

**Ethnicity and Political
Behaviour During
Nigeria's 2023
Presidential Election**

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Abstract

Ethnicity has historically played a significant role in shaping political behaviour around the world, influencing government structures, political systems, and political mobilisation. This has encouraged the engagement of ethnic politics, especially during elections. The 2023 Nigerian presidential election further demonstrated the influence of ethnicity in Nigeria's politics. Ethnic sentiment in political behaviour has been influential in furthering ethnic politics, ethnic violence, and ethnic loyalty to the detriment of national unity and development. This study examined the ongoing influence of ethnicity on political behaviour, using the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria as a case study. The study adopted social

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identity theory and Instrumentalism theory. This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys. This study employed multi-sampling techniques, which included clustered, purposive and accidental sampling techniques. The research found that ethnicity has a notable influence on the political behaviour of citizens, especially in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. However, the influence is based on factors like ethnic-driven campaigns, ethnic loyalty and interest, which illuminated the dynamic nature of ethnicity as both a unifying and divisive force in Nigeria's political system. The paper concluded that ethnicity remains a double-edged sword, mobilising tribal loyalties while fuelling violence through the employment of ethnic favouritism and exclusion. The study recommends that Nigeria's government should enforce legal frameworks to penalise political actors who promote ethnic-based campaigns.

Keywords: Political behaviour, Ethnicity, Nigeria, Ethnic Violence, Ethnic Politics.

Introduction

Around the world, political behaviour is determined by political events, history, ideologies, shared goals, and activities within a state. According to Orunbon (2022:5), political behaviour refers to "any form of (individual or collective) involvement in the political process, or any activity which has political consequences in relation to government and policy." It involves forms of political participation and illegal political activities. Ethnicity plays a major role in determining the political behaviour of citizens around the world. According to Waterbury (2020), ethnicity and political behaviour matter in world politics, particularly when ethnic politics incites violence between and within states. She argues that ethnic nationalism and support for ethnic minorities cause conflicts. For example, Hungary's support for Hungarian minorities in Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine has led to diplomatic friction since the 1990s, thereby undermining international stability.

In Africa, according to Seife (2022:6), most countries are multi-ethnic melting pots with rich cultural heritages and significant linguistic and ethnic diversity. The Berlin Conference (1884-1885) saw the division of Africa into boundaries without considering ethnic and cultural groups. Since then, ethnicity has been a recurring issue in African political systems. The genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda 1994, mass expulsions of ethnic minorities in Uganda 1973, ethnic support in Kenya during the 2007, 2013 and 2017 elections exemplify how ethnicity influences political behaviour (Hartmann, 2019).

The issue of ethnicity and how it relates to political behaviour in Nigeria can be traced to the amalgamation that forced ethnic groups of the northern and southern protectorates to become a political entity in 1914. It resulted in competition, prejudice, and conflict among ethnic groups in the Nigeria (Oladipo and Bodunde, 2020). According to Ayate and Iorhen (2013), ethnic sentiments were deliberately introduced by the British colonial government for political and economic objectives. And since the end of colonialism in 1960, ethnicity has been played dominant roles in post-colonial Nigeria, accounting for many economic, social, political, and administrative problems in Nigeria.

Since the Fourth Republic in 1999, ethnicity has consistently influenced voting patterns. In the 1999 election, Olusegun Obasanjo (Peoples Democratic Party- PDD) and Olu Falae (Alliance for Democracy- AD) were the major candidates. AD, led by a Yoruba candidate, dominated the South-West. The Yoruba elites viewed Obasanjo, as a Northern candidate and believed their interests would be protected under Falae (Isaiaq, Oluwashina & Adebola, 2019). Okolo (2022) noted that the 2011 presidential election was one of the most ethnically driven elections in Nigeria's history. The North expected a northern candidate to complete Yar'Adua's term due to an unwritten rule of rotating power between the North and the South; however, this fell through with Jonathan's victory, leading to resentment and fuelling ethnic tensions.

The 2023 presidential election was keenly contested, with each candidate having strong ethnic support. Tinubu (APC), a Yoruba Muslim, chose Kashim Shatima, a Kanuri Muslim as his running mate to draw support from the South-West and North-East (Ibrahim et al., 2024). Adeyemi (2023) noted

that there is an informal agreement between political parties to rotate power between the North and the South, and Christians and Muslims, raising concerns about the competence of candidates versus ethnic alignment.

The connection between ethnicity and political behaviour is an engaging subject in a state marked by identity politics, political polarisation and issues of inequality and discrimination. The desire for control of resources in the state has led the dominant groups in Nigeria (Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa) to seek control of political power. Issues relating to the political behaviour of citizens are evident in the political decisions of Nigerians and pose a challenge to the need for equal representation for the people. The political behaviour of citizens relating to ethnicity raises concerns about the rationality of the electoral process and electorate decisions, which leads to the need to interrogate the role of ethnicity in shaping political behaviour in Nigeria's elections, using the 2023 Nigeria's presidential election as a case study.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to determine how ethnicity played a role in the voting behaviour of citizens during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

Hypotheses

H_{01} : Ethnicity had no significant effect on political behaviour during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

H_1 : Ethnicity had a significant effect on political behaviour during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted the Convergent parallel research design. The target population for the study is 1,884,626 that registered for Nigeria's 2023 presidential election from the two selected states. Lagos and Anambra were selected because of their high ethnic diversity and the major voting of a particular candidate in both states. The sample size was determined using Tao Yamane to arrive at 400 samples. Clustered sampling, purposive sampling and accidental sampling techniques were used. Instruments of data collection were validated questionnaire and interview guide. The study

utilised Cronbach's Alpha to test the instruments' reliability. The descriptive statistics was used to analyse data, using frequency and percentage table to analyse the response of participants. Inferential analysis was used to explore and to test the research hypothesis and measure the relationship between the independent variable and sub-variables of the dependent variable, using Pearson correlation.

Review of Literature

Ethnic Politics

Ethnic politics is the "organisation and formation of social elite groups whose goals are strategically attained through the mobilisation of ethnic groups" (Oji, et al, 2024:6). It involves political actors utilising ethnic identity, often using sentimental strategies to gain support, due to their desire for political power. Kings (2018) cited Nnoli (1978) in his book, "*Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*", describing ethnic politics as the usage of ethnic identity to gain political and economic advantages, often leading to social exclusion and national disunity.

Emeka (2024:302) argues that "ethnic politics has evolved into self-perpetuating cycle, characterised by intrigues and deceit aimed at maintaining power." It promotes the principle of mediocrity, weakens nationalism and fosters self-serving policies detrimental to national development. It is an issue across the globe, where ethnic, racial and religious identities are mobilised for political gains, and are visible in both democratic and authoritarian regimes, thereby contributing to polarisation. Ikre (2023) contends that the challenge of ethnic politics does not arise from ethnicity itself but, predominantly, from political elites who mobilise ethnic groups and manipulate their grievances, utilising it as a tool to achieve their political goals. Globally, ethnic politics is often linked to the history of a country. In Africa, ethnic politics is linked to the colonial legacies where artificial borders grouped diverse ethnic communities together, leading to ethnic competition. In Europe, ethnic politics is historically shaped by nationalist movements and migration. In Asia, caste system and ethnic minorities struggles influenced ethnic politics, while in the Americas, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities have faced long-standing marginalisation.

Ethnic politics has both positive and negative effects on the politics of a nation. It has allowed diasporas to maintain strong culture, led to the emergence of multicultural identities and interethnic cooperation. While it fosters inclusion and representation, it also threatens political stability, exacerbates marginalisation, and can escalate into conflict as seen in Nigeria, Sudan, and Rwanda. It has fuelled secessionist movements where ethnic groups sought independence in regions like Nigeria, Spain, and the UK (Zambuk, 2023). Ethnic politics continues to be a dynamic and complex aspect of contemporary world politics. Therefore, critical analysis is necessary to understand its dominance and ensure democratic integrity.

Ethnicity and Issues in Nigeria's Politics

Ethnicity is not a danger or threat to Nigeria's politics; rather, the manipulation and politicisation of ethnicity pose significant problems. The Nigerian state has struggled to combat ethnic divisions and ensure equal representation in government, which has hindered the promotion of national unity. Ethnicity continues to feature in Nigeria's politics, fostering "politics by identity" as ethnic groups protect their own interests over national interest. This has led to conflicts in Nigeria's history, including the Nigeria-Biafra war. Before independence in Nigeria, colonial powers employed ethnicity as an administrative strategy in the governance of the state, amalgamating diverse ethnic groups into a single geopolitical entity. Ethnic sentiments followed post-independence, fuelling competition for resources and political dominance among ethnic groups (Alliyu & Kalejaiye, 2013). Ethnicity was a deliberate effort by the colonialists to control the colonies in Africa.

Nnoli in his work, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (1978), traces the origin of ethnicity in Nigeria and blamed it on European imperialism. He noted that tribalism, which became a recurring feature in the Nigerian system, was part of colonial racism, aimed at alienating Africans for complete control (Kings, 2018). According to Salawu and Hassan (2018), the colonial constitutions, particularly, the Arthur Richard 1946 constitution was a major contributor to ethnic politics. Scholars observed that the 1946 constitution began ethnic fragmentation and embedded ethnicity into Nigeria's political framework.

Ethnicity has been a powerful force to reckon with in shaping political decisions in the Nigerian state. The multi-party system has helped in creating ethnic problems and furthering political challenges in the country. Ethnicity has brought distrust and conflict among ethnic groups in the struggle for resources (Oladipo and Offor, 2021). It has promoted a “Us” vs “Them” mentality. It has a negative connotation for Nigeria’s politics and democracy, including election rigging, Nigeria’s civil war, ethno-religious violence, intimidation by political parties, inter-ethnic violence, and the inability of minority groups to attain political offices (Emoghene & Okolie, 2020).

An examination of Nigeria’s previous elections reveals persistent issues with Nigerian politics. The 2023 election was plagued with ethnic-driven political behaviour. According to Nwabuafo (2023), prior to the election, the 2023 election was shaping up to be a tribal competition. Political support appeared to be built around ethnic allegiance. Statemen became tribesmen, and nationalists tribalists. Anti-ethnic speeches by political parties and candidates were used to harden the minds of the electorate against opposition ethnic groups. Social media was a platform used to promote this agenda.

Political Behaviour in Nigeria

Political behaviour is the study of the way people think, act, and feel about politics. It involves public opinion, ideology, partisanship, political participation, campaigns, political violence, the media, and political knowledge (Settle, 2014). People act according to how they perceive a system to be. Chimes (2020) claims that Nigerians perceive Nigeria’s politics to be a dirty game for criminally minded people, a major source of stealing wealth, full of dishonest people who exploit various strategies to survive and remain relevant actors in the system. Most politicians are perceived to be corrupt and bad leaders, unprincipled and opportunistic. This has shaped Nigerian’s behaviour towards Nigeria’s politics. Exhibition of political behaviour is seen mostly during elections with the struggle for power and control. Political behaviour proposes that the rise and fall of a polity is due to the kind of political beliefs’ systems, orientations, culture, and dispositions of the political leaders and citizens. There is no politics without a belief system attached to its people. Political culture shapes the political behaviour of citizens in a country.

According to Sule (2019), President Olusegun Obasanjo noted in the 2007 elections that “election is a war, and you must win it by all means possible.” This statement implies that the votes were not necessarily needed; rather, the use of thuggery, coercion, and rigging would help get political power. Utterances like this shape how electorates act and react during elections. The political behaviour of electorates, political parties, and candidates during the 2023 elections was shaped by ethnic considerations. Political parties relied on ethno-religious networks, candidates and citizens engaged in ethnic conflicts, and there were reports of suppression of voters. Also, there was the usage of ethnic narratives to mobilise voters (Oduola, 2023).

Nigerians entered the 2023 elections amidst severe economic and social problems, and with this, they clamoured for change, thus leading to the rise of strong youth movements. The political behaviour of the electorate involved strong engagement in political activities in the run-up to the 2023 election. However, the turnout was 25%- a low record- attributed to the fears of insecurity and violence (Dirk, 2023). According to Carboni and Serwat (2023), over 200 violent events were recorded leading up to the elections. The method of election campaigns also shaped pre-election issues and the voting patterns of the electorate.

Voting Patterns and Voting Behaviour in Nigeria’s Elections

Voting patterns and behaviour are forms of electoral behaviour, and studying them helps to understand the factors that influence electorate’s decisions during elections, such as why people vote the way they do or what the implications of such decisions will be. Voting patterns and behaviour reflect in the decisions and actions that voters make during elections, and various factors influence them, one of which is shared characteristics between voters and candidates. According to Adebisi (2021), voting behaviour involves voting in elections, involvement in electoral campaigns, and participation in rallies. It involves both participation and non-participation in elections. Some factors that could influence voting behaviour and patterns are government performance, party loyalty, the charisma of the candidates, and many more. Adebisi (2021), citing Hoffman and Long (2013) on voting behaviour and patterns, observed that ethnic affiliation is the most powerful

determinant of voting patterns and behaviour in a multi-ethnic democracy and that voters cast their votes to show electoral support for co-ethnics. Eze (2021), in his analyses of the voting behaviour among south-western states, using a case study of Oyo and Osun States, noted low electoral participation and high level of mistrust among the electorate in the electoral system. He noted that electorates are biased as they vote not necessarily for the most qualified candidates.

The 2015 Nigerian election showed the ruling party lost. It is believed that the 2015 election truly reflected the people's wishes. Situmo, Nwobashi and Nwefuru (2019) observed that the number of votes scored by the All Progressive Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) indicates a manifestation of ethnicity in voting behaviour. They posited that ethnicity was a determinant in the 2015 elections' outcome. An analysis of the result shows the voting pattern of the bloc votes for the leading candidate in each geo-political zone. The APC presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari got majority of his votes from the North-East and the North-West geo-political zones, while the PDP presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar got his from the South-East and the South geo-political zones. The dominance of each candidate in each geo-political zone can be explained within the context of a political party, as the personality of the candidates and the ethnic identity of the candidates, contributed to the votes they had. Both candidates drew support from ethnic bases (Adebisi, 2021).

In the 2023 Nigerian elections, over 93 million people voted. Less than half of the population in each of the 36 states turned out to vote. The North-West had about 6.6 million votes, the North-Central had 4.5 million votes, the South-West had about 4.25 million votes, the North-East had about 3.4 million votes, the South-South had about 2.85 million and the South-East had about 2.2 million votes. The APC candidate Bola Ahmed Tinubu won the North-West, North-Central and the South-West. The labour party candidate won the South-East and the South-South, while the PDP candidate won more votes in the North-East (Yusuf 2023). Analysing it, it could be seen that the presidential candidates won most votes in the geo-political zones with their ethnicity, except for Atiku Abubakar, who lost his geo-political zone to Tinubu.

According to Babangida (2023), Atiku was able to get most votes in the North because he was the strongest northern in the absence of Muhammadu Buhari. In the build-up to the election, a group named Na Ka Sai Baka, translated as “your own is your own” campaigned a lot in the North for Atiku, asking individuals to vote for him.

From the analysis above, it could be seen that ethnicity influences voting patterns in elections especially in the 2023 elections. It was less obvious in elections where the electorate wanted a change in government and voted for the opposition to get rid of the ruling party.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws upon Social Identity Theory by Henri Tajfel and Instrumentalism Theory by John Dewey. Through instrumentalism Theory, Dewey proposed that ideas are tools or instruments that people and individuals use to make a greater sense of the world. “Ideas are plans of action and predictors of future events” (Britannica, 2023). He believed that the most important part of an idea was its value as an instrument of action. John Dewey maintains that thoughts, theories, and concepts are important instruments for solving practical problems.

Ethnicity is a tool used by individuals to achieve certain goals as individuals who share certain common characteristics with one another can be effectively mobilised to influence public affairs and policies. Individuals elect their ethnic members to obtain access to national and valuable resources to achieve their goals. This is usually done because of a shared sense of belonging to having the same common goals in life (Yeghiazaryan, 2018).

Supporters of instrumentalism see ethnicity as a variable factor. According to Farkhod (2021), ethnicity could be seen as a political and social event and ethnic groups could be seen as “Interest Groups”. According to him, ethnic groups were not identified with “political associations and activities,” but they later became politicised because of interests in politics and economics. It is a strategic basis for coalition among ethnic groups. According to him, politics behaviour of ethnic conflicts and civil wars among ethnic groups do not arise from ethnic feelings but to achieve certain goals and obtain resources. Instrumentalism explains how

ethnicity is useful in explicating support for political candidates, why the electorate and political parties adopt behaviours that will maximise their interests, and how it is also employed in canvassing for votes during elections.

Social Identity Theory, propounded by Henri Tajfel in the late 1960s and early 1970s, aims to specify and predict the situation in which individuals think of themselves as individuals or as a member of a group. It considers the effects of personal and social identities on group behaviour and the perceptions of individuals. This theory originated from the belief that group membership can help people discover themselves and help determine how they relate with others in society (Ellemers, 2023). Membership of a group has a way of informing the actions and inactions of group, thereby conferring common disposition, identity, vision and perspective (Oladipo, 2022).

According to Nyiayaana (2019), social factors such as religion and ethnicity are important determinants of the electorate's voting decisions. A person's identity influences their voting decision-making. The emotional and personal attachment to one's ethnic group, an attachment that is historically rooted, can influence their political behaviour. It promotes a "Us" vs "Them". According to Adebisi (2019), studies carried out by Lazarfeld et al (1994) show that the social and cultural environments of a person, in this case their ethnic group, are deciding factors that influence their voting pattern and behaviour. This means that there is a strong correlation between an individual's social group and their political behaviour. Their choice is conditioned by their membership in an ethnic group.

Political parties and candidates have most times relied on ethnicity to mobilise voters, as could be seen in the creation of political parties along ethnic lines in the first republic, and the electoral outcomes have often been determined along those lines, which could be seen with geo-political zones voting for their ethnic candidates. When voters identify with their co-ethnic group candidate and they win, they derive a sense of pride and self-esteem from being associated with ethnicity (Abdullahi, 2023).

Social Identity Theory provides an important framework for understanding the impact of ethnicity on the political behaviour of electorates. Both theories- Instrumentalism Theory and Social Identity Theory- explain the relationship between ethnicity and political behaviour. How ethnicity can be weaponised to affect political behaviour, and how ethnic identity of a citizen shapes his political behaviour in the country.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The objective of the study sought to examine the effect of ethnicity on political behaviour during the Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. To achieve this objective, participants were requested to indicate their level of agreement with the statements. The findings showed the frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Effect of ethnicity on political behaviour during the Nigeria's 2023 presidential election.

Items	SA F(%)	A F(%)	U F(%)	D F(%)	SD F(%)	Total	
						MS	TD
Ethnic background of the candidates influenced your voting decision	57 (14.6%)	58 (14.9%)	46 (11.8%)	104 (26.7%)	125 (32.1%)	2.53	1.44
Ethnic-based political campaigns influenced election outcome	117 (30.0%)	136 (34.9%)	47 (12.1%)	52 (13.3%)	38 (9.7%)	3.62	1.30
Ethnicity influenced your decision to vote or not to vote in the 2023 presidential election	54 (13.8%)	30 (7.7%)	67 (17.2%)	102 (26.2%)	137 (35.1%)	2.39	1.39
Voting along ethnic lines is a common practice in your community	101 (25.9%)	141 (36.2%)	71 (18.2%)	45 (11.5%)	32 (8.2%)	3.60	1.22
Voting for a particular candidate is influenced by pressure from your ethnic group or ethnic-based political party	59 (15.1%)	64 (16.4%)	78 (20.0%)	84 (21.5%)	105 (26.9%)	2.71	1.41
AWM						2.97	1.35

Source: Author's computation of Field Survey Data (2024) using SPSS version 23

Table 1 examines the extent to which ethnicity influenced the voting behaviour of respondents during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. The responses reveal a generally low agreement that ethnic background influenced voting decisions. About 14.6% of respondents strongly agreed, while 14.9% agreed. In contrast, a substantial 32.1% strongly disagreed, and 26.7% disagreed, indicating that many respondents downplayed the role of ethnicity in their voting decisions. The mean score was 2.53, reflecting a low level of agreement overall, with a relatively high standard deviation of 1.44, suggesting diverse opinions.

Respondents generally acknowledged the influence of ethnic-based political campaigns on election outcomes. Approximately 34.9% agreed, and 30.0% strongly agreed that such campaigns played a role. About 12.1% were undecided, while 13.3% disagreed, and 9.7% strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.62 reflects a moderately high level of agreement, with a standard deviation of 1.30, showing some variability in responses. The influence of ethnicity on decisions to vote or not to vote was rated low by respondents. While 13.8% strongly agreed and 7.7% agreed, a large proportion strongly disagreed (35.1%) or disagreed (26.2%). The mean score is 2.39, one of the lowest among the items, and the standard deviation of 1.39 indicates significant diversity in views.

Furthermore, voting tendencies along ethnic lines appeared more common, with 36.2% agreeing and 25.9% strongly agreeing that it is a prevalent practice in their communities. About 18.2% were undecided, while smaller proportions disagreed (11.5%) or strongly disagreed (8.2%). The mean score was 3.60, which suggests a moderate prevalence of ethnic voting, with a standard deviation of 1.22, indicating relatively consistent responses.

In addition, the responses show a mixed perception of ethnic pressure influencing voting decisions. Only 15.1% strongly agreed and 16.4% agreed, while a combined 48.4% either disagreed (21.5%) or strongly disagreed (26.9%). The mean score of 2.71 reflects a low to moderate influence of ethnic pressure, and the standard deviation of 1.41 highlights notable variability in opinions.

In summary, the results in Table 1 indicate that ethnicity has a mixed but notable influence on voting behaviour during the 2023 presidential

election. The highest mean scores (3.62 and 3.60) suggest moderate agreement that ethnic-based campaigns and voting along ethnic lines are prevalent. However, lower mean scores (2.97) reflect weaker perceptions of ethnicity as a decisive factor in individual voting choices or participation. The standard deviations of 1.35 indicate significant diversity in respondents' views, which may reflect regional or individual differences in the salience of ethnicity in political behaviour.

Hypotheses

H₀₁ Ethnicity had no significant effect on political behaviour during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

H₁ Ethnicity had a significant effect on political behaviour during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 2 Simple linear regression showing the effects of ethnicity on political behaviour of the electorate in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election

Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	R ²
1	(Constant)	1.344	.233		5.780	.000	0.003
	Political behavior	.015	.014	.054	1.063	.288	

a. Dependent Variable: Ethnicity

Table 2 indicates that ethnicity has no significant effect on the political behaviour of electorates in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election ($R^2=0.003$, $\hat{a}=0.054$, $t=1.063$, $p>0.05$). The model shows that ethnicity could explain 1 percent variation ($R^2=0.003$) in political behaviour. Consequently, the null hypothesis which states that ethnicity has no significant effect on the political behaviour of electorates in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election was accepted. The model further shows that ethnicity has a weak positive ($r=0.054$, $p>0.05$) insignificant effect on political behaviour. This suggests that an increase in ethnic sentiments was not associated with an increase in political behaviour.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the data reveal strong thoughts of the influence of ethnicity on political behaviour during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. While respondents unarguably did not see ethnicity as a direct factor in their individual voting decisions, they acknowledged its role in shaping electorates' choices, such as ethnic-based campaigns and community voting patterns. Respondents demonstrated moderate agreement that ethnic-based campaigns influenced election outcomes, with a mean score of 3.62 indicating widespread recognition of such campaigns' impact. Voting along ethnic lines was perceived as a common practice, with a mean score of 3.60. A significant proportion of respondents (36.2% agreeing and 25.9% strongly agreeing) affirmed its prevalence in their communities. However, the relatively low undecided rate (18.2%) suggests that this perception is widely acknowledged, even among those who may not engage in the practice themselves. The influence of ethnic pressure on voting decisions showed mixed results, with the respondents strongly disagreeing, indicating that many voters did not feel constrained by ethnic expectations. Also, the findings indicate that respondents were less likely to agree that their ethnic background influenced their voting decisions. With a mean score of 2.53 and significant proportions strongly disagreeing (32.1%) and disagreeing (26.7%), the data suggests that many voters either reject the notion or are unwilling to acknowledge ethnicity as a determinant of their choices. These results highlight the evolving nature of political behaviour in Nigeria, where ethnic considerations remain an important issue but may be moderated by other factors, such as candidate appeal and voters' education.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the extensive discussion presented regarding the role of ethnicity and its impact on political behaviour during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, several key conclusions can be drawn. First, it is evident that ethnicity had a moderate influence on political behaviour, though it is not a decisive factor in individuals' voting choices. By setting proper review and restructuring of the democratic system, the government will promote electoral transparency, inclusion, ethnic harmony, national unity and consciousness and reduce ethnic tensions.

The study revealed the evolving nature of political behaviour, where ethnicity is an important issue; however, it is influenced by a candidate's appeal, interest and political awareness. Moreover, the role of ethnicity in political behaviour, revealed the struggle between ethnic loyalty and merit-based politics. Studies indicated that there should be enforcement of legal frameworks to penalise political actors and parties that promote ethnicity through ethnic-based campaigns.

Additionally, the influence of ethnic-based political campaigns in the electoral system continues to persist, contributing to ethnic-based exclusion, favouritism and prejudice. Addressing these issues alongside promoting societies where citizens feel included is essential to reduce ethnic-based political behaviour in the political system.

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