

## Research Article

### THE DIALECTICS OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: AN EXPOSITORY ANALYSIS

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#### ABSTRACT

A presidential election is an expedient process for the democratization of the office of the Executive President. It therefore represents a national-conscious exercise fundamental for governance and development. This paper examines the trends of voting behaviour in presidential elections of a plural democratizing polity, Nigeria. In reference to the methodology of this discourse, the paper explored the relevance of primary and secondary sources of data collection and content-analyzed events and issues as regards identity politics and presidential elections in Nigeria. This discourse adopted the theory of Marxian historical dialectical materialism to establish that voter enthusiasm and preference of Nigeria electorate is a function of ethno-religious identity driven by the motive of materialism nurtured and advanced by the history of alienation and competition among the elite ethnic nationalities in fervent struggle for national power and resources. Hence, the discourse explicitly revealed that the dialectics of ethno-religious voting behaviour in 2011, 2015 and 2019 presidential elections varied in form and intensity critical for the permutation of 2023 presidential election. In credence to these findings, the discourse recommends for issue-based voting behaviour, advocacy for national consciousness among other measures imperative for visionary leadership for national transformation.

**Keywords:** Ethno - religious, voting behavior, presidential election, and dialectics.

#### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as African largest democracy is a plural nation-state divided along regional, ethnic and religious cleavages. This reflective attributes stem from heterogeneous background of over 300 ethnic nationalities spread across the hinterland to coastal regions of the country. In a specific sense, Okpanachi (2010) explicitly dissected that in Nigeria, ethnic and religious division coalesces. The Hausa-Fulani and other communities residing in the Northern Nigeria are mainly Muslims while South-South minorities and Igbo speaking South-East are predominantly Christians. The Middle Belt (or the North-Central zone) is a mixture of Christian and Muslim population while the Yoruba speaking communities in the South-West are about half Muslim and half Christian. This differentiation underlines the North-South cleavages in terms of the North being predominantly Muslim and the South predominantly Christian (Onwuanable, 2015:186). Basically, these regional, ethnic and religious pluralities may tend to influence the orientation and attitude of Nigerians in the political process. Hence, elections therefore represent the most influential political process which provides insight on the character and dynamics of country's political orientation and participation. Invariably, elections are expedient in democratic and democratizing states. This is because it upholds the values of liberty and equality, and ensures stable transition to power. In democratizing nation-state such as Nigeria, the national election particularly presidential election is the most influential and sensitive process since the inception of presidential democracy in 1979 which was however interrupted by intermittent coup d'etat and successive authoritarian administrations

(military regimes). However, since the return of democratic governance in 1999, Nigeria has had six presidential elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. These elections provided insight on the nature and dynamics of Nigeria's electoral behavior. It also in explicit sense showed the dialectics of attitudinal orientation among the ethnic nationalities in fervent contest for the control of national power and resources. Basically, successive presidential elections in 2011 and 2015 remained a watershed in Nigeria's political development with reference to its euphoria, process and outcome. In the 2011 presidential election, the most active presidential candidates were the ruling party's president Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party, PDP; General Muhammadu Buhari, the former Military Head of State (1983-1985) and candidate of the Congress for Progressive Change CPC; the former Head of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission, EFCC, Nuhu Ribadu of the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN; and the Governor of Kano state, Ibrahim Shekarau of the All Nigeria's Peoples Party, ANPP, (Report of European Parliament Election Observation Mission, 2011:4). At the end of the election, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan won comfortably and was certified by the Chair of Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC Attahiru Jega as the duly elected on 18<sup>th</sup> April (Gberie, 2011:5). In contrary, the 2015 presidential election held on 28<sup>th</sup> March present an interesting scenario and entrench a precedent in Nigeria's electoral democracy with the defeat of the incumbent president, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan by the opposition presidential contender, Muhammadu Buhari. In this regard, Kwon-Ndung, *et al.*, (2015) remarked that the election brought about a paradigm shift in the culture of elections in Nigeria. In sharp contrast to the electoral practice of 2003, 2007 and 2011 in which the ruling party had always won landslide victories. The new experience led to the victory of the opposition party, the All Progressive Congress (APC) decisive victory. This scenario formally

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brought to an end the sixteen years of stay in power of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) with the defeat of the incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan by (RTD) Gen. Muhammadu Buhari. In this sense, Soyinka (2015) argued that Nigerians are used to the incumbent winning elections. What happened in the aftermath of March 28<sup>th</sup> presidential election in which Buhari the opposition candidate defeated president Goodluck of the ruling People's Democratic Party, PDP with a margin of more than 2.5 million votes requires some explanation. So what really happened? Why is this election different? Perhaps what informed the choice of the Nigeria electorate in the two successive but remarkably different presidential elections in 2011 and 2015 accentuate the imperative of depth inquiry to establish the dialectics of ethno-religious voting behaviour in the two successive presidential elections for prediction of future presidential election in 2023. To this end, this discourse is streamlined in seven sections which begin with introduction, conceptual explication, theoretical discourse, and dialectics of ethno-religious voting behaviour in 2011 and 2015 presidential elections, dialectics of 2019 presidential election and permutations of 2023 presidential election, conclusion and recommendations.

## CONCEPTUAL EXPLICATION

Ethnicity is a sociological term of polemical analysis. A depth review of the term, 'ethnicity' illuminates myriad of definitions and perspectives elicited from character of its occurrence and dimensionality. In this vein, ethnicity connotes the interaction among members of the diverse groups (Salawu, 2010: 330). An analysis of Salawu's view of ethnicity revealed certain ambiguities. First, Salawu's failure to define discernible attributes of ethnic "interaction" and "groups" in differentiation from other forms of social interaction and groups. However, the Salawu's definition is useful in attempt to establish reflective attribute of ethnicity as seen in interaction and group. Similarly, Mclean (1996) defined it as common consciousness of shared origin and tradition among a group of people. In this regard, ethnicity is also viewed as subjective self-consciousness, a claim to status and recognition either as a superior group or as a group at least equal to other groups (Brass, 1991:19). A review of Mclean and Brass's affinity of views underscored the importance of consciousness shared among group of people.....a "shared consciousness" that stem from homogeneity. However, these scholars in their similar views failed to explicate more explicitly on the nature of this "shared consciousness" with regards to its content and character. In more specific sense, ethnicity connotes a conscious identification with people, who have shared cultural heritage, tradition, values and norms in seeking, protecting and advancing interest of a identified people (group) within the larger society (Onwuanabile, 2015: 191). From this indication, Onwuanabile's conception of ethnicity filled the gap identified in Mclean and Brass' definitions. Also, Milton (2008) observed that ethnicity as a social phenomenon is associated with identity of members of the largest possible competing communal groups (ethnic groups) seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system. Milton's view of ethnicity is vague and narrow, though elicits the essence of partisanship but failed to illustrate its occurrences in social and economic interactive processes. In this vein, the above definitions amid conceptual limitations aptly indicated that ethnicity manifest in social interaction in the expression of social identity or shared identity of a people. In a dialectical sense, it therefore suggested that ethnicity as a social phenomenon is competitive and conflictual in nature as seen in the relation of different tribal or ethnic groups. The concept of religion like other terms in social science is elusive. Thus, the term, 'religion' is a hybrid concept of multi-disciplinary perspectives in Religion, Sociology and Anthropology. Hence, there is no generally accepted definition of religion in social sciences. The controversies over

definition are sometimes non-scientific, relating to psychological complexes and to personal theological commitments and biased attitudes of individual social scientists (Oтите and Oгionwo, 2006:95). In this sense, Idowu (1973) argued that religion is a difficult topic to handle whether we are considering its connotation, its origin or its definition. In the 'Elementary Forms of the Religious Life', Emile defined religion as a unified system of belief and practices relating to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called church, all those who adhere to them (Durkheim 1915 :47) cited in Oтите and Oгionwo (2006). Durkheim's term, "moral community called church" in conceptualizing religion diminishes the relevance of other religious beliefs such as Islam etc. From this indication, Wali (1989) therefore asserts that religion is people's way of life including their tradition and social interaction. It is therefore man's integral attitude of life. In reference to the views of these scholars, religion is therefore a reverence to sacred being known as supernatural and fundamental in social existence. In a broader perspective, religion can be understood in two related, yet distinct ways, material and spiritual. In the material perspective, it is conceived as religious establishment (i.e. institutions and officials) as well as social groups and religious concerns. On the other hand in the spiritual perspective, religion is concerned with models of social and individual behavior that help believers to organize their everyday lives. It is in this way that religion is characterized as transcendence, supernatural realities and sacred (Alanamu, 2004:98). Islam and Christianity are dominant religious identities in Nigeria multi-ethnic state. Election is a concept that elicits seemingly diverse definitions and interpretations but underlies the social reality of preference over alternatives. To begin, Donze and Hughes (1972) cited in Okpala (2012) assert that election is one type of social mechanism among others for aggregating preference of particular kind. An election is therefore, a procedure recognized for the rules of an organization be it a state, a club, a voluntary organization or whatever, where all, or some of the number of persons choose a smaller number of persons to hold an office or offices of authority within that organization. Donze and Hughes' definition underscored the pervasiveness of election as a preference-driven process that has gained relevance in the internal process of every social group or organization. However, this view is vague as regarding the nature of election in the context of state. In relation to the context of state, it is argued that election involves the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and it is a device or mechanism for electing or choosing from among an army of candidates to represent the people in the Legislature, Executive and in some case the Judiciary for Judges of the lower courts are elected in countries such as the United States of America (Ikyase and Ejuce 2015:250). From Nonli's view, election represents the hallmark of representative democracy. To further illustrate the relationship between election and democracy, Adele (2017) observed that there can be never a democracy without election. Transitions in numerous countries today have continued to reveal that democracy is not possible without election. Significantly, the preference or expression of preference between candidates, political parties, and ideologies is central to every election process. Thus, this preference is expressed in voting. As noted, the most common form of political participation is exercising the right to vote (Flanigan and Zingala 1998:6). In other words, Ethridge and Handleman (2010) further remarked that the act of voting occupies a central place in political behavior nay voting behaviour. Voting behavior is a concept of empirical importance in establishing the rationale, content and outcome of voter preference or choice in an election process. As noted, Ranney (1971) cited in Oluwatula and Arogundade (2010) remarked that voting behavior is perceived as having two dominant categories, the voter's preference and voter turnout. The preference includes the degree of approval and disapproval a voter has for a political party and the candidate

ving for political offices while voter turnout is actually the percentage of people at the poll. In similar sense as earlier noted, Mahmud (2015), remarked that voting behavior refers to how the electorate vote and what determines the way they vote. Furthermore, the analysis of voting pattern as a subset of voting behaviour invariably focuses on the factors or conditions determining why people vote in a particular manner (pattern) and how they arrive at decision they make. In this vein, Sociologists tends to look to the socio-economic determinants of support for political parties, observing the correlation between class, occupation, ethnicity, sex, age and votes. Political scientists have concentrated on the influence of political factors such as electoral campaign issues, political programmes and the popularity of party leaders on political behavior (Jawah, 2013:34, Olaniyi, 2004:16). Arguably, this behavioural trait according to Olayode (2015) is likely to be influenced by not merely the impact of one cleavage on vote choices e.g. the strength of class or religious or ethnic voting or whichever is the strongest of them but rather the combined impact of all persistent divisions in the electorate that can be expected to influence the pattern of voting. However, there are conceptual gaps in most influential condition or conditions in explaining voter behavior and the context of such pattern of occurrences and recurrence. To this end, voting behavior is a function of myriad of intervening and interfacing variables that influence preference over competing candidates and political parties. And, these factors have over the years and decades stimulated scientific research on the rationale, development and analysis of voting behavior among scholars of political science. In this regard, Heywood (2007) identified four most significant models of voting behaviour advanced by scholars; i. The Party-identification model by factors such as policies, personalities etc. ii. Sociological model links voting behaviour to group membership, suggesting that the electors tend to adopt voting pattern that reflects the economic and social positions of the group to which they belong. iii. Rational-choice model shift attention on individual and away from socialization and behaviour of social groups. In this vein, voting is seen as a rational act in the sense that individual electors are believed to decide their party preference on the basis of personal self-interest. iv. Dominant Ideology model is concerned with Radical theories of voting which tends to highlight the degree to which individual choices are shaped by a process of ideological manipulation and control. These models of voting behaviour have remained significant over the decades and years amid dynamics of the political process in attempt to establish the rationale of voter preference in an election. To this extent, the dialectics of sociological model which emphasis on social identities of ethnicity and religion is useful to establish the element of regularity or irregularity in voting pattern in the successive presidential elections in Nigeria.

## THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

The dialectics of ethno-religious voting behaviour in Nigerian Presidential elections is a phenomenon of empirical inquiry and scientific analysis. The interfacing variables (of ethnicity and religion) in the context of Nigerian presidential elections underscored the imperative of theoretical explication in analysis, prediction and generalization. In this sense, the Marxian theory of Historical Dialectical Materialism provides appropriate and logical assumptions to establish the rationale, occurrence and outcome of ethno-religious voting orientation of the Nigerian electorate in the presidential elections. Karl Marx (1818-1883) is the exponent of Marxism. Hence, Marxism is a codified body of thought which came into existence after Marx's death in 1883 (Heywood, 2007:118). Furthermore, Marxism illuminates the essence of economic determinism as the condition of social existence. As noted, Nnabugwu (2006) stressed that Marxist political theories have one underpinning code they emphasize the fact that economic factor determines or is the primary determinant of the

form of politics, culture, law etc of any given society. Notably, Marxism revealed the exploitative tendencies of capitalism and plausible process of its overhauling through the conscious movement of the alienated and exploited working class. In this line of thought, Heywood (2007) again stressed that Marxism was ideas and theories condensed into a systemic world view that suited the needs of the growing socialist movement. Subsequently, Marxism espoused the idea of the materialist interpretation of history which acknowledged the relevance of historical dialectical materialism. In reference to dialectics, it was a Hegelian concept. In this sense, Nwoko (2006) embellished that George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was a German Idealist thinker who developed the concept of "dialectics". "Dialectics" was the key idea in Hegelian philosophy though Engel credited Heraclitus with its origin when he held that "Everything is and is not, for everything is fluid, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away". Thus, Hegel viewed history as the progressive manifestation of human reason and the development of historical spirit (Mukherejee and Ramaswany, 2007: 355). Similarly, Asogwa (2003) stressed that Feuerbach (1804-1872) in his book (Essence of Christianity, 1841) adopted the position of French Materialist conception and proclaimed the triumph of materialism and atheism while sharply criticizing Hegelian idealism. Also, in reference to Marxian concept of history, the utmost reality hinges on an understanding of the matter of social life. As crystallized on the crux of historical materialism. For Karl Marx, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle". And, the highest determinant of the sum of relation involved in economic production is known as the Marxian idea of historical Materialism (Asogwa, 2003:27 and Ambe-Uva, 2006:21). However, Karl Marx and Frederick Engel (1820-1895) were worried about the prevalent condition of social inequality, social injustice, and tension in their days. They believed in Hegelian dialectics-Thesis-Anti-Thesis-Synthesis but Marx and Engels resented Hegelian Metaphysics for its inability to locate the material economic or social existence of men in the society as the root cause of social inequalities, social injustice and class tension in human history (Aja, 1997:2). In other words, to propound the theory of historical dialectical materialism, Asogwa (2003) remarked that Marx took dialectics from Hegel and materialism from Feuerbach. Marx placed his dialectical materialism in the context of historical conception of social development justifying the ultimate transition to a socialist stage and thereafter socialism. Thus, Karl Marx and his Associate, Fredrick Engel employed Hegelian dialectics (Metaphysical interpretation of social reality and change) to establish that human history is immersed with struggle and conflicts over material condition of life as aptly observed in the Communist Manifesto of 1847 which states;

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle..... Freeman and Slaves, Patrician, and Plebeian, Lord and Serf, guild Master and Journey man, in a world, oppressor and oppressed stood in constant opposition to one another carried on uninterrupted, now hidden now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of the society at large or in common ruin of contending classes.

More succinctly, the theory of historical dialectical materialism lends credence to the following fundamental assumptions relevant to logics of this discourse;

- The primacy of materialism or importance of material condition has enormous influence on other forms of social processes such as political, legal, traditional, etc. This assertion further underscored the criticality of economic factor in the interrelatedness and advancement of social processes.

- The struggle for the material needs (critical for man's and societal survival) in the context of social realities of limited resources and inequalities invariably differentiate men into classes of "Have and Have not"
- The ceaseless antagonism and clash between the social differentiations (class) over material conditions of life which is conceived as crucial for the stability and advancement of societal process. This situation therefore represents the social reality of dialectical materialism.
- The social reality of dialectical materialism is also historical in defining the processes of human development and civilization. To this extent, dialectical materialism crystallized in synthesis (a new development) that is inherent with conflicting or contradicting tendencies (thesis and antithesis).

However, Marxism is criticized on the bases of its methodology and scope. Marxism denies that politics is a persisting feature of every form of society. It therefore (from its theoretical analysis) sought abolition of politics (Gauga, 2003:75). It is pertinent to note that Gauga's view failed to understand inextricable nexus between politics and economics and, the import of its symbolic influence which Marxism illuminates in the exploitative politics and economy of capitalism hence the need for proletarian state and economy. Again, Okpanachi (2012) noted that Marx's failure to comprehend the fact that relationship between the ruling class and working class is not always antagonistic. However, the incessant incidents of industrial strike and disharmony in advanced and neo-capitalist economies invalidate Okpanachi's claims. Though, some western scholars are often quick to argue that the evolution of welfare capitalism has improved the condition of workers in the industrial societies rather than worsen as Marx projected. However, socio-economic realities in neo-capitalist countries of Africa are recessive and deplorable to the local population. To illustrate the relevance of this theory in this discourse, it is argued that Nigerian state is a neo-capitalist economy whose foundation was laid by imperial motives. In reference to history, Nigeria as a plural society is an outcome of British imperialism. Hence, the euro-imperialism that forcefully reversed the pre-colonial socio-economic formation and political architecture to respond to the exigencies of the industrial capitalism. Thus, the entrenched western mode of production inextricably created situation of tussle among the amalgamated diverse socio-cultural nationalities over limited and scarce resources. Furthermore, it is also argued that Europe dominated the commanding height of the economy through his ownership of means of production, distribution and exchanges. It also controlled the foreign production relation which unjustly exploited the labour of the vast majority of Africans, dictated the work roles and expropriated Africans. Soon Africans experienced the colonizer racial prejudices and discrimination in the fields of jobs, remunerations, housing, sports and even churches and burial grounds (Osoba, 1974:51) cited in Nnoli(1980). As explicitly noted, the Euro-mode of production entrenched divisive sentiments and process of social differentiations between the Colonialists and Africans. Interestingly, the resultant anomies and alienation reflected in the socio-economic and political relations even among Africans. In the interaction with his fellow Africans, he experienced tension, anxiety and insecurity. Discriminated, subjugated and humiliated by the colonizer, he directed his aggressive impulses against other natives with whom he competed on the basis of equality. Ethnic group membership was useful (Alex, 1978: 342) cited in (Nnoli 1980). In analogy to Nigerian context, Nnoli (1980) observed that the colonialists also encouraged the competitive groupings to run along linguistic and communal lines.

For example, they choose administrative units which coincided with communal homelands of various linguistic groups and which with the introduction of elective politics became political constituencies was

enhanced by the even development inherent in imperialism. Colonial socio-economic projects are located in areas of gainful exploitation. Ultimately, certain linguistic and communal homelands became better developed socio-economically than others. The imbalance deepened antipathies between ethnic groups. Today, post-colonial Nigeria state is immersed with contradicting and conflicting tendencies emanating from the socio-cultural background of its integrating nationalities, lopsided socio-economic structure, legacies of imperial pillage and centrifugal politics. As a less industrialized economy, Nigeria is grappling with challenges of governance, economy and national cohesion. Notably, the manipulated process of distribution of material dividends had adversely created situations of unemployment, poverty and hunger, inadequate distribution of public utilities, insurgency, militancy, threat of secession, etc. These unpleasant tendencies had over the years affected the psyche, values and attitude of an average Nigerian in the political, economic and social processes. In other words, it is therefore established that:

- The quest for material satisfaction in the situation of limited utilitarian values created imbalance and tussle among the diverse ethnic- nationalities which inextricably affect and define the character of the political process. Hence, presidential elections in Nigeria is the most sensitive process with reference to its euphoria, voter-turnout and post-election reactions as observed in 2011 and 2015 where materialism was enormously activated to propel regional, ethnic and religious sentiments.
- The primacy of regional development and survival stimulated ethno-religious consciousness among the Nigerian electorate as seen in the votes secured by the major candidates in the April and March presidential elections of 2011 and 2015 respectively. In other words, Nigerians voted for presidential candidates who represent the image and interest of their regions, tribes and religions on the assumption that the electoral success of the candidate is a condition for social, economic and political gains.
- The reality of the dialectical process (thesis and anti-thesis) reflects in the North and South divide. From the pre-independence to the post-colonial Nigeria state, the political elites of the North and South had been engrossed in fervent tussle over national elective positions and dividends of development. Thus, the successive presidential elections represent context of the clash between the thesis and anti-thesis resulting to a synthesis which symbolized the outcome of the election.

In final analysis, it is therefore instructive to note that the criticality of social tendencies of ethno-religious factor in a society of inequalities and dysfunctional structures is in credence to the logics of Marxian historical dialectical materialism. And, the dialectical social reality entrenched in a heterogeneous nation-state breeds injustice has the over years persistently shape and drive the values and attitude of Nigerians in the election process particularly the presidential election. In a specific sense, the voting behaviour of the Nigeria electorate is a function of ethnicity and religion driven by the motive of materialism nurtured and promoted by the history of alienation and competition among the elite ethnic-nationalities over national power and resources. To this end, presidential election in Nigeria is a contest for the relevance of ethno-regional nationalities for the control and distribution of dividends of power.

## The Dialectics of Ethno-Religious Voting Behaviour in Nigerian Presidential Elections in 2011 and 2015

The 2011 and 2015 presidential elections are the seventh and eighth presidential polls after the first historic presidential election on August 11<sup>th</sup> 1979 and successive presidential elections in 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003 and 2007. Hence, the substance of these successive presidential elections is what drives the enthusiasm to participate in its process and what informed the electoral choice of Nigeria voters. In explicit sense, it is argued that since gaining independence in 1960, Nigerians have participated in six national elections. Critical examination of these elections will reveal that Nigerians have had to consider some factors in the course of choosing political leaders to represent their views. Some of these factors appear to be ethnicity, geographical location and other desired benefits. This occurrence may be related to the foundations of the discretion of the regional leaders in the 1960s. Consequently, voters have had to cast their votes for political leaders who share their geographical traits in some elections particularly with the division of Nigeria into three regions. Recent division has resulted in six geo-political zones. This trend however appears to have raised fundamental questions of national identity and against regional and ethnic loyalty which seems not to facilitate good leadership and even development of the Nigerian nation (Oluwatula and Arogundade, 2010:323). This view further underscored the criticality of identity politics in the national presidential elections. As earlier indicated, cursory examination of the extant literature revealed that identity factor reflecting in regionalism, ethnicity and religion have to a large extent influenced voting behavior of the Nigeria electorate in presidential elections across regions and states of the federation. In other words, the identity politics of presidential elections in Nigeria reflects in character and dimension of dialectical process as dramatized in successive recent presidential elections. In 2011 presidential election, Peoples Democratic Party, Congress for Progressive Change, All Nigeria Peoples Party and Action Congress of Nigeria emerged as frontline political parties from over 50 political parties registered by the national election management body, INEC. Interestingly, the ethno-religious sentiment influenced the candidate selection processes in the two major political parties, Congress for Progressive Change, CPC and Peoples Democratic Party, PDP as stressed by Aliyu and Okon (2011), Buhari was the CPC presidential candidate. Buhari's choice of religion and the manner of his defense of it in public glare has been a cause for concern by his critics. A Muslim who has on several occasions defended Islam and its adherents, sometimes with impunity, Buhari has come under attack as a leader likely to Islamize the country and fan embers of religious insurgency. Apparently concerned by the religious sentiment against him in spite of stout defense, Buhari in 2011 picked a popular Christian pastor, Tunde Barkare of the Latter Rain Assembly as his running mate under the banner of the Congress for Progressive Change, CPC, a party he almost singlehandedly formed after he quit the All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP under which umbrella he contested 2003 and 2007 presidential polls. The primary election in People's Democratic Party presented a different scenario. Akitimine (2011) remarked that within the PDP, the drama came during the primary convention in January, when the incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan was challenged by a northern consensus candidate, Atiku Abubakar. The Report of Common Wealth Observer Commission (2015:6) further documents as the election loomed ahead, there was much speculation regarding whether President Jonathan would contest the PDP's presidential race. President Jonathan's formal declaration of his candidature in September 2010 was significant because of the impact on the PDP's long standing "zoning arrangement" whereby political office rotates between the North and South as a way of managing the politics of multi-ethnic and multi-religious Nigeria. Advocates of the zoning arrangement were

opposed to Dr. Jonathan's candidacy they argued that as former President Yar'Adua (a northerner) had not completed his term before his demise and could have been expected to serve another four-year term, the presidency should as expected again fall to the North because President Jonathan is from the South. Within this context, a group of influential northern Nigeria politicians from PDP named former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar (who had now returned to the PDP) as their consensus candidate to challenge Dr. Goodluck Jonathan in the presidential primaries held on 13 January 2011, however President Jonathan won 2,736 of the votes compared to Alhaji Abubakar 805.

At the end of the intra-party contest, the Table 1 below provided an insight on ethno-religious background of the frontline candidates and their political parties.

**Table 1: The Frontline Candidates of the 2011 Presidential Election and their Ethno-religious Background**

Candidate	Political Party	Religion	Ethnic Group	Geo-Political Zone
Goodluck Jonathan	Peoples Democratic Party, PDP	Christian	Ijaw	South-South
Muhammadu Buhari	Congress for Progressive Change, CPC	Muslim	Hausa/Fulani	North-West
Nuhu Ribadu	Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN	Muslim	Hausa/Fulani	North-East
Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau	All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP	Muslim	Hausa/Fulani	North-West

Source: Authors compilation.

NB: As earlier noted Nigeria is a federation of thirty-six states regionalized in six geo-political zones of North-East, North-West, North-Central, South-South, South-West and South-East. From the index of the above table, there were four presidential frontline candidates. In reference to ethno-regional background, three presidential candidates were Muslim from the Hausa-Fulani tribe in the North while the incumbent presidential candidate under the platform of ruling People's Democratic Party, PDP was a Christian from the Ijaw ethnic group in Southern Nigeria. The numerical visibility and strength of the Northern Presidential candidates may be attributed to the death of Alhaji Umaru Yar Adua on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2010, former President and a Muslim from the Hausa-Fulani tribe in the North. In other words, it was the conviction of the Northern political elite (irrespective of political party platform) that the untimely demise of Yar Adua before completion of his tenure was a setback to the relevance of the region in national power and governance.

The 2011 presidential election held on 16<sup>th</sup> April. Furthermore, the NDI Report (2012) observed that INEC chairman announced the results of the presidential election in a live television broadcast less than 48 hours after the poll closed. The chairman announced the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan as the winner as shown in the table of election results below:

Table 2: The 2011 Presidential Election Result.

	Candidate party	Number of Votes	% Votes
1	Goodluck Jonathan (PDP)	22,495,187	58.89%
2	Muhammadu Buhari (CPC)	12,214,853	31.98%
3	Nuhu Ribadu (ACN)	2,079,151	5.41%
4	Ibrahim Shekarau (ANPP)	917,012	2.40%
5	Mahmud Waziri (PDC)	82,243	0.21%
6	Nwadike Chikezie (PMP)	56,248	0.51%
7	Lawson Aroh (PPP)	54,203	0.14%
8	Peter Nwangwu (ADC)	51,682	0.14%
9	Christopher Okotie (FRESH)	34,331	0.69%
10	Dele Momodu (NCP)	26,376	0.09%
11	Solomon Akpona (NDMP)	25,938	0.07%
12	Lawrence Adedoyin (NMDP)	23,740	0.06%
13	Solomon Akponi (NMDP)	28,938	0.07%
14	Ebiti Ndok (APS)	21,203	0.06%
15	John Dara (NTP)	19,744	0.05%
16	Rasheed Shitta (MPP)	16,492	0.04%
17	Yahaya Ndu (APP)	12,264	0.03%
18	Ambrose Owuru (HDP)	12,023	0.03%
19	Patrick Utomi (SDMP)	11,544	0.03%
20	Christopher Nwaokobia	18,472	0.02%

Source: African Elections Data Base, (2011:5).

Table 3: Nigeria's 2011 Presidential Election (April 16) Results by States and Geopolitical Zones.

S/N	STATES IN GEO-POLITICAL ZONES	PDP	CPC	ACN	ANPP	Voter Turnout
		Jonathan	Buhari	Ribadu	Shekaru	
<b>STATE SOUTH-WEST</b>						
1	Ekiti	135,009	2,689	116,981	1,482	34.2%
2	Lagos	1,281,688	189,983	427,203	8,941	31.8%
3	Ogun	309,177	17,654	199,555	2,969	28.00%
4	Ondo	387,376	11,890	74,253	6,741	30.1%
5	Osun	188,409	6,997	299,711	3,617	39.6%
6	Oyo	484,758	92,396	252,240	7,156	33.6%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,786,417</b>	<b>321,609</b>	<b>1,369,943</b>	<b>30,906</b>	<b>32.3%</b>
<b>SOUTH-EAST</b>						
7	Abia	1,175,984	3,743	4,392	1,455	77.9%
8	Anambra	1,145,169	4,223	3,437	975	57.5%
9	Ebonyi	480,592	1,025	1,112	14,296	47.9%
10	Enugu	802,144	3,753	1,755	1,111	62.5%
11	Imo	1,381,357	7,591	14,821	2,520	83.6%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,985,246</b>	<b>20,335</b>	<b>25,517</b>	<b>20,357</b>	<b>66.9%</b>
<b>SOUTH SOUTH</b>						
12	Akwa Ibom	1,165,629	5,348	54,148	2,000	76.2%
13	Bayelsa	504,811	691	370	136	85.6%
14	C/River	709,382	4,002	5,889	2,521	63.2%
15	Delta	1,378,851	8,960	13,110	2,746	69.4%
16	Edo	542,173	17,795	54,242	2,174	37.5%
17	Rivers	1,817,762	13,182	16,382	1,449	76.3%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,118,608</b>	<b>49,978</b>	<b>144,141</b>	<b>11,026</b>	<b>76.2%</b>
<b>NORTH-WEST</b>						
18	Jigawa	419,252	663,994	17,355	7,673	56.6%
19	Kaduna	1,190,179	1,334,244	11,278	17,301	65.8%
20	Kano	440,666	1,624,543	42,353	526,310	53.2%
21	Katsina	428,392	1,163,919	10,945	6,342	52.4%
22	Kebbi	369,198	501,453	26,171	3,298	56.4%
23	Sokoto	309,057	540,769	20,144	5,063	40.1%
24	Zamfara	238,980	624,515	17,970	46,554	51.7%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,395,724</b>	<b>6,453,437</b>	<b>146,216</b>	<b>612,541</b>	<b>54.5%</b>

/N	STATE	PDP	CPC	ACN	ANPP	Voter Turnout
		Jonathan	Buhari	Ribadu	Shekarau	
<b>STATES</b>						
<b>NORTH-EAST</b>						
25	Adamawa	508,314	344,526	32,786	2,706	50.0%
26	Bauchi	258,404	1,315,209	16,674	8,777	63.8%
27	Borno	207,075	909,763	7,533	37,279	49.5%
28	Gombe	290,347	459,898	3,420	5,693	58.4%
29	Taraba	451,354	257,986	17,791	1,203	55.3%
30	Yobe	117,128	337,537	6,069	143,179	45.3%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,832,622</b>	<b>3,624,919</b>	<b>84,273</b>	<b>198,837</b>	<b>54.2%</b>
<b>NORTH-CENTRAL</b>						
31	Bneue	694,776	109,680	223,007	8,592	43.8%
32	Kogi	399,816	132,201	6,516	16,491	42.7%
33	Kwara	268,243	83,603	52,432	1,672	36.0%
34	Nasarawa	408,997	278,390	1,204	1,047	50.0%
35	Niger	321,429	652,574	13,344	7,138	46.8%
36	Plateau	1,029,865	356,551	10,181	5,235	62.5%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,123,126</b>	<b>1,612,999</b>	<b>306,684</b>	<b>40,175</b>	<b>48.2%</b>
<b>FCT-ABUJA</b>						
37	<b>FCT</b>	<b>253,444</b>	<b>131,576</b>	<b>2,327</b>	<b>3,170</b>	<b>42.2%</b>
	<b>TOTAL COUNTRY</b>	<b>22,495,187</b>	<b>12,214,583</b>	<b>2,079,101</b>	<b>917,012</b>	<b>52.3%</b>

Source: Culled from the report of Independent National Electoral Commission, 2011 and structured into geo-political zones.

## ANALYSIS

The above table showed the statistics of votes won by the frontline political parties and presidential candidates, and voter turnout across the thirty-states and Federal Capital Territory in the six geo-political zones of Nigerian federation. From the index of the table, there are 17 states in the South (seen in south-west, south-east and south-south) and 19 states in the North (seen in north-west, north-east and north-central) and the FCT. In reference to the South-West, it is a region of six states of Yoruba ethnic nationality and mixed religious identities (Islam and Christianity). The table showed that Dr Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from Ijaw Tribe in Bayelsa state of South-South geo-political zone and incumbent President won five states except Osun state won by Nuhu Ribadu, a Muslim from Hausa-Fulani ethnic group in Adamawa state of North-East geo-political zone while other candidates trailed behind with proportional number of votes. The reasonable scale of electoral performance of ACN presidential candidate seen in 1,369,943 votes inspite of the defeat by the incumbent PDP candidate was attributed to partisan charisma of Bola Tinubu, (the national leader of the party) and party identification where five states (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Osun and Oyo) were under the government of the Action Congress of Nigeria. To this extent, the electoral victory of PDP candidate in the region can be enormously attributed to factors of incumbency and regionalism where ethnicity and religion were less significant. In reference to voter turnout, the region recorded poorest voter enthusiasm of 32.3% which was attributed to two critical indications. First, none of the presidential candidates were from the region except a popular pastor, Tunde Barkare, the presidential running mate of CPC. Secondly, the region was excluded from geo-dividends of power at the national level with reference to positions of Vice President, Secretary to the Federal Government, Senate President, Deputy Senate President however the region held the office of the Speaker of Federal House of Representatives (2007-2011) before the April Presidential election. Regionalism is very critical in Nigerian governance and politics.

Furthermore, the second geo-political zone, the South East is a region of five states of Igbo ethnic nationality and predominantly Christian in religious inclination. Again, the incumbent PDP candidate, Goodluck Jonathan swept the region with 4,985,246 votes while the ACN candidate trailed behind with 25,517 votes and ANPP candidate with 20,357 votes while CPC candidate failed with 20,335 votes. Hence, regionalism and ethno-religious factor played pivotal role in the landslide electoral performance of the PDP candidate in the region. Also, party identification provided the complimentary role in view of the fact that four states (Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo and Abia) were under the government of PDP and one state (Anambra) was under the government of All Progressive Grand Alliance, APGA, an ethno-regional political party of Ndigbo which did not field any presidential candidate but allied with PDP to support the candidature of Goodluck Jonathan. This development was necessitated by the fact that South-South geo-political zone of Dr Goodluck Jonathan share regional affinities (cultural and political) with the South-East geo-political zone. Again, PDP candidate has an Igbo name, "Azikwe", a name that is symbolically relevant to the millions of Nigeria electorate of the Eastern extraction and his Christian background further lend credence to the overwhelming victory. In reference to regional voter turnout, the voter enthusiasm was reasonably high with 66.9% which is attributed to the inclusion of the region in geo-dividends of power at the national level (amid regionalism and ethnic-religious factor) with reference to the positions of Deputy Senate President, Chief of Army Staff etc, and in anticipation of more dividends of power. The South-South is a region of six states of minority ethnic nationalities often referred as Niger Delta. The ethnic minorities of the region are Ijaw, Isoko, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ukwani, Anag, Andoni, Okobo, Oron, Ibiobio, Ibeno, Ekete, Efik, Ejagham, Yakurr, Bette, Yela, Igede, Ukelle, Bekwarra, Okpe, Esan, Afemai, Ora, Akoko-Edo, Igbanke, Emai, Ogoni, etc with Igbo extractions in Rivers and Delta states and were predominantly Christian in religious inclination. Again, the PDP candidate won overwhelmingly with 6,118,608 million votes while CPC candidate, Muhammadu Buhari trailed behind with 49,978



votes, and ACN and ANPP candidates performed poorly. Regionalism and ethno-religious identity played enormous role in the impressive electoral victory of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in the six states of the region. Beside the fact of Christian background of the PDP candidate, his dramatic emergence as acting and later substantive President after the ill-health and death of His principal, the former President in 2010, was indeed a resonance of hope for the ethnic minorities of the South to control national power and resources in a country where governance and politics revolves around the predominant influence of elite ethnic groups of Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. In addition, the five states in the region were under the government of PDP except Edo state which was governed by ACN government. To this extent, party identification also played critical role in the electoral victory of the incumbent PDP candidate. In reference to voter turnout, the euphoria of regionalism and religious identity of the minority tribes trump out reasonable scale of voter enthusiasm in 76.2%. A cursory overview of voting behaviour of Nigerians in the three geo-political zones in the South indicates that regionalism and ethno-religious identity amid other factors influenced voter turnout and preference in the electoral victory of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of PDP and failure of other candidates. In other words, the candidate of PDP won 16 states while Nuhu Ribadu of ACN won one state in the South of Nigeria federation. In reference to the North-West, it is a region of seven states of Hausa-Fulani ethnic nationality and predominantly Muslims of Islamic faith. The Congress for Progressive Change, CPC candidate Muhammadu Buhari won in landslide victory in the seven states with 6,453,437 million votes to defeat the ruling PDP candidate, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, who secured 3, 395,724 million votes and other two frontline candidates. Interestingly, five states (Jigawa, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto) were under the government of Peoples Democratic Party, PDP while the two other states (Kano and Zamfara) were under the government of All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP which invariably indicated the insignificance of the party identification in the decisive electoral victory of CPC candidate in the region. Hence, Muhammadu Buhari a Muslim from Hausa-Fulani ethnic group in Katsina state of North West geo-political zone was very popular in the region amid the political charisma of Mallam Ibrahim Shekaru, a Muslim and the incumbent Governor of Kano, a spring state (with enormous voting strength) and influence of PDP and ANPP. To this extent, regionalism and ethno-religious factor facilitated Buhari's victory in the region. For instance, the demise of former President (who was from Katsina state in North-West) and emergence of Dr Goodluck Jonathan as President of the Federal Republic truncated Northern hold on national power and violated Peoples Democratic Party's zoning formula between North and South. Therefore, Buhari was massively voted for in the region in anticipation of emergence of another Fulani and Muslim President after the sudden demise of Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar Adua. The reasonable scale of voter turnout of 54.5% underscored the euphoria of voter enthusiasm in the region. In the North-East, the same euphoria of regionalism and ethno-religious factor was also seen as embellished in another landslide victory of CPC candidate in four states out of six in the region. The North-East geo-political zone is a region of six states of Hausa-Fulani, Kanuri and other minority ethnic nationalities such as Bali, Gudu, Mbula, Bata, Koma, Mumuye, Gerawa, Sayawa, Jarawa, Kirfawa, Turawa, Bolewa, Karchare, Faawa, Butawa, Warjawa, Zulawa, Boyawa, Mbadawa, Tangele, Terawa, Waja, Kumo, Bolewa, Perol, Shonge, Tula, Cham, Languda, Dadiya, Banabuka etc and were predominantly Muslims of Islamic faith. The CPC candidate, Buhari won with 3, 624, 919 million votes to defeat PDP candidate and President Goodluck Jonathan who polled 1, 832, 622 million votes while Shekaru and Ribadu trailed behind with 198, 837 and 84, 273 votes respectively. To further underscore the significance of religious identity and party identification amid the influence of regionalism and ethnicity, Dr

Goodluck Jonathan won in religious mixed states of Adamawa and Taraba with 508, 314 and 451, 354 votes respectively to defeat the candidate of CPC, Buhari who polled 344,526 and 257, 986 votes respectively. Four states (Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe and Taraba) were under PDP government while the other two states such as Borno and Yobe were under ANPP government. To this extent, regionalism and ethno-religious identity were critical while party identification factor was less significant in the voting behaviour of the North-East. The voter turnout of 54.2% represents the reflection of regional enthusiasm to participate in the presidential election process. The North-Central presents an interesting and remarkably different scenario not seen in North-West and North-East geo-political zones. North-Central geo-political zone is religious mixed and ethnic minority region. The North-Central region is made up of six states and the FCT consisting ethnic minorities often referred as the Middle-Belt or Northern minorities which are Tiv, Idoma, Igede, Etubo, Yachi, Jukun, Akwenya, Ufia, Nyifon, Igala, Epira and Okun, Nupe, Bariba, Afo, Agatu, Akye, Alago, Baribari, Bassa, Egbira, Eggon, Gade, Gbagyi, Gwandara, Hausa, Yourba, Mada, Ninzom, Arum, Rinda, Yekwa, Afizere, Amo, Anaguta, Aten, Bogghom, Buji, Challa, Chip, Fier, Gashish, Goemai, Irigwe, Jarawa, Jukun, Kofyar, etc with extractions of Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba. One unifying identity among the Northern minorities is "Hausa language" among over five million people of Middle-Belt irrespective of their tribal language. Remarkably, Dr Goodluck Jonathan polled 3, 123, 126 votes winning five states while CPC candidate won only state, Niger state in the region while other candidates trailed behind. In addition, Dr Goodluck Jonathan won the FCT with 253, 444 votes to defeat Buhari (who secured 131, 576 votes) and other candidates. Religion, Party identification and personality traits of candidate were significant while regionalism and ethnicity were less significant in voter enthusiasm and preference. The proportional percentage of Northern Christians in the region voted for Goodluck on the premise of religion while others voted on the strength of personality traits and party identification. Five states (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Niger and Plateau) were under PDP government while Nasarawa was under CPC government. The regional voter turnout of 48.2% which was marginal lower compared to what was seen in North-West and North-East geo-political zones. A cursory overview of voting behaviour of Nigerians in the three geo-political zones in the North indicates that regionalism, ethno-religious identity and party identification enormously influenced voter turnout and preference in the electoral victory CPC Candidate, Muhammadu Buhari in North-West and North-East while Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of PDP won North-Central and FCT. In other words, the candidate of PDP won 7 states in the North and FCT of Nigerian federation while the candidate of CPC, Buhari won 12 states in the North and other two candidates failed to win any state in the North. In reference to the regional electoral performance, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan won four geo-political zones (south-west, south-east, south-south and north-central) while Buhari won two geo-political zones (north-west and north-east). Hence, the PDP candidate, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan won 23 states (16 in the south and 7 in the north) and FCT while CPC candidate, Gen Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd) won only 12 states (all in the North) and the ACN candidate, Nuhu Ribadu won only one state (osun) in the South-West. The National voter turnout was 53.7% from 73.5 million registered voters. The failure of Muhammadu Buhari to win any state beyond the North again ostensibly showed the criticality of regionalism and ethno-religious identity in a dialectical process of voter enthusiasm and preference across the states and regions in Nigerian Federation. Subsequently, the 2011 post-presidential election violence in the North further represents an unpleasant dimension of ethno-religious sentiment that led to loss of lives and properties. Many southerners living in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states lost their lives and properties



to thousands of protesting Northern youths who felt the result of the presidential election was manipulated in favour of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. However, the gravity of the violence in Kaduna, Zaria and Kano was unprecedented. This unpleasant situation undoubtedly entrenched crises of disunity which further heightened tension in the relation between regions before the 2015 presidential election as embellished by scholars. Accordingly, Ayo *et al.*, (2012) remarked that the outcome of the 2011 presidential election implied that Jonathan has been given a mandate to rule Nigeria state for next four years. The implication of this is that his tenure ends in May 29, 2015. The crossroads here that will power rotates back or still remain in South. As earlier noted, the 2015 presidential election was remarkable in Nigeria’s political development. It was a paradigm shift in Nigeria electoral democracy with reference to the historic defeat of an incumbent president and ruling political party by an opposition candidate and political party. All Progressive Congress, APC emerged in 2013 in the building up to 2015 presidential election. In this vein, Thurston, (2015) embellished that Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was labeled as a center-right party and All Progressive Congress, APC described as leftist progressive party with diverse geo-graphical and political constituencies reflecting its founding parties’ bases. It comprises of Action Congress of Nigeria, All Nigeria Peoples Party, and Congress for Progressive Change, and a fraction of All Progressive Grand Alliance. In other words, the three frontline opposition (in 2011 presidential election) political parties Action Congress of Nigeria, All Nigeria Peoples Party and Congress for Progressive Change merged in July 2013 to form All Progressive Congress ahead of 2015 presidential election. What are the prevailing regional and national perceptions before the historic presidential election in March 2015? On regional perception, Ayorinde (2015), opined that some opinion leaders in the Northern part of the country are yet to get over what they regarded as treachery of Jonathan with the defiance of the zoning arrangement of the PDP to contest the presidency after the death of Umaru Yar’Adua barely two years in office 2010. Such Northern leaders from the region had argued that Jonathan should have completed the first term of Yar’Adua which was cut-short by death and allow another Northern to conclude the eight years occupation of the presidency which began with the election of late president in 2007. Again, there is narrative that Jonathan administration has deliberately allowed the Boko Haram insurgency which by president’s own admission has resulted into the death of over 3,000 Nigerians from 2009 to 2013. A segment of the people in the North have also accused the Jonathan administration of lackadaisical attitude to tackling the Boko Haram insurgency because these areas considered to be the stronghold of the opposition to enhance no chances in the 2015 polls. These perceptions articulated may have shape or influence the orientation of the electorate in the 2015 presidential election. Notably, the intra-party dynamics also illuminate certain cleavage orientations critical in the 2015 presidential election. It seems that ethno-religious considerations was

visible in the intra-party process in APC. In All Progressive Congress, APC, Buhari emerged as the presidential candidate to contest against Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. However, the process and emergence of Buhari’s running mate to an extent showed the importance of ethno-regional and religious considerations as Kazeem (2015) observed that with Buhari’s emergence as presidential candidate, the North automatically relinquished the vice president, VP slot to the South. The politicking was then shifted to the South as to who becomes Buhari’s running mate. With the APC refusing to present Muslim-Muslim ticket for the presidential election. Former Governor of Lagos State and National Leader, APC Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, automatically lost out of the equation, but was given the privilege to nominate the VP, which informed the choice of Osinbajo. A committee set up by the party to choose among the contestants later settled for Osinbajo to appease Tinubu and for the fact that the professor of law, who is a provincial pastor at the Redeemed Christian Church of God, RCCG will likely sway the votes of the Christian community to the side of APC. The choice of Osinbajo was therefore not negotiable. He is a Christian and a revered and respected pastor of the RCCG. He is well known in the Christendom. It is a fact that RCCG has more than two million worshippers which can sway the votes of Redeemers in favour of the APC. Another permutation is that the South-West geo-political zone, which is being controlled by APC, will give their votes to the party, especially as the VP slot is from the zone. Furthermore, other political parties held their respective primaries and make known their presidential candidates. The presidential election was held on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2015. On 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2015 Prof. Jega, the Chief Returning Officer in the presidential election declared Major-General Muhammed Buhari, (Rtd) winner of the poll against Dr. Jonathan Goodluck. The APC presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari secured twenty five percent (25%) in the 36 states and FCT gained from the fifteen million, four hundred and twenty-four thousand, nine hundred and twenty-one (15,424,921) votes to defeat his closest rival and the incumbent president, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the candidate of People’s Democratic Party, PDP, who received twelve million, eight hundred and fifty three thousand, one hundred and sixty two (12,853,162) votes.

**Table 4: The Presidential Election Result between the Frontline Candidates**

Candidate Party	No of Votes	% Votes
Muhammadu Buhari, APC	15,424,921	53.96%
Goodluck Jonathan, PDP	12,853,162	44.96%
Ayeni Musa	53,537	0.19%

Source: Adapted from Soyinka (2015:25).

**Table 5: Nigeria’s 2015 Presidential Election (March 28) Results by States and Geopolitical Zones.**

S/N	STATES IN GEO-POLITICAL ZONES	Buhari APC Candidate	Jonathan PDP Candidate	Regional Voter Turnout	S/N	STATES IN GEOPOLITICAL ZONES	Buhari APC Candidate	Jonathan PDP Candidate	Regional Voter Turnout
<b>SOUTH-WEST</b>					<b>SOUTH-EAST</b>				
1	Ekiti	120, 331	176, 466		7.	Abia	13, 394	368, 303	
2	Lagos	792, 460	632, 327	40.26 %	8.	Anambra	17, 926	660, 762	40.52%
3	Ogun	308, 290	207, 950		9.	Ebonyi	19,518	323, 653	
4	Ondo	299, 889	251, 368		10.	Enugu	14, 157	553, 003	
5	Osun	383,603	249, 929		11.	Imo	133,253	559,185	
6	Oyo	528,628	303, 376			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>198,248</b>	<b>2,464,906</b>	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,433,201</b>	<b>1,821,416</b>						

	<b>SOUTH-SOUTH</b>	<b>Buhari APC Candidate</b>	<b>Jonathan PDP Candidate</b>	<b>Regional Turnout</b>	<b>Voter</b>	<b>NORTH-WEST</b>	<b>Buhari APC Candidate</b>	<b>Jonathan PDP Candidate</b>	<b>Regional Turnout</b>	<b>Voter</b>
12	Akwa Ibom	58,411	953,304		18.	Jigawa	885,988	142,904		
13	Bayelsa	5,194	361,209	57.81%	19.	Kaduna	1,127,760	484,085	55.09%	
14	Cross River	28,368	414,863		20.	Kano	1,903,999	215,779		
15	Delta	48,910	1,211,405		21.	Katsina	1,345,441	98,937		
16	Edo	208,469	286,869		22.	Kebbi	567,883	100,972		
17	Rivers	69,238	1,487,075		23.	Sokoto	671,926	152,199		
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>418,590</b>	<b>4,714,725</b>			Zamfara	612,202	144,833		
						<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,115,119</b>	<b>1,339,709</b>		
	<b>NORTH-EAST</b>	<b>Buhari APC Candidate</b>	<b>Jonathan PDP Candidate</b>	<b>Regional Turnout</b>	<b>Voter</b>	<b>NORTH-CENTRAL</b>	<b>Buhari APC Candidate</b>	<b>Jonathan PDP Candidate</b>	<b>Regional Turnout</b>	<b>Voter</b>
	Adamawa	374,701	251,664			Benue	373,961	303,737		
	Bauchi	931,598	86,085			Kogi	264,851	149,987		
	Borno	473,543	25,640			Kwara	302,146	132,602		
	Gombe	361,245	96,873	45.22%		Nasarawa	236,838	273,460	43.47%	
	Taraba	261,326	310,800			Niger	657,678	149,222		
	Yobe	446,265	25,536			Plateau	429,140	549,615		
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,848,678</b>	<b>796,598</b>			FCT-ABUJA	146,399	157,195		
						<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,411,013</b>	<b>1,715,818</b>		

Source: Culled from the report of Independent National Electoral Commission, 2011 and structured into geo-political zones.

## ANALYSIS

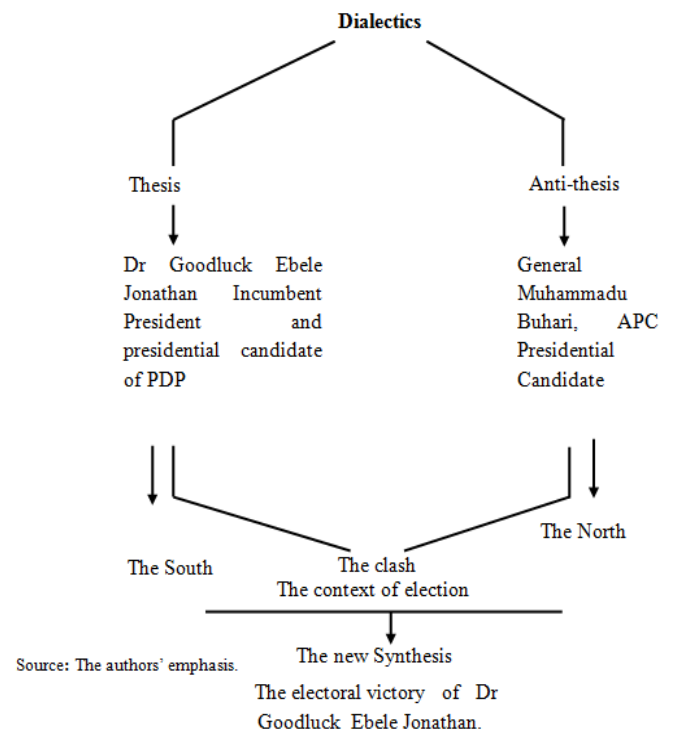
The above table shows the statistics of votes won by the two frontline political parties and presidential candidates, and voter turnout across the thirty-states and Federal Capital Territory in the six geo-political zones of Nigerian federation. In reference to the South-West, it is a region of six states of Yoruba ethnic nationality and mixed religious identities (Islam and Christianity) as earlier indicated. The index of the table showed an interesting trend in voter preference not seen or observed in 2011 as regards the impressive electoral performance of APC candidate, Buhari in five states of the region. The APC candidate won the region with 2,433,201 million votes to defeat the PDP candidate, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who secured 1,821,416 million votes. The APC candidate won five states while the PDP candidate won only one state, Ekiti. Regionalism, religious identity and party identification and other variables played critical roles in the decisive electoral victory of Buhari, APC candidate in the region. Regionalism may have influenced millions of Yoruba electors to vote for APC presidential candidate whose running mate is from Ogun state. And religious factor in credence to the Christian background of Buhari's running mate, Prof Osinbajo (pastor at the Redeemed Christian Church of God), was also instructive. Accordingly, Lagos, Ogun, Osun and Oyo were under the government of APC (while Ekiti and Ondo were under PDP government) and, All Progressive Congress, APC provided viable platform in the region to sail the candidature of Buhari in the minds of Yoruba voters. Most importantly, the exclusion of the region from geo-dividends of power under the Presidency of Goodluck Jonathan further influenced massive fury of vote against Peoples Democratic Party, PDP. Though, the region voter turnout of 40.26% was not impressive but a relatively higher than what was seen in 2011 presidential election which further showed reasonable scale of voter enthusiasm. Furthermore, the second geo-political zone, the South East, a region of five states of Igbo ethnic nationality and predominantly Christian in

religious inclination maintained its voting pattern as observed in 2011. Again, the incumbent PDP candidate, Goodluck Jonathan swept the region with 2,464,906 million votes to defeat Buhari who polled 198,248 thousand votes. Hence, regionalism and ethno-religious factor again played pivotal role in the landslide electoral performance of the PDP candidate in the region. Also, party identification provided the complimentary role in view of the fact that Enugu, Ebonyi and Abia remained under the government of PDP while Anambra was under the government of All Progressive Grand Alliance, APGA, a regional Igbo political party which did not field presidential candidate but again allied with PDP to support the candidature of Goodluck Jonathan while Imo state was under the government of APC. Again, the overwhelming electoral performance of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in the region was ostensibly an acknowledgement of the inclusion of the region in geo-dividends of power at the national level with reference to the new positions of Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Deputy Speaker of House of Representatives, Minister of Finance, etc and anticipation of more dividends of power under Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Presidency. Though, the regional voter turnout of 40.52% was relatively lower against what was seen in 2011. The South-South is a region of six states of minority ethnic nationalities and Christian in religious inclination as earlier noted. The PDP candidate again defeated the candidate of APC, Buhari in a landslide victory of 4,714,725 million votes. Hence, Buhari polled 418,590 thousand votes and failed to win any state even Edo which was under APC government while the other five states were under the government of PDP. Regionalism and ethno-religious identity played enormous role in the impressive electoral victory of Dr Goodluck Jonathan in the six states of the region. Notably, the Presidency of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2011-2015), ensured effective integration of the Niger Delta region in the mainstream of national governance and politics. In reference to voter turnout, the 57.81% was a shortfall from what was seen in 2011 presidential election however it was a reasonable scale of voter enthusiasm. A

cursory overview of voting behaviour of Nigerians in the three geo-political zones in the South presented an interesting scenario. The decisive electoral victory of APC candidate, Buhari in the South particularly in the South-West was unprecedented and remarkably historic in presidential electioneering process in Nigeria. However, regionalism and ethno-religious identity and party-identification influenced voter turnout and preference in the electoral victory of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of PDP in South-South and South-East. In other words, the candidate of PDP won 12 states and lost 5 states to the candidate of APC in the South. In reference to the North-West, it is a region of seven states of Hausa-Fulani ethnic nationality and Islamic in religious inclination as earlier established. The candidate of All Progressive Congress, Muhammadu Buhari won in landslide victory in the seven states with 7, 115, 119 million votes to defeat the ruling PDP candidate, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, who secured 1, 339, 709 million votes. The development obviously showed the height of popularity and acceptance of Muhammadu Buhari among the millions of North-West electorate. Most importantly, regionalism and ethno-religious factor are critical in Buhari's victory in the region. The 55.09% voter turnout was marginally higher from what was seen in 2011 presidential election. As earlier noted, North-East geo-political zone is a region of six states of Hausa-Fulani, Kanuri and other minority ethnic nationalities and were predominantly Muslims of Islamic faith. Regionalism and ethno-religious factor were also decisive in the landslide victory of APC candidate, Buhari in five states of the region except Taraba. Thus, the APC candidate won the region with 2, 848, 678 million votes to defeat PDP candidate and President Goodluck Jonathan who polled 796, 598 thousand votes. However, Dr Goodluck Jonathan again (as seen in 2011 presidential election) won in religious mixed state, Taraba with, 310, 800 votes to defeat the candidate of APC, Buhari who polled 261,326 to further underscore the significance of religious identity and party identification amid the influence of regionalism and ethnicity. Taraba state was under PDP government. To this extent, regionalism and ethno-religious identity were critical while party identification factor was less significant in the voting behaviour of the North-East. The voter turnout of 45.22% was slightly lower compared to 2011 voter turnout. And, this development may be largely attributed to Boko insurgency in the region. The North-Central geo-political zone is a religious mixed and ethnic minority region of the North. The North-Central region is made up of six states and the FCT consisting ethnic minorities often refereed as Middle-Belt. Muhammadu Buhari also won the Middle-Belt Region with 2, 411, 013 million votes to defeat his close rival, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who polled 1, 715, 818 million votes. It was indeed an intense competition of voter preference between the two frontline presidential candidates, where regionalism and religious factors were decisive among the electorate of the Middle-Belt region. The APC candidate, Buhari won four states (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, and Niger) while PDP Goodluck won two states (Nasarawa and Plateau states) and FCT. A close examination of states won by APC and PDP candidates showed the insignificance of party identification in voter preference. This is in credence to the fact that Benue, Kogi and Niger states won by Buhari, the APC candidate were under the government of Peoples Democratic Party while Nasarawa state won by Jonathan, PDP candidate was under the government of All Progressive Congress. It is also important to note that Kwara and Plateau states were under the government of APC and PDP respectively. A cursory overview of voting behaviour of Nigerians in the three geo-political zones in the North indicates that regionalism, ethno-religious identity and party identification influenced voter turnout and preference in the electoral victory of Muhammadu Buhari, the presidential candidate of APC and failure of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the candidate of PDP. The APC candidate won 16 states while of PDP won 3 states in the North and FCT. In reference to the regional electoral performance, Muhammadu Buhari won four

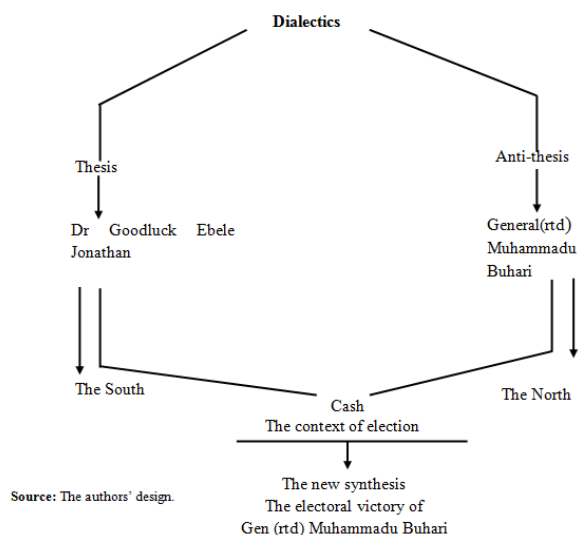
geo-political zones (south-west, north-west, north-east and north-central) while Dr Goodluck Jonathan won two geo-political zones (south-east and south-south). Hence, the APC candidate, Buhari won 21 states (16 states in the North and 5 states in the South while PDP candidate, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan won 16 states and FCT (12 states in the South and 3 states in the North). The National voter turnout was 43.65% from the registered 68.8 million registered voters. Thus, the national voter turnout was marginally low from what was seen in 2011. The superlative electoral performance of Muhammadu Buhari in the South-West region is an indication of two critical factors. First, the alliance between political elite of Yoruba ethnic nationality and political elite of Hausa-Fulani nationality to wrestle power from the Southern minorities and Igbo ethnic group. Secondly, the partisan regional alliance between the Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani was reinforced and facilitated through the platform of All Progressive Congress, APC in ensuring the historic electoral victory of an opponent presidential candidate against an incumbent presidential candidate for the first time in history of presidential election in Nigeria. In other words, the two successive presidential elections were undoubtedly immersed in a dialectical process where regionalism and ethno-religious identity are critical among millions of Nigerian electors to decide the success or failure of presidential candidates across party lines. The dialectics of the two successive presidential elections is further illustrated below:

Figure.1. The Dialectical Process of the 2011 Presidential Election



From the index of the figure 1, the new synthesis (in the psyche of most Nigerians) symbolized the alienation of the North from the dividends of power and economic utilitarian values. This perception is perhaps the cause of 2011 post- presidential election violence in the North which claimed lives and properties of the Southern residents in Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Niger etc. Hence, this narrow sentiment intensify the ethno-religious politics and campaign in the North to displace the synthesis of Ebele Jonathan Presidency through the candidature of Muhammadu Buhari under a new party platform, APC as seen in 2015 presidential election. To this end, the dialectics of the 2015 presidential elections reflects below:

Figure 2. The Dialectical Process of the 2015 Presidential Election



From the index of the figure 2, the emergence of this new synthesis entrenched the alienation of Southern extractions particularly the South-South and South-East in the mainstream of Nigeria's governance and development dividends. This situation adversely created widespread discontent and regional resentment of Muhammadu Buhari Presidency. And, the alienation of the two regions also spurred insurrectional activities seen in the restiveness of Niger Delta Avengers in the South-South and secession protest of Indigenous People of Biafra in the South-East against the Nigeria state.

**The Dialectics of 2019 Presidential Election**

After the inauguration of the APC government in 2015, it was long before public frustration with Buhari's new government began to mount. The new president took several months to have his cabinet, and he left many key government positions unfilled. The economy entered recession, the value of naira plummeted, food prices shot up, insecurity deteriorated as more than 800 people died as result of insurgency in the North during Buhari's first 100 days in office. In addition, to the multiple conflicts, series of oversea trips by the president to address an undisclosed health issue help created a fertile environment in which an internal party conflict then festered (Matthew and Sola, 2018:2). Furthermore, many notable politicians in APC defected to PDP. They were Atiku who later became the Presidential Candidate of PDP, Senate President Saraki, Speaker, Dogara, and Governor Tambuwal. Buhari also lost a lot of his financiers who assumed that his victory in 2015 would provide financial rewards for them which did not happen. Buhari also lost support of much of the Northern technocratic elite who are of the view that he has not shown sufficient competence in governance and has in addition allowed his key ministers in finance, budget, power and works to allocate more resources to the South West (Report of Centre for Democracy and Development, 2019:1). Remarkably, the incumbent president, Muhammadu Buhari emerged as the candidate of All Progressive Congress, APC and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, former Vice President (1999 -2007) became the presidential candidate of Peoples Democratic Party. Interestingly, the two presidential candidates from the ruling APC and dominant opposition political party, PDP were from Hausa-Fulani ethnic nationality and share same religious faith, Islam. Many may have observed that ethno-religious factor may be insignificant among millions of Nigeria voters considering the regional, ethnic and religious affinities shared by the candidates of APC and PDP. However, this popular perception is limited in credence to the cleavage background of their respective

presidential running mates. In attempt to establish the effects of political value of the running mates of the main presidential candidates on ethno-religious disposition of Nigeria voters, Dele, (2019) stressed that Buhari went into the race with his vice-president, a Yoruba Christian, Yemi Osinbajo, and Atiku picked an Igbo running mate, a former Anambra state governor, Peter Obi who is also Christian. With the two presidential candidates having identical ethnic and religious background and both running mates being southern Christians, it was not out of order to expect an issue-based contest but this was not the case. It was apparent that the PDP's calculation in the choice of Obi was to shore up support for Atiku in the South-East and South-South where Buhari suffered massive defeat in 2015. This strategy yielded some dividend as Atiku became visibly popular among the Igbos and the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta region (South-South). The reasons for Atiku's lack of popularity in the North-East and North-West geopolitical regions are many but the perception that the APC was a Muslim party and the PDP a Christian party cannot be ignored. On the other hand, Buhari was also seen as the Hausa-Fulani and Muslim candidate while Atiku was seen as in-law and friend by the South-South and the South-East, as well as Christian candidate. Also, the perception of lopsidedness in federal appointments and neglect of the Igbo ethnic group was a major encumbrance against Buhari's re-election bid. The campaign took ethnic dimension as ethnic associations, in an attempt to rekindle their relevance found themselves competing for candidate endorsement. The main faction of Afenifere (a socio-cultural association in the South-West region), for instance, supported Atiku while the break-away faction, together with leading Yoruba traditional rulers endorsed the Buhari/Osinbajo ticket, ostensibly in support of the 'son of the soil', Osinbajo. Similarly, the national executive of the Igbo ethnic group, Ohaneze Ndigbo also endorsed the Atiku/Obi ticket, apparently to support their son, Obi. The predominantly Hausa-Fulani association, the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) threw their weight behind Buhari while a similar association, also based in the north, the Northern Elders Forum (NEF) endorsed Atiku. The presidential election held on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2019 was won by the APC candidate, Muhammadu Buhari against over 70 presidential candidates including the PDP candidate, Atiku.

**Table 6: Presidential Election Result Declared between APC and PDP Candidates in the Geo-political Zones.**

Geopolitical zones and Federal Capital Territory	APC	PDP
1 FCT	152,224	259,997
2 North-Central	2,313,375	1,763,772
3 North-East	3,708,615	1,170,509
4 North-West	5,525,819	2,365,313
5 South-East	403,968	1,693,485
6 South-South	1,051,396	2,233,232
7 South-West	2,036,450	1,776,670
<b>Total votes</b>	<b>15,191,847</b>	<b>11,262,978</b>

Source: New Telegraph, Feb, 28, 2019.

The APC and Buhari won the Presidential poll with 15,191,847 votes (55.6 percent) compared with the PDP and Abubakar who received 11,262,978 votes (41.2 percent). Buhari received at least the required 25 percent in 32 states as well over the 24-state threshold. The APC won the presidential vote in 19 states while the PDP won in 17 states and FCT (Report of National Democratic Institute, 2019: 2). The APC candidate, Muhammadu Buhari won in 19 states which include Ekiti, Osun, Kwara, Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto, Borno, Nasarawa, Kogi,

Gombe, Bauchi, Katsina, Kebbi, Yobe, Niger, Jigawa, Ogun, Lagos and Zamfara. The PDP candidate, Atiku Abubakar won in 17 states which include Ondo, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra, Oyo, Adamawa, Edo, Benue, Imo, Taraba, Plateau, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom and Cross River

## ANALYSIS

The index of the Table 6 revealed the distribution of votes won by the two frontline candidates of APC and PDP in the six geo-political zones and FCT. Interestingly, South-East and South-South remained consistent in support of PDP presidential candidate, Atiku in spite of his ethno-religious background as Hausa-Fulani and Muslim from Adamawa state in North-East. Hence, Atiku defeated Buhari in the two regions with 1, 693, 485 million votes and 2, 233, 232 million votes respectively while the APC candidate secured 403, 968 and 1, 051, 396 thousands votes respectively. Regionalism, ethno-religious identity and party identification factor are decisive variables of consideration in the landslide victory of the PDP candidate. As regards party identification, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta and Rivers states were under PDP government while Edo and Imo were under APC government which facilitated electoral victory of the PDP candidate in South-East and South-South regions with low voter turnout of 26.16% and 28.91% respectively. Also regionalism and ethno-religious identity were critical in view of the fact that Atiku's running mate, Mr Peter Obi is a Christian and an igbo from Anambra state in South-East. However, Anambra state was under All Progressive Grand Alliance, APGA, and a regional political party of Ndigbo which fielded a presidential candidate in the election. Beside these factors, exclusion of the two regions (south-south and south-east) in geo-power dividends (as regards national appointment and distribution of critical infrastructures), and PDP campaign for "restructuring" elicited massive voter preference for the PDP candidate amid lower turnout. Interestingly as earlier noted, the two frontline candidates share affinities in ethnic nationality and religion. Hence, ethno-religious identity becomes less significant where personality trait, political charisma and party identification emerge as instructive variables of consideration among the electorate of North-West and North-East. In the North-West (44.0% voter turnout) which is Buhari's region, the APC candidate won with 5, 525, 819 million votes against 2, 365,313 million votes polled by PDP candidate, Atiku. In the North-East (41.7% voter turnout), Buhari again defeated the PDP candidate. In other words, the two regions remained consistent in support of the APC candidate, Buhari as seen in 2011 and 2015 presidential elections respectively. However, the victory of Atiku against the candidate of APC, Buhari in Taraba (a PDP state) and Adamawa (Atiku's state of origin) states of North-East underscored the imperative of party identification and nepotism. The South-West (36.27% voter turnout) and North-Central (35.75% voter turnout) geo-political zones presented an interesting scenario as regards states won and lost by the frontline candidates. In the South-West, the APC candidate polled 2, 036, 450 million votes to defeat PDP candidate who secured 1, 776,670 million votes. Regionalism, ethno-religious identity and party identification were influential while party identification played less role in the victory and failure of the frontline candidates in the region. Regionalism and ethno-religious identity in deference to the candidature of APC presidential running mate, Prof Yemi Osinbajo, a South-Western of Yoruba nationality and religious identity in view that the proportional percentage of Yoruba Muslims and Christians may have shared their votes between the two frontline presidential candidates and their running mates. However, it is important to note that the APC candidate, Buhari was defeated by PDP candidate in Ondo and Oyo states inspite of the fact that the two states were under the government of APC. However, Buhari won in

the remaining four states (Lagos, Ogun, Osun and Ekiti which were under the government of APC) to further underscore the criticality of party identification amid the influence of regionalism and ethno-religious identity. In the Middle-Belt region, (North-Central), the APC candidate polled 2,313,375 million votes to defeat PDP candidate, who secured 1,763,772 million votes. Buhari won four states (Kogi, Kwara, Naasarwa, and Niger) while Atiku won two states (Benue and Plateau) and the FCT. Remarkably, FCT was very consistent for its support for PDP candidates in three presidential elections in 2011, 2015 and 2019 respectively. In the region, regionalism, party identification and religious factors were reflective in the voting behaviour of the electorate. In a nutshell, the APC candidate won four geo-political zones (North-West, North-East, North-Central and South-West) while PDP won only two regions (South-East and South-West). The national voter turnout was 35.6%, the lowest in the history of presidential elections in Nigeria. The unpleasant development was largely attributed to widespread public disillusionment on the abysmal failure of governance and national security challenges seen in Herdsmen killings and abductions in the Middle Belt and Southern part of Nigeria including the unabated onslaught of Boko Haram insurgents in the North-East.

## The Permutations of 2023 Presidential Election

In May 29, 2023, Buhari's Presidency ends in accordance to Nigerian constitution of 1999. The current narrative among the Nigerian political elite across party lines is, "Power Shift" to Southern Nigeria. It is therefore anticipated that the frontline political parties, the ruling All Progressive Congress, APC and opponent Peoples Democratic Party, PDP shall field presidential candidates of southern origin in 2023 national election. However, none of these political parties have decided or reached a consensus from which part of Nigeria federation the presidential candidates shall emerge. It is important to note that politics of rotation of power or politics of zoning between the South and North divide is entrenched partisan practice (not provided in the constitution) by the Nigerian Elite to ensure equity and fairness in the control of national power and resources among the ethnic nationalities and regions in Nigerian federation. And, this practice has over the years influenced voting pattern in presidential election along regional, ethnic and religious lines. However, the current heightened insecurity challenges (insurgency, banditry and abductions) in the North has continued to undermine expectations of national development occasioned with insurrectional activities and secession agitations (that stem from Fulani Herdsmen killings) in the South-West and South-East also constituted a serious threat to the unity of the country. Also, the present socio- economic realities with national inflation rate of 18.12% in June, 2021 and high food inflation rate of double digits with over 20 million youth unemployment where more than 50% Nigeria population lives under \$ 1 and unable to access portable drinking water and medical services. In reference to current regional perceptions towards politics of 2023 presidential election, the North-East region is currently grappling with crises of Boko Haram insurgency and abductions which have assumed an alarming level where the convoy of a state Governor was attacked twice. This ugly reality has shifted the attention of the regional elite from national politics to security measures to stem the tides of insecurity crises in the region. In the North-West, the region is also grappling with security challenges obvious in incessant banditry and abduction of school children. However, the regional elite share the national narrative that "power should shift to south" while a northern Muslim should serve as a presidential running mate across party lines. In the North-Central, the region is also fervently challenged by widespread banditry and Herdsmen killings where a Governor was attacked in his farm. However, the regional elite also share the national narrative that "power should shift to south, particularly the



South-East" and look forward for better bargaining. In the South-South, the region is currently the safest among the geo-political zones in the country with isolated incidences of Farmers-Herdsmen conflicts and pipe-lines vandalism. The region also share the optimism that "power should shift to south" particularly the South-East. Remarkably, South-South elite of Igbo extraction are currently establishing contacts with the North for better bargaining for 2023 presidential election. In the South-East, it is a mixed reaction where the regional elite campaign fervently for Nigeria President of Eastern/Igbo extraction in 2023 and the youths and proportional percentage of the Easterners are more concerned for secession and Republic of Biafra from Nigerian federation. Hence, there is a stretched gap between the expectations of the elite and the people in South-East. Similarly, in the South-West, the euphoria of Nigerian President of Yoruba extraction is yet to be widespread among the regional indigenes. Currently, there is upset among Yoruba youths for secession and Yoruba sovereignty from Nigerian federation which many believed may undermine the chances of the region in presidential race with the South-East. Although, there has been sustained campaign among the royalists for the National Leader of APC, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu to contest for the office of Nigeria President in 2023. However, many observed that such ambition will be extremely difficult for the National Leader (who is from Lagos state in South-West) considering his Islamic religious background (where many northern elite insist on southern Christian presidential candidate and Muslim northern presidential running mate). This is very critical factor of consideration in view of the fact that the North is predominantly Islamic in faith and would prefer a Northern-Muslim presidential running mate instead of a Northern-Christian presidential running mate in 2023 to further accentuate the criticality of religion in Nigerian politics of presidential election. To this extent, the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria shall be the most intriguing process in consideration of the current trends of intrigues across regions and party lines. However, Nigerians may witness the following puzzles:

- Fundamental issues of restructuring, national economy and national security may feature prominently in 2023 presidential election campaign. These issues may influence voter preference of millions of Nigerians particularly the young voters across regions and states but ethno-religious considerations will still remain instrumental especially in a country that is more divided under this Presidency as never seen before.
- Massive defection and partisan realignments toward the late months of 2021 and early months of 2022. In the South-East and South-South, we may witness defection of leading elite and politicians to the ruling All Progressive Congress, APC and defection of leading elite and politicians to People's Democratic Party, PDP in the North.
- National widespread voter apathy in 2023 presidential election if the current national challenges persist. The low voter turnout may be witnessed in South-West, North-East and near boycott in the South-East. However, the South-Eastern boycott or low turnout in 2023 presidential election may be marginally reversed if the PDP or APC present a presidential candidate from the South-East extraction.
- Peoples Democratic Party may lose the South-East and South-South in 2023 presidential elections if it violates its rotational power formula (repetition of 2011 scenario and its outcome in 2015) by presenting a Northern Presidential candidate of Islamic religious faith and Southern Presidential running mate. And, the ruling APC may win the two regions for the first time if it leverage efficiently on the failure of PDP by fielding an Igbo Presidential candidate and Northern presidential running mate otherwise, the party may continue

to remain unpopular in the two regions as observed in 2015 and 2019 presidential election outcomes.

- The 2023 presidential election may witness emergence of an interventional party platform and regional realignments. The new party alliance may emerge to accommodate defectors and reconciles aggrieved interests from the two dominant political parties, APC and PDP. And, the failure of the dominant ruling party, APC and opponent party, PDP to elicit public support for its candidates may be the electoral gain of this new party alliance.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The dialectics of ethno-religious voting behaviour in Nigerian presidential elections is factuality not an illusion as revealed in three successive presidential elections in 2011, 2015 and 2019 respectively. This reality is susceptible to the cleavage politics of regionalism that is historic in character and dynamics in fervent struggle for power and resources in a society of imbalance and inequalities. What drives the interest of Nigerian politicians and the electorate in presidential elections is fundamentally identity consideration with emphasis on ethnicity and religion while issues of governance and economy remain less attractive and virtually insignificant. The dialectics of ethno-religious voting behaviour across states and regions of the federation was seen in the 2011 presidential election, intensely observed in 2015 presidential election and less significant in 2019 presidential elections. Hence, it is permutated that 2023 presidential election may elicit regional and ethno-religious voting behaviour or issue-driven voting behaviour in a nation-state grappling with myriad of daunting challenges of recessive economy, national security and development. Suffice to state that the reality of ethno-religious voting behaviour beyond the fundamental issues of national development is the bane of vicious cycle of failed governance, dysfunctionality state institutions, insecurity and poverty. Ethno-religious identity in Nigerian presidential politics and electoral behaviour is endemic but can be mitigated when the citizens realized the fact that political leadership of Nigerian state beyond identity politics is critical to national survival and development. This lofty ideal begins with national orientation drive for national consciousness and national rebirth. The clarion call for issue-driven voting behaviour should be sustained by consistent campaign for national awareness and consciousness. The National Orientation Agency, NOA should provide constructive education on priorities of national development and the need for vote of a credible candidate in 2023 presidential election beyond ethno-religious considerations. Furthermore, governance should be prioritized in deference to national expectation to reverse the citizen trust deficit in state institutions and its statutory responsibilities. To this end, the Nigerian state institutions should be strengthened to be proficient in credence to precedents, law, checks etc. In a specific sense, the Nigeria political class should also realized the fact that manipulation of ethnic-religious consideration for electoral support may undermine national security in loss of lives and properties as seen in 2011 post-presidential election violence. The current situation in the country exigently requires a paradigm shift in voting orientation of Nigerians in 2023 presidential election beyond cleavage driven politics. In other words, it is suggested that Nigerians should search and support leaders or candidates of competence, tact, antecedents and credibility to provide meaningful leadership for national transformation. Finally, what Nigerians desired currently is Nigerian President for Nigerian people and state. Although, power-shift is valuable for national unity however, let Nigerians vote for visionary leadership for national transformation.

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