, Gubernatorial Election, Senatorial District.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, Nigeria, was a significant event that had shaped the political landscape of the state but also underscore the complex interplay of ethno-religious identities in influencing voting behaviour. The election showcased the multifaceted ways in which ethno-religious identity impacts the choices made by voters.

Lagos State, as a microcosm of Nigeria's diverse ethno-religious landscape, is home to a rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and religious beliefs (Akinade, 2014). With a population comprising predominantly of the Yoruba ethnic group, as well as a significant presence of Igbo, Hausa, and other ethnicities, the state embodies a mosaic of identities (Magaji, 2014). Moreover, Lagos is a melting pot of religious affiliations, with Islam and Christianity being the predominant faiths, alongside traditional African religions (Janson, 2021).

Ethno-religious identity plays a pivotal role in shaping the voting behaviour of individuals in Lagos State. The phenomenon of voting along ethnic and religious lines, commonly referred to as "ethno-religious voting," has been observed in previous elections in the state and this continued to influence the 2023 gubernatorial election. This form of voting behaviour is often driven by a sense

of kinship, shared cultural values, and religious solidarity. The perceived interests and aspirations of a particular ethno-religious group can heavily influence their voting decisions.

Ethnicity and culture are worldwide problems, not just something that happens in Nigeria. Both industrialized and developing countries have experienced it, and they continue to do so. The effects of ethnicity are particularly severe in Nigeria, where they have hampered national progress and led to a greater sense of loyalty among Nigerian leaders and citizens to their ethnic group than to the country. According to the 2012 study of the international foundation for electoral system's national opinion poll (IFES, 2012), conducted independently in Washington, DC, ethnicity is Nigerians' greatest form of identification. Electorate tends to focus their vote along observable ethnic lines based on the link between ethnicity and electorate that is found overall (Salawu & Hassan, 2011).

Referred to be a little Nigeria, Lagos State is home to a diverse range of ethnic ethnicities. It is mostly composed of a number of ethnic groups, the primary ones being the Yoruba, Ibo, and Hausa. It is regrettable that most states in Nigeria believe that politics have always been plagued by ethnicity. Because of this, Nigerian politicians, according to (Agba, 2008), may not have forgotten or learned anything in the many years after the country's independence; ethnic trauma remains a major problem in the country's politics. It is stated that early, misguided politicians who molded the foundation of most states left us with an inheritance of ethnic and religious-based politics, which has a significant impact on the political coherence of most states in the nation, including Lagos State. Since voting based on cultural connections promotes corruption and the breakdown of social cohesion, which can have brought ruin throughout various states in Nigeria, particularly Lagos State, the researcher suggests that ethnic backgrounds based politics deserve thorough investigation to determine whether it is one of the main causes of stagnation in nations.

Nigerians are the tenth most religious population in the world, according to (Onapajo, 2016). African Traditional Religionists, Muslims, and Christians make up the major religious groupings. The majority religion in the north-eastern and northwestern regions of the nation is Islam, whereas the south, southwest, and south-eastern regions are dominated by Christianity. In Nigerian cities and towns, you may find churches and mosques on almost every main street. The five wealthiest pastors in Africa are Nigerian, with net worths ranging from $10 million to $150 million. Nigerian clergyman are among the wealthiest and most powerful in the world (Onapajo, 2016). Nigerian society has had a strong influence from religion. Because religion has influenced Nigerian politics at every turn, whether explicitly or covertly, it is thus undeniable that it must have played a significant role in each step of the process.

In the larger context of an election, voter behaviour is connected to human behaviour. The act of deciding which political option a voter feels is best suited or most desirable to be selected is known as voter behaviour. A voter's personal activities during an election might include campaigning, casting a ballot, and selecting the candidate to be chosen (Bratton et al., 2012). According to (Ramlan, 2010), voting behaviour is an action that the public chooses to participate in or not during elections. Voter behaviour is defined as the general public's involvement in and influence over political choices during general elections. Political engagement includes things like taking part in or being involved in general elections. It is a social action that is intentionally done to influence the opinions of the general population. Citizens of Nigeria who are at least eighteen years

old or who are married cast ballots. Voters are enrolled in every election via data gathering carried out by election organizer-appointed officials.

Additionally, (Hardy, 2017) clarifies that voters are all parties that political candidates seek to persuade and influence in order to gain support and ultimately cast their ballots for the candidates they choose. In this instance, voters may be common citizens or constituents. A group of individuals who believe that a certain philosophy, as it is expressed in political institutions like parties, represents them is known as constituents. Election-related behaviour research have shown that voting choices are not made in a vacuum or on their own. Decisions are instead made in light of an individual's life experiences. The Independent National Electoral Commission, or INEC, is the primary source of secondary data for this research, but it also uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the results of the 2023 presidential election. While qualitative data for this study came from academic journals, textbooks, and newspaper articles on the 2023 presidential election, quantitative data were created from the INEC data base and analyzed using simple percentage as the statistical instrument of analysis. Since it was essentially a struggle between the three major political parties—the Peoples Democratic Party, the All Progressives Congress, and the Labour Party—we are primarily interested in the outcomes of these parties for the purposes of this research. It should be noted that these three political parties accounted for 21,880,779 of the 24,025,940 legal votes cast at the election, or 91.1%, while the remaining fifteen political parties shared 2,145,161 votes (INEC, 2023). In light of this, this study examines the variations in voting patterns across the different ethnic and religious groups in Lagos State to determine the impact of ethno-religious identity on voting behaviour in the state's 2023 gubernatorial election.

Politics in Lagos State have been clearly influenced by the avalanche of ethnic crises that destroyed the harmonious coexistence of Lagos State unity, ethnocentrism, which tribalism, persecution, and prebendalism. Voting patterns and ethnic politics have not been as prominent in the current Fourth Republic. This might happen as a result of the three Senate districts in Lagos State's informally rotation and zoning system for major political posts. Of all of these, there is no question that the majority of people have a tendency to vote along ethnocentric lines during elections because they are attached to the communal bonds that bind them to their senatorial district.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses was formulated to guide the study:

H01: There is no significant relationship between ethnic identity and voting behaviour in 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between religious identity and voting behaviour in 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State.

METHOD

This study adopted descriptive research design which attempts to study the influence of ethno-religious identity on voting behaviour in 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, Nigeria. This design employed because it is out to gather information about already existing among the population under study. Moreover, adopting, the descriptive survey help the researcher to gather data from the respondents. The target population for this study consisted of all voters in Lagos State.

Studying the entire population will be highly difficult and can be referred to as impossible in most cases, hence the research adopted the simple random sampling techniques for this study, while the sample size was randomly selected from the population. Thus, respondents close to the research in terms of proximity were considered more appropriate for the study and they were selected from the major ethnic groups. A total of two hundred were selected for the study from the five local government in Lagos East senatorial District as follows: 40 Epe Local Government, 40 Ibeju-Lekki Local Government, 40 Ikorodu Local Government, 40 Somolu Local Government, and 40 Kosofe Local Government

The data for the study was collected using a questionnaire designed and developed by the researcher. The questionnaires were designed to solicit the opinions of the respondents on the research study. The primary and secondary sources of data were employed. One way through which primary data was obtained was through responses to questionnaire. The questionnaire was made up of three sections. Sections A was the introduction of the researcher and his objective. Section B was used to obtain personal information from the respondents, while section C comprise of 20 questions to measure the influence of ethno-religious identity on voting behaviour in 2023 Gubernatorial election in Lagos State, Nigeria.

The reliability of the instrument is the ability of the instrument to measure what it is supposed to measure. The Cronbach Alpha test of reliability was carried out on the research instrument at 0.05 level of significance. The result of this reliability test showed 0.78 for Ethno-Religious Identity and Voting Behaviour Questionnaire (ERIVBQ) which shows that the research instrument is reliable.

Inferential statistical of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) would be used to test the stated hypotheses at (p-value of 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Gender

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	97	48.5
	Female	103	51.5
	Total	200	100.0

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of the respondents by their gender, it shows that 97 (48.5%) of the respondents were males while the remaining 103 (51.5%) of the total number of respondents were females. This shows that most of the respondents were females.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Ethnicity

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yoruba	76	38.0
	Hausa/Fulani	63	31.5
	Igbo	61	30.5
	Total	200	100.0

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of the respondents by ethnicity, it shows that 76 (38.0%) of the respondents were Yoruba, 63 (31.5%) were Hausa/Fulani, while the remaining 61 (30.5%) were Igbo. This implies that majority of the respondents were Yoruba.

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Religion

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Christianity	90	45.0
	Islam	92	46.0
	Others	18	9.0
	Total	200	100.0

Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of the respondents by religion, it shows that 90 (45.0%) of the respondents practice Christianity, 92 (46.0%) practice Islam, while the remaining 18 (9.0%) practice others forms of religions. This implies that majority of the respondents practice Islam.

Table 4: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Region

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	South West	52	26.0
	North West	30	15.0
	North East	25	12.5
	South East	40	20.0
	South South	24	12.0
	North Central	29	14.5
	Total	200	100.0

Table 4 shows the frequency and percentage of the respondents by region, it shows that 52 (26.0%) of the respondents were from the South-West region, 30 (15.0%) were from the North West region, 25 (12.5%) were from the North-East region, 40 (20.0%) were from the South East region, 24 (12.0%) were from the South-South region while the remaining 29 (14.5%) were from the North-Central region. This implies that majority of the South-West region.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypotheses One

Hypothesis one states that there is no significant relationship ethnic identity and voting behaviour in the 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Coefficient at 0.05 level of significance. The results are presented in the Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation Showing Relationship between Ethnic Identity and Voting Behaviour in the 2023 Gubernatorial Election in Lagos State, Nigeria

		Ethnic Identity	Voting Behaviour
Ethnic Identity	Pearson Correlation	1	.783
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.656
	N	200	200
Voting Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.783	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.656	
	N	200	200

From the result presented on Table 5, it could be observed that a significant Person Correlation of 0.783 was obtained at 0.05 level of significance, therefore hypothesis one as stated is hereby rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between ethnic identity and voting behaviour in the 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses Two

Hypothesis two states that there is no significant relationship between religious identity and voting behaviour in the 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Coefficient at 0.05 level of significance. The results are presented on the Table 6.

Table 6. Correlation Showing Relationship Between Religious Identity and Voting Behaviour in the 2023 Gubernatorial Election in Lagos State, Nigeria.

		Religious Identity	Voting Behaviour
Religious Identity	Pearson Correlation	1	.719
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.433
	N	200	200
Voting Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.719	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.433	
	N	200	200

From the result presented on Table 6, it could be observed that a significant Pearson correlation of 0.719 was obtained at 0.05 level of significance, therefore hypothesis two as stated is hereby rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between religious identity and voting behaviour in the 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Results obtained from hypothesis one revealed that there is significant relationship between ethnic identity and voting behaviour in 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, Nigeria. The ethnic patterns of voting can undermine meritocracy and good governance by prioritizing ethnic identity over the qualifications, integrity, and capabilities of candidates (ONAKOYA & HASSAN, 2023). When voters predominantly support candidates solely based on their ethnic background, it diminishes the importance of policy proposals, competence, and track record in public service. Consequently, this can lead to the election of leaders who may not be best suited to address the diverse needs of the entire populace, perpetuating mediocrity and inefficiency in governance.

Moreover, ethnic patterns of voting contribute to the deepening of ethnocentrism and division within the society. When electoral outcomes are heavily influenced by ethnic affiliations, it fosters a sense of "us versus them" mentality, exacerbating intergroup tensions and hindering efforts to foster national unity. This can lead to social polarization, distrust, and animosity among different ethnic groups, impeding the social cohesion necessary for sustainable development and peaceful coexistence.

Furthermore, ethnic patterns of voting may result in the neglect of minority interests within the political process. When the majority ethnic group overwhelmingly determines election outcomes, the concerns and aspirations of minority groups may be marginalized or overlooked. This can perpetuate feelings of disenfranchisement and alienation among minority communities, leading to their underrepresentation in decision-making processes and the allocation of resources.

Ethnic patterns of voting have the potential to impede progressive change and development. In the study of (Tomalin et al., 2019) on ethnic and voting, he opined that when political leaders are elected primarily based on ethnic considerations, there is a risk of prioritizing parochial interests over broader developmental goals. This can hinder the implementation of inclusive policies, equitable distribution of resources, and the advancement of infrastructure and social services that benefit all citizens, regardless of their ethnic background.

Result obtained from hypothesis two revealed that there is significant relationship between religious identity and voting behaviour in 2023 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, Nigeria This findings is comparable to a research done by (Qorri, 2018) titled The Psychology Behind Voting Behaviour in Kosova. Voters often choose politicians who share their religious beliefs, according to the survey. Promises of material help did not influence voters' decisions, except from religious considerations. According to (Adibe, 2023), one of the most concerning aspects of religious patterns of voting is the potential for division and polarization within the electorate. When voters are swayed primarily by religious affiliations, it can lead to the fragmentation of communities along religious lines. This division can result in heightened social tensions, animosity between religious groups, and a lack of unity in addressing common societal challenges. The repercussions of such division can extend beyond the electoral process and permeate into the fabric of society, hindering social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

In the opinion of (Somer, 2014), religious patterns of voting also pose a threat to the principle of secular governance. In a diverse society like Lagos State, it is imperative to uphold the secular nature of the state to ensure equal treatment of all citizens regardless of their religious beliefs. When religious considerations dominate the electoral landscape, there is a risk of elected officials prioritizing the interests of specific religious groups over the collective welfare of the entire populace. This erosion of secular governance can undermine the democratic ideals of equality, fairness, and justice.

This means that, the prevalence of religious patterns of voting can detract from substantive policy debates and the consideration of critical issues affecting the state. Instead of focusing on candidates' qualifications, integrity, and policy platforms, voters may be swayed by religious rhetoric or affiliations, neglecting the urgent socio-economic, infrastructural, and governance challenges that require effective leadership and solutions. This shift in focus can impede the progress and development of the state as elected leaders may prioritize symbolic gestures over pragmatic governance.

CONCLUSION

According to the research, voting behaviours in the 2023 Lagos state gubernatorial election were influenced by people's ethnicity and religion. Voter analysis also revealed variations in voting patterns among the electorate based on these factors. Nigeria is one of the world's most religiously diverse nations, hence the relationship between its politics and religion is significant to written works on this topic. The use of religion as a tool to mobilize voters during elections is what brings religion into Nigerian politics. This study demonstrates how religious feelings have often been used throughout Nigerian history in order to win elections. The Lagos State gubernatorial election of 2023 is undoubtedly another noteworthy illustration of how the political class tries to control religion and sway the pious in order to garner support and win elections. Therefore, the focus of this analysis of the politics surrounding the elections is on how people of faith were inspired to vote in their houses of worship. This was evident in the main candidates' campaign tactics for the governor's position. Unchecked political, ethnic, and religious interaction is detrimental to socioeconomic and political progress in a diverse nation like Nigeria. In order to enable socio-economic and political re-engineering, the government must have the political will to redefine the boundaries of the three ideas and therefore determine its priorities.

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