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TRIBALISM IN NIGERIA: AFTERMATH OF THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to investigate the effects of tribalism on the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The nation's political landscape and socioeconomic fabric have been impacted by the pervasive influence of tribalism in Nigeria following the 2023 elections. Meritocracy continues to be overshadowed by tribal affiliations, which results in the election of leaders based more on ethnic allegiances than on skill. This phenomenon exacerbates social divisions, undercuts governance, and maintains nepotism. Nigeria thus faces difficulties in promoting national cohesion, accomplishing development objectives, and resolving urgent problems like insecurity and economic inequality. It will take coordinated efforts to advance inclusivity, fortify democratic institutions, and give merit-based leadership top priority in order to reverse the negative effects of tribalism. It is, however, recommended that efforts should be intensified towards providing a compelling statutory set of principles for nation building and national integration which will in turn guarantee the peaceful co-existence for people of diverse ethnic backgrounds

Keywords: tribe, tribalism, election, Nigeria

Introduction

A tribe is a group of people in a traditional society who are related by blood, religion, or shared cultural practices. These individuals have comparable customs and traditions, as well as common leaders or ancestors. Tribalism is the display of behaviors that indicate a person's utter devotion to their group over other groups or their nation. In Nigeria, tribalism dictates how people behave, think, and react as well as who they oppose or compete with.

Regular, fair, and unimpeded elections are among the most important components of a liberal, participatory democracy. A democratic process is used in elections to select the leaders of a given group, state, or society. Elections are an essential component of democracy and can take many forms, depending on the needs and preferences of the relevant polity (Robert & Obioha 2005).

Election-related factors that sway voters' decisions have a significant impact on how much elections contribute to the growth and maintenance of democracies, especially in emerging ones. Research has been done to demonstrate how ethnic structure and electoral choice interact (Posner 2006). These studies show that election results in African countries typically follow ethnic lines, as elites in the continent frequently manipulate ethnic divisions to win elections.

Nigeria is without a doubt one of the world's most diverse nations. Nigeria is the most populous Black nation, home to over 250 ethnic groups and multiple sub-groups, with a population of over 186 million people (Worldometers, 2015). Olayode (2015), posits that despite these traits, the Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo ethnic groups dominate the political landscape of the nation. There are other subgroups, but they are still seen as minority. The fear of minority groups being dominated by major ethnic groups is increased by the

existence of subgroups within the larger, dominant groups. As a result, these ethnic groups and subgroups engage in politics in a way that either upholds the dominance of the majority groups or thwarts and resists the domination of the minority groups.

Specifically, there was a great deal of tension and controversy surrounding the Nigerian presidential election of February 2023. In addition to taking place during a period of heightened insecurity primarily orchestrated by the incessant kidnapping in the country and the activities of terrorists and bandits, the 2023 general elections have been characterized as the most competitive to have taken place in Nigeria since independence.

The study uses both a descriptive analysis of election data provided by the Independent National Electoral Commission and an analysis of historical and empirical data. Secondary sources like social media apps, newspapers, journals and internet materials were also used to gather information regarding the role tribalism played in the last election and its resultant effect. This paper has four sections. The first part of this research contains the introduction, which provides a generic background to the study and the methodology adopted. The second part consists of an overview of the 2023 general election in Nigeria and the visible role tribalism played. The third section contains an array of the causes of tribalism, and the fourth section discusses the remedies and recommendations on how to curb this.

Overview of the 2023 General Elections

On Saturday, February 25, 2023, all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria held their presidential and national assembly elections. This was the seventh election in a row with the highest level of competition since the nation returned to democracy in 1999. In addition, it was the election with the lowest voter turnout, with only roughly 25.2 million people casting ballots. With nearly a million ballots void, the winner was declared to have received only 8.8% of the total votes cast among the 93.4 million registered voters, or 87.2 million in total. Electoral violence plagued the pre-elections. Over 200 violent incidents involving party members and supporters had been documented in the 12 months prior to the election, with nearly 100 reported fatal incidents (Sahara Report, 2023). According to NDI (2023), Dr. Banda, former president of Malawi and head of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), who was part of the election observers, said that the mission notes that despite the much-needed reforms to the Electoral Act 2022, the election fell well short of Nigerian citizens' reasonable expectations. Logistical challenges and multiple incidents of political violence overshadowed the electoral process and impeded a substantial number of voters from participating. The disenfranchisement of the Igbo people in particular and various flaws reported in the voting process are enough to conclude, as international observers did, that the election fell short of Nigerian citizens' reasonable expectations. In the last elections, tribalism manifested in different ways, and some of these ways are discussed below:

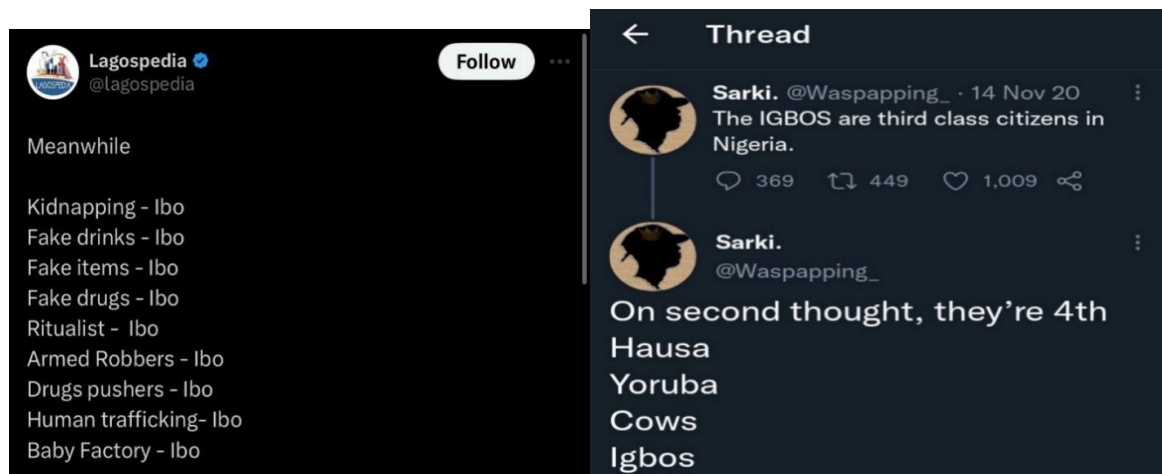
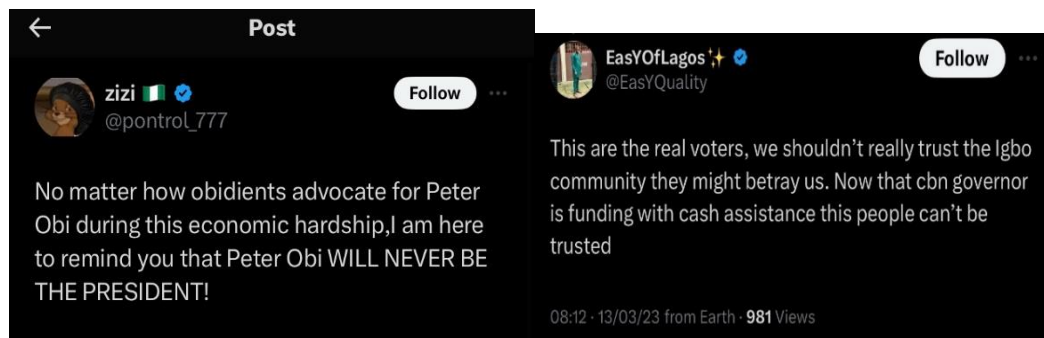
Ethnic Voting Patterns: The propensity for people to support politicians from their own ethnic or tribal groupings is a typical example of how tribalism was displayed. Candidates from different ethnic backgrounds may be excluded as a result of this practice, which frequently reflects a sense of loyalty and trust in candidates who share the same ethnic background (Itodo, 2023). We see this in full display in some parts of Lagos like Ikorodu

and Surulere where some Igbo people were told to go home if they won't vote the ruling party. Those that insisted on staying were either injured or chased away.

Strategies for Ethnic Campaigns: Campaign strategies based on ethnicity are often used by political parties and candidates. In an attempt to garner a bloc vote from their ethnic constituency, they focus their campaign efforts on areas where members of their own ethnic group predominate. Campaigns are frequently divided along tribal lines as a result of this strategy.

Ethnic Rivalries and Conflicts: Tribalism during elections can occasionally turn into ethnic rivalries and confrontations. Competition between ethnic groups for resources and political power can cause tensions that occasionally turn violent and cause social instability.

Media Amplification: social media and local newspapers, among other media outlets, can occasionally contribute to the spread of tribalism. Inaccurate reporting and the dissemination of narratives that divide people created election tension (Acheampong,2023). This contributed greatly to the tribalism experienced in the country from the last election up till now. During the campaign period, so many hateful, tribalist and bigot tweets were littered all over social media and this most times brew hatred and disharmony amongst people. Some of the bigot tweets culled from X formerly (twitter) are displayed below:



Culled from X (formerly Twitter)

Causes of Tribalism in Election in Nigerian General Elections

Selfishness: Tribalism in elections, such as the one in Nigeria in February 2023, can be attributed in part to selfishness. It is crucial to remember that in this context, selfishness is defined as when people or organizations put their own interests and benefits ahead of the country's overall well-being. Power and power maintenance are often the top priorities for self-serving political actors. They might then take advantage of tribal feelings in order to win over their ethnic or tribal group's votes. They might encourage tribalism in order to strengthen their hold on power, paying little attention to the polarizing effects. Corruption, which is a result of selfishness, is ubiquitous. It is a serious problem that has existed in human society for a long time and occurs in both developed and developing economies of the world (Lawal, 2007). To further their own or their group's interests, self-serving politicians may direct government funds and development initiatives disproportionately to regions where their ethnic group is strong. This unfair distribution of resources has the potential to exacerbate ethnic rivalries and widen tribal divisions.

Lack of Unity and National Integration: Nigerian ethnic and tribal groups have historically divided from one another, which has hindered the country's ability to come together as a nation (Jiboku&Jiboku, 2018). Tribalism was spawned by pre-independence rivalries and colonial legacies, which are the source of these historical divisions. In Nigeria, a lack of a unified national identity can make tribalism worse. Many people identify more strongly with their ethnic or tribal group than with the country as a whole. Ethnic interests may be given priority in elections as a result of this fractured sense of identity. Politicians in Nigeria frequently use ethnic divisions to their advantage by engaging in ethnic politics (Okonkwo, 2018). Politicians can take advantage of tribal feelings and widen divisions during elections when there is a lack of a strong national identity and integration. The absence of national integration in Nigeria is a contributing factor to the economic and social divide between the country's various ethnic groups (Nwosu, 2019). Without a strong, cohesive nation, some groups may look to their tribal identities for protection and advancement when they feel marginalized or disadvantaged.

Defaults in Upbringing: An individual's sense of identity and sense of belonging to a group is greatly influenced by the values of their family and community (Iyanga, 2008). Tribalism in ensuing political decisions may be sustained if upbringing places a higher value on ethnic or tribal identity than on national unity. A person's political decisions can be influenced by social norms and cultural practices that they were taught during their upbringing (Iyanga, 2018). People may bring these values into the voting booth if they live in a community where ethnic affiliations are valued more highly than national identity. A child raised by default may not have as much opportunity to interact with people of different ethnic backgrounds. Politicians may find it easier to take advantage of tribalism as a result of this lack of exposure, which can promote insularity and reinforce negative stereotypes about other ethnic groups (Okonkwo, 2018). The way that a person perceives their own identity and the identities of others can be greatly influenced by the standard of education and media exposure received during childhood. Tribalism can be fueled by biased educational materials and media coverage that upholds ethnic stereotypes.

Lack of Electoral Enlightenment: Voters who are not politically educated may be more receptive to disinformation and political manipulation (Anugwom, 2000). Politicians may take advantage of this ignorance to spread tribalist narratives that further widen ethnic gaps during election campaigns. Voters may depend on simpler identity-based criteria, like ethnicity, if they are ill-informed about the credentials and policies of the candidates. Voters who lack electoral enlightenment may be more susceptible to identity politics because they may not be fully aware of the consequences of their decisions.

Electoral Rigging: According to Ajuwon (2022), electoral rigging undermines public confidence in the legitimacy and fairness of the political system. Voting tribally in protest or defense may be the response of voters who feel that elections are rigged to benefit particular ethnic or tribal groups. Politicians may engage their ethnic or tribal supporters by portraying the matter as an assault on their group's interests in reaction to alleged manipulation. To fight rigging, people may become more tribal as they unite behind their ethnic identity. Voters from particular ethnic groups or geographical areas may feel excluded as a result of electoral rigging, which can disenfranchise them (Okonkwo, 2018). They might then mobilize in response, further dividing tribes along ethnic lines. Eze (2020) argues that politicians have the ability to escalate ethnic tensions by portraying electoral rigging as an attack on their ethnic group. This abuse has the potential to reinforce tribalism by shifting the conversation away from important policy issues and toward identity politics.

Aftermath of the Election and the Effect of Tribalism

Tensions between the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, namely Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, reached a breaking point following the 2023 national elections, with accusations of marginalization and exclusion being levelled at both sides. Tribal politics and poverty, regrettably, are closely related and frequently resulted in violence instigated by these tribes during the election.

The aftermath of the election has left us with little or nothing compared to what was obtainable before. The effect of tribalism cannot be overemphasized as it leaves a dent on our nations fabric and destroys that which holds us together as a country.

One of the major effects of tribalism is that it led to the election of bad and incompetent leaders. Where tribalism prevails, citizens are biased and they vote on the basis of ethnic allegiance thus they do not care if the best individual is elected, they only care that their person is being elected. According to Yusuf (2010), Leadership deficit has been a recurring decimal in the Nigerian political landscape. Lack of purposeful and visionary leadership has impacted negatively on governance in Nigeria. This shortcoming in leadership has therefore weakened the potency of governance. This pervasive phenomenon frequently puts ethnic allegiances ahead of meritocracy, which results in the election of inept leaders who lack the knowledge and foresight necessary to handle the complex issues facing the country. Tribal concerns also feed cronyism, nepotism, and polarizing politics, destroying national cohesion and sustaining a cycle of corruption. As a result, capable professionals lose their jobs, institutional safeguards are compromised, and the nation suffers from a brain drain as talented people leave for other opportunities.

Tribalism in Nigerian politics creates additional difficulties that are exacerbated by insecurity, which exacerbates social unrest and impedes efficient government. The nation faces a number of security risks, such as kidnapping, insurgency, banditry, communal

violence, and terrorism, all of which exacerbate social unrest and obstruct development initiatives. Adebakin (2012), sees security as freedom from danger or threats, and the ability of a nation to protect and develop itself, promote and cherish values and legitimate interests and enhance the well-being of its people. This can't be so in a society where there is tribal segregation between individuals. Tribal dynamics and insecurity frequently collide because some ethnic groups may experience violence more severely than others or believe that security personnel are biased, which exacerbates tensions within communities. Furthermore, people become disillusioned with the government and its incapacity to effectively handle security-related issues, which exacerbates ethnic divisions and erodes confidence in the leadership.

Tribalism in politics creates difficulties that are greatly exacerbated by Nigeria's current economic situation. Social unrest and ethnic divisions are intensified by economic hardships such as high unemployment, inflation, poverty, and income inequality. Resentment and heightened tribalistic sentiments can result from marginalized groups feeling disproportionately affected by economic downturns. Moreover, the struggle for limited resources in the face of economic difficulties can exacerbate inter-ethnic rivalries, escalating social unrest and impeding attempts at national unity. Anugwom (2000), posited that tribalism rendered the political leaders incapable of performing their responsibilities. Because of ethnic sentiments, the Nigerian government is acknowledged to be answerable to the people. The people that make up their tribes are the ones that the political leaders now serve, not the general public. This slows down economic growth because some of the regions are left undeveloped and therefore natural resources are not fully harnessed. When this occurs, the marginalized ethnic groups harbor resentment, which fuels conflict within and outside.

Ethnic politics can also obstruct the formulation and execution of sound economic policies. Short-term gains for their ethnic constituencies may take precedence over long-term economic development and stability by leaders. Furthermore, in economic decision-making, cronyism and nepotism can cause resource misallocation and impede inclusive growth.

Mitigating Tribalism and Way Forward

Promoting Inter-Ethnic Communication and Reconciliation: It is imperative that civil society organizations, religious authorities, and local leaders serve as facilitators for the initiation of communication and reconciliation processes between various ethnic groups. These discussions can foster understanding between various communities, help dispel stereotypes, and help establish trust. Particularly religious leaders can use their moral influence to spread messages of forgiveness, tolerance, and harmony between different religions and ethnic groups.

Building Stronger Democratic Institutions: It's expedient to Protect the Law, Make Elections Transparent, and Encourage Meritocracy in Government. Building political trust and preventing the exploitation of tribal feelings for political advantage are two benefits of strengthening democratic institutions. It is imperative to guarantee that Nigeria's diverse population is inclusive and well-represented in its institutions.

Economic Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation: Tribalism's influence can be lessened by addressing socioeconomic inequalities. Ethnic tensions and poverty can be lessened by putting policies into place that support fair access to jobs, resources, and

essential services. Religious organizations have a big part to play in supporting community development projects that help all ethnic groups, fighting for economic justice, and offering social services.

Media Sensitization and Responsibility: Public opinion is greatly influenced by the media. Tribalism can be less harmful if responsible journalism is encouraged and media professionals are made aware of the risks associated with maintaining tribal stereotypes. Furthermore, religious leaders can combat divisive narratives spread by some media outlets by using their platforms to advance messages of peace, tolerance, and interfaith harmony.

Conclusion

Ethnic pluralism and fragmentation define the Nigerian state. Ethnic bloc voting has continued to be a barrier to Nigeria's democratic process, and this has resulted in the growth of ethnic militias and interethnic conflicts throughout the nation. From the country's independence, ethnicity has shaped Nigeria's political environment significantly. In fact, ethnicity played a role in the formation of political parties in Nigeria since, during the Nigerian First Republic, these parties arose from the socio-cultural organizations of the various ethnic groups in the nation, lending them a distinct ethnic identity. As a result, during elections, votes were cast with ethnicity being the primary determining factor.

In the event that we are to continue as a nation, we must respect the diversity of our ethnic nationalities, which means upholding the fundamentals of true federalism. The component ethno-cultural communities must have a satisfactory distribution of political power, and resources for development must be allocated fairly. In addition to embracing the principles of their respective religions, which promote peaceful coexistence, love, and the brotherhood of all people, religious leaders and followers are urged to engage in communication, tolerate one another, and show respect for one another. The provisions and guidelines outlined in the Nigerian constitution ought to be diligently adhered to, followed, and employed. This will significantly increase the authority and potency of government in Nigerian governance. Since the nation belongs to all of us, Nigerians should learn to put the needs of the nation before their own local, tribal, ethnic, or religious interests.

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