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THE PIVOTAL INFLUENCE OF IDENTITY POLITICS IN SHAPING ELECTORAL OUTCOMES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of identity politics in shaping electoral outcomes in Nigeria, a country with diverse ethnic, religious, and regional identities. It argues that identity politics is a pervasive and influential factor in Nigerian elections, as voters tend to align with candidates who share or appeal to their identity groups. The paper analyzes how identity politics affects voter behavior, party formation, campaign strategies, and electoral violence in Nigeria. It also discusses the implications of identity politics for democratic consolidation, national integration, and political development in Nigeria. The study concludes that identity politics is a pervasive and influential factor in Nigerian elections, as voters tend to align with candidates who share or appeal to their identity markers with some recommendations that will move Nigeria beyond identity politics and embrace a more inclusive and issue-based approach to electoral politics, this way Nigeria can enhance its democratic development and stability.

Keywords: Electoral outcomes, Governance, Democracy, Identity politics, Elections.

Background to the Study

Electoral outcomes can be likened to a sports match. Just as teams compete to win a game, political parties and candidates contest elections to secure victory. The strategies, tactics, and performances throughout the campaign period are akin to the intensity and skill displayed by athletes on the field. The voters, in this case, act as the referees, judges, or spectators, observing the match and ultimately deciding the winner. Finally, the electoral process, including the counting of votes and declaration of results, is comparable to the post-game analysis, where statistics and scores are assessed to determine the final outcome. According to Hix & Marsh (2007), electoral outcomes are defined as the political consequences of electoral rules on party strategy and behavior. They argue that electoral systems can either "punish" or "reward" political parties based on their strategic choices, such as candidate selection, policy platforms, or coalition formation.

Whereas, Berinsky (2015) defines electoral outcomes as the consequences of changing electoral rules, such as redistricting or introducing proportional representation, on party competition, voter behaviour, and candidate selection. On the other hand, Powell (2010) examined the concepts of majoritarian and proportional visions of democracy and their consequences for electoral outcomes. He defines electoral outcomes as the resulting distribution of seats or political power obtained by political parties in elections, influenced by the specific electoral system in place.

There have been different views about electoral outcomes by different researchers due to different factors and reasons. One of the key arguments for electoral outcomes is that they help ensure fair representation of the diverse interests and preferences of the electorate. By electing representatives through a democratic process, it allows for a wider range of voices and ideas to be heard and incorporated into policymaking (Diamond, 2012).

While, Samuels *et al*. (2021) submit that electoral outcomes is a system that provides a mechanism for holding politicians accountable for their actions and decisions. Through regularly scheduled elections, citizens have the opportunity to express their approval or disapproval of the elected officials' performance. This serves as a check on power and encourages politicians to act in the best interest of the people they represent.

Whereas, critics of electoral outcomes argue that electoral outcomes can lead to the marginalization or oppression of minority groups by the majority. In a winner-takes-all system, the preferences of the minority may be ignored or overridden, resulting in policies that are not representative of the overall population's desires. This undermines principles of equality and fairness according to Anderson, 2017.

As regards manipulation and corruption, skeptics point to the potential for electoral outcomes to be influenced by manipulation, corruption, or an unfair distribution of resources. Electoral fraud, gerrymandering, and the influence of money in campaigns can undermine the integrity of elections and erode trust in the process. This can result in outcomes that do not accurately reflect the will of the people (Trechsel, 2015). These arguments present contrasting perspectives on the impact and legitimacy of electoral outcomes, highlighting the importance of ongoing debates surrounding electoral systems and their influence on democracy and representation.

Meanwhile, electoral outcomes in Nigeria have witnessed various developments in recent years, including victories, defeats, controversies, and legal battle. An instance of 2015 Presidential Election, which saw the incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan, from the People's Democratic Party (PDP), face opposition from Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC). Muhammadu Buhari emerged as the winner with 15.4 million votes, while Goodluck Jonathan garnered 12.8 million votes (BBC, 2015). This marked the first time in Nigeria's history that an opposition candidate defeated an incumbent president through the democratic process (Reuters, 2015). In 2019 Presidential Election, Muhammadu Buhari sought re-election, competing against Atiku Abubakar of the PDP. Buhari was declared the winner with 15.2 million votes, while Atiku Abubakar received 11.3 million votes (Al Jazeera, 2019). However, the outcome was challenged by Atiku Abubakar, who alleged irregularities and filed a petition at the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal (Premium Times, 2019). The 2020 Edo State Gubernatorial Election took place amid intense political rivalry between the incumbent governor, Godwin Obaseki of the PDP, and Osagie Ize-Iyamu of the APC. Godwin Obaseki emerged victorious with 307,955 votes, while Osagie Ize-Iyamu received 223,619 votes (The Guardian, 2020). This victory represented a significant feat for the PDP, as Edo State has historically been considered an APC stronghold (Vanguard, 2020). These electoral outcomes illustrate the evolving political landscape in Nigeria, characterized by shifts in power dynamics, high-stakes contests, and legal disputes.

Electoral outcomes and identity politics are two interconnected concepts in political science and sociology that have significant impacts on elections and society. Identity politics refers to the political mobilization and organization around specific social identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexuality. Electoral outcomes, on the other hand, are the results of elections which determine the composition of a legislative body or the appointment of a political office holder. The relationship between these two concepts lies in how identity politics can shape and influence electoral outcomes.

Chong and Rogers (2015) conducted a study to explore the role of racial solidarity in influencing political behavior and electoral outcomes. They argued that identity politics can shape voting patterns by creating a sense of group loyalty and common interest among racial minorities. They analyzed survey data from the 2000 U.S. presidential election and found that racial solidarity had a significant effect on the vote choice of African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. They also found that racial solidarity moderated the impact of other factors, such as ideology, party identification, and issue positions, on the vote preference of these groups. They concluded that racial solidarity is a powerful force in American politics that can mobilize and unify racial minorities in support of candidates who share their group identity or interests.

The article by Van Heerde-Hudson (2010) explores how Muslim women in Britain engage in politics and how their gendered identity influences their political behavior and representation. The author argues that Muslim women are not passive or oppressed, but rather active and empowered agents who use their religious and cultural identity as a source of strength and legitimacy. The author also shows how Muslim women face multiple challenges and opportunities in the British political system, such as discrimination, stereotyping, mobilization, and leadership. The article provides a nuanced and complex analysis of Muslim women's political participation, highlighting their diversity, agency, and potential.

The article by Schildkraut (2017) examines how the contact between Americans and Muslims affects their voting behavior and political attitudes. The author argues that contact can activate different aspects of identity, such as national, religious, or partisan identity, and influence the preferences and opinions of voters. The author uses survey data and experiments to test the hypotheses and finds that contact can have both positive and negative effects, depending on the context and the type of identity that is salient. The article contributes to the literature on identity politics and intergroup relations in the United States. The aforementioned research studies provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between electoral outcomes and identity politics from various perspectives, including race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and nationality.

In Nigeria, identity politics has played a significant role in shaping electoral outcomes since the country gained independence in 1960. Nigeria is a diverse country with over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own distinct culture, language, and values. This diversity has often led to deep divisions and conflicts along ethnic and religious lines (Falola, 2004). One of the earliest instances of identity politics in Nigeria was during the struggle for independence from British colonial rule. Different ethnic groups, such as the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani, formed their own political organizations to advocate for their interests and aspirations. These

ethnic-based political organizations played a crucial role in mobilizing support for independence and subsequently dominated the country's political landscape.

After gaining independence, Nigeria faced various political and socio-economic challenges that further fueled identity politics. The country experienced a series of military coups and civil wars, leading to the breakaway of the Republic of Biafra in 1967. The Biafra secessionist movement was primarily driven by ethnic and regional grievances, highlighting the potency of identity-based political mobilization.

In recent times, identity politics has continued to exert a pivotal influence on electoral outcomes in Nigeria. Political parties often rely on ethnic and religious affiliations to secure votes, especially in regions where these identities hold significant political sway. Candidates often exploit these divisions by appealing to the ethnic or religious sentiments of voters, promising to protect their interests and address their grievances. Identity politics also plays a significant role in the formation of political alliances and coalitions in Nigeria. Political parties often establish alliances with ethnic-based or religious-based parties to consolidate their support base and secure victory in elections. These alliances are often based on the belief that they can leverage the voting power of particular ethnic or religious groups to gain an advantage over their opponents.

However, while identity politics has influenced electoral outcomes in Nigeria, it has also been a source of tension and conflict. The manipulation of ethnic and religious identities by politicians seeking power has often exacerbated divisions and led to violence during elections. This has undermined the democratic process and hindered Nigeria's progress towards national integration and unity. Identity politics has had a pivotal influence on electoral outcomes in Nigeria. The country's diverse ethnic and religious landscape has provided fertile ground for the mobilization of voters based on their shared identities. While identity-based political mobilization can be a powerful tool for gaining support, it has also contributed to divisions and conflicts within the country by shaping electoral outcomes and has often resulted in deep divisions, violence, and a lack of governance effectiveness. The manipulation of ethnic, religious, and regional identities has often overshadowed issues of governance, development, and national unity in electoral campaigns. The problem lies in the negative consequences of identity politics on electoral outcomes and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The narrow focus on identity markers has often led to the exclusion of competent candidates who do not belong to the dominant ethnic or religious group. It has also led to heightened tensions, violence, and electoral malpractices as political parties prioritize identity-based alliances over merit-based governance.

Furthermore, identity politics in Nigeria has contributed to the perpetuation of a cycle of patronage politics and corruption. Political elites use identity-based alliances to distribute resources and opportunities to their ethnic or religious groups, often neglecting the needs of the broader population. This perpetuates a sense of marginalization and inequality among different groups, exacerbating social and economic divisions.

Therefore, understanding the pivotal influence of identity politics in shaping electoral outcomes in Nigeria is crucial for addressing the challenges of democratic governance, national unity, and inclusive development. By comprehending the complex dynamics of

identity politics, policymakers, electoral institutions, and civil society can develop strategies to promote a more inclusive and issue-based electoral system, hence the study.

The objective of this study is to explore and analyze the pivotal influence of identity politics in shaping electoral outcomes in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the various forms and manifestations of identity politics in Nigerian elections.
2. To assess the impact of identity politics on electoral behaviour and decision-making.
3. To understand how identity politics shape voter mobilization and electoral campaigns.
4. To explore the role of identity politics in shaping party dynamics and coalitions.
5. To analyze the consequences of identity politics on governance and policy-making processes.
6. To identify the challenges and opportunities of identity politics in Nigeria's electoral system.
7. To provide recommendations for fostering more inclusive and issue-based electoral outcomes in Nigeria, moving beyond identity politics.

Literature Review- Concept of Identity Politics

The concept of identity politics has been widely debated and criticized in the academic literature, especially in the fields of political science, sociology, philosophy, and cultural studies. Some of the main issues and controversies that have been raised are:

The relationship between identity politics and universalism: Some critics argue that identity politics undermines the universal values and principles of human rights, democracy, and justice, by promoting particularistic and sectarian interests that divide rather than unite people. They also claim that identity politics fosters a victim mentality and a culture of resentment among the marginalized groups, instead of encouraging them to overcome their disadvantages and participate in the common good. On the other hand, some defenders of identity politics contend that universalism is a false and oppressive ideology that masks the power and privilege of the dominant groups, and that identity politics is a necessary and legitimate way of resisting domination and asserting difference (Fraser, 2010; Taylor, 2014; Young, 2020).

The relationship between identity politics and essentialism: Some critics contend that identity politics relies on a fixed and homogeneous conception of identity that ignores the diversity and complexity of human experience. They also suggest that identity politics reinforces stereotypes and prejudices about the marginalized groups, by reducing them to their identity markers and ignoring their other dimensions. Moreover, they warn that identity politics can lead to intolerance and exclusion of those who do not fit into the predefined categories of identity or who dissent from the dominant views within these groups. On the other hand, some defenders of identity politics argue that identity is not a static or monolithic entity, but a dynamic and fluid process that is constantly negotiated and constructed in relation to others. They also maintain that identity politics does not deny the commonality or hybridity of human beings, but rather acknowledges and celebrates their diversity and specificity (Butler, 2010; Hall, 2016; Laclau & Mouffe, 2015).

The relationship between identity politics and social change: Some critics question the effectiveness and relevance of identity politics for achieving social change and justice. They argue that identity politics distracts from the structural and material causes of inequality and oppression, such as class, capitalism, globalization, etc., and that it focuses on symbolic rather than substantive issues. They also assert that identity politics is a form of co-optation and assimilation by the dominant system, which allows the marginalized groups to gain some recognition and representation, but without challenging the status quo or transforming the underlying power relations. On the other hand, some defenders of identity politics claim that identity politics is a vital and transformative force for social change and justice. They argue that identity politics empowers the marginalized groups to challenge the dominant narratives and norms, to create alternative spaces and discourses, and to mobilize collective action for their rights and interests. They also contend that identity politics is not incompatible or isolated from other forms of struggle, but rather complementary and interconnected with them (Davis & Zarkov, 2013; Hooks, 2020; Mohanty *et al.,* 2011).

Identity politics is a term that has gained significant attention in recent decades as societies continue to grapple with issues related to diversity, social justice, and equality. This literature review aims to explore key ideas and perspectives regarding the concept of identity politics, critically analyzing various scholarly sources to understand its origins, developments, and implications. As such, the review presents notable citations and references to provide a comprehensive understanding of this multifaceted topic.

The Various Forms and Manifestations of Identity Politics in Nigerian Elections

Identity politics refers to the political mobilization of people based on their ethnic, religious, regional or other identities. In Nigeria, identity politics has been a prominent feature of the electoral process, as candidates and parties appeal to the sentiments and interests of different identity groups to gain votes and power.

Some of the forms and manifestations of identity politics in Nigerian elections are:

Ethnicity: Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country with over 250 ethnic groups. Ethnic identity has been a major factor in shaping political alliances and preferences, especially at the presidential level. For example, in the 2023 election, the three major candidates are from the three dominant ethnic groups: Atiku Abubakar from the Hausa-Fulani, Bola Ahmed Tinubu from the Yoruba, and Peter Obi from the Igbo (The Guardian Newspaper, 2023).

Religion: Nigeria is also a religiously diverse country with a roughly equal split between Muslims and Christians. Religious identity has often been used to mobilize voters along sectarian lines, sometimes leading to violence and polarization. For instance, in the 2011 election, the victory of Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the south, sparked riots in some northern states where many Muslims felt marginalized (Abdullahi *et al*., 2023).

In terms of Region, Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones: North West, North East, North Central, South West, South East and South South. Regional identity has influenced the distribution of political power and resources among the zones, as well as the formation of regional blocs and coalitions. For example, in the 2015 election, the merger of four opposition parties into the All Progressives Congress (APC) was largely driven by regional interests and calculations (Hassan, 2023).

Besides ethnicity, religion and region, other forms of identity politics have also emerged in Nigerian elections, such as gender, youth, class, profession and ideology. These identities have been used to articulate specific demands and agendas for political representation and inclusion. For example, in the 2023 election, some civil society groups have advocated for more women and youth participation in politics (Hassan & Obe, 2023).

Impact of Identity Politics on Electoral Behaviour and Decision-Making in Nigeria

Identity politics refers to the political mobilization of social groups based on their identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexuality. Identity politics can have a significant impact on electoral behaviour and decision-making, as voters may align themselves with parties or candidates that represent their identity interests or values. Some of the factors that influence the effect of identity politics on voting include:

Personal emotions: Voters may be affected by their emotional reactions to events that are unrelated to politics, such as sports outcomes, weather, or personal life events. These emotions can influence their perception of political issues and candidates, and their motivation to vote (Healy *et al*., 2010)

Voter identification laws: Some countries require voters to present a valid form of identification before casting their ballot. This can create barriers for some groups of voters, especially those who are marginalized, poor, or lack access to official documents. Voter identification laws can reduce voter turnout and skew the electoral results in favour of certain parties or candidates (INEC, 2023).

Strategic interdependence: Voters may coordinate their behaviour with other members of their identity group, based on their expectations and knowledge of the electoral situation. This can create a collective action problem, where voters may choose to vote for a less preferred option if they believe it will benefit their group or prevent a worse outcome (Chandra, 2014).

Decision strategies: Voters may adopt different decision strategies when choosing a candidate or party, depending on the information and criteria they use. Some voters may focus on specific issues, such as the economy, health care, or immigration. Others may rely on party identification, which is a long-term psychological attachment to a political party. Yet others may evaluate the personal characteristics of candidates, such as their competence, honesty, or charisma (Lau & Redlawsk, 2016).

These factors illustrate how identity politics can shape the preferences and actions of voters in different ways. Identity politics can also have implications for the stability and legitimacy of electoral systems, as it can affect the representation and participation of diverse groups in politics (Green, *et* al., 2014).

According to several studies, ethno-religious voting patterns have been evident in Nigerian presidential elections since 1999, when the country returned to civilian rule after decades of military dictatorship. For instance, in the 2011 presidential election, the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan, who is from the southern minority Ijaw ethnic group and a Christian, won overwhelmingly in the south-east, south-south and south-west regions, where most of the Christian and minority voters are concentrated. His main challenger, Muhammadu

Buhari, who is from the northern majority Hausa-Fulani ethnic group and a Muslim, won overwhelmingly in the north-east, north-west and north-central regions, where most of the Muslim and majority voters are concentrated. This ethno-religious voting pattern was repeated in the 2015 presidential election, when Buhari defeated Jonathan by a narrow margin. Buhari again won most of the northern states, while Jonathan won most of the southern states. However, Buhari was able to win some key swing states in the south-west and north-central regions, where he formed alliances with some influential regional leaders and parties. This gave him enough votes to cross the constitutional threshold of winning at least 25% of votes in two-thirds of the states (INEC Electoral Commission (2015).

The 2019 presidential election also followed a similar pattern, with Buhari defeating his main rival Atiku Abubakar, who is also from the northern Hausa-Fulani ethnic group and a Muslim. Buhari maintained his stronghold in the north, while Atiku performed better in the south than Jonathan did in 2015. However, Atiku could not win enough votes in the south-west and north-central regions to overcome Buhari's advantage in the north (INEC Electoral Commission (2019).

The Influence of Identity Politics on Voter Mobilization and Electoral Campaigns in Nigeria

Identity politics refers to the tendency of people to vote for candidates or parties that appeal to their ethnic, religious, regional or other identities. In Nigeria, identity politics has been a major factor in voter mobilization and electoral campaigns, especially in the presidential and governorship elections. According to a report by the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) (2023), a coalition of civil society organizations that observed the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, identity politics was one of the main strategies used by politicians to attract voters. The report stated that:

> *Issue-based campaigns must take root in the political process in Nigeria rather than rely on identity mobilization of voters. The 2023 elections witnessed a high level of identity mobilization by political actors who exploited the fault lines of ethnicity, religion and region to garner votes. This has further deepened the divisions and polarization in the country and undermined national cohesion and democratic consolidation.*

The TMG report also noted that identity politics contributed to electoral violence, low voter turnout, voters' suppression and vote trading in some parts of the country. For instance, in some states, voters were intimidated or bribed to vote along ethnic or religious lines, or to abstain from voting altogether. In other states, political thugs attacked or disrupted polling units where voters of a different identity were dominant. The influence of identity politics on voter mobilization and electoral campaigns in Nigeria has been attributed to several factors, such as:

i. The historical legacy of colonialism, military rule and civil war that created ethnic and regional grievances and mistrust among different groups.
ii. The weak institutional capacity and performance of the state that failed to deliver public goods and services, protect human rights and ensure accountability and justice for all citizens.

iii. The lack of ideological differentiation and programmatic orientation among the political parties that made them rely on identity appeals rather than policy proposals and achievements.
iv. The insecurity and instability caused by various armed conflicts, insurgencies and criminal activities that heightened the sense of vulnerability and fear among different communities.
v. The social and economic inequalities and marginalization that fueled resentment and frustration among some groups who felt excluded or discriminated against by the dominant groups.

Identity politics is not inherently bad or good. It can be a source of diversity, representation and empowerment for some groups, but it can also be a source of division, manipulation and violence for others. The challenge for Nigeria is to find a balance between respecting and celebrating its diversity while fostering unity and solidarity among its people.

The Role of Identity Politics in Shaping Party Dynamics and Coalitions in Nigeria

This is the influence of social identities, such as ethnicity, religion, and regional affiliations, on political party dynamics and the formation of coalitions in Nigeria. Identity politics plays a crucial role in shaping the political landscape of the country by influencing voter behavior, party formation, and alliances between different political actors; So also the need for political will (Manuwa T. 2022).

The recent examples highlighting the role of identity politics in shaping party dynamics can be seen in the 2023 presidential elections, where the three major parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party (LP), actively courted voters along ethnic and religious lines. The APC which was the ruling party had Bola Tinubu, a Muslim Yoruba man from Southwest geo-political zone as its flag bearer, PDP fielded Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, who is a northerner Muslim from Adamawa as its flag bearer, while Peter Obi, the former Governor of Anambra State, a South eastern Christian as the flag bearer of Labour Party. Bola Tinubu received significant support from predominantly Muslim northern states being a Muslim and fielded Northerner who is also a Muslim as his running mate Kashim Shettima Mustapha. While the South-East geo-political zone voted massively for their tribesman; Peter Obi of Labour Party who came third while the PDP candidate came second (INEC Electoral Commission 2023).

Another aspect of identity politics influencing party dynamics in Nigeria is the formation of coalitions and alliances based on shared identities. For instance, the Southern and Middle Belt Leaders Forum (SMBLF) is a coalition of various groups from the southern and central regions of Nigeria, advocating for the protection of regional interests. They have actively sought to form political alliances with parties and candidates that align with their goals, often based on ethnic or regional identities.

Identity politics can also result in the fragmentation of political parties, as different factions within a party prioritize the interests of specific social groups. The recent defections of prominent politicians between parties can be linked to these identity-based factions. For example, in 2018, several high-profile politicians from the APC, such as former Senate President Bukola Saraki and former Benue State Governor, Samuel Ortom, defected to the

PDP due to perceived marginalization of their respective ethnic or regional interests within the ruling party (Adetula *et al.,* 2019).

Identity politics plays a significant role in shaping party dynamics and coalitions in Nigeria. Recent political events and electoral outcomes highlight how parties align themselves along ethnic and religious lines to attract voters. Additionally, the formation of coalitions and factions based on shared identities further augments the influence of identity politics on Nigeria's political landscape. However, identity politics alone will not determine the outcome of the election. Other factors such as economic performance, security challenges, anti-corruption efforts, social media influence, youth participation, and electoral integrity which is beyond the scope of this study will also play a significant role in shaping voters' preferences and behavior.

The Consequences of Identity Politics on Governance and Policy-making Processes in Nigeria

Some of the consequences of identity politics on governance and policy-making processes in Nigeria are:

i. The fragmentation of the political system along ethnic and religious lines, leading to a lack of national cohesion and trust among different groups. This also makes it difficult to form stable and effective coalitions or consensus on key issues affecting the country (Adetula *et al*., 2019).
ii. The emergence of violent conflicts and insecurity in various regions of the country, such as the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, the Niger Delta militancy in the south-south, and the separatist agitation in the southeast. These conflicts are often fueled by perceived marginalization, discrimination, or injustice by the dominant groups or the federal government (Agbiboa, 2013).
iii. The corruption and patronage that pervade the public sector, as politicians and bureaucrats use public resources to reward their loyal supporters or to buy votes from their constituencies. This undermines the accountability and transparency of governance and policy-making processes, as well as the quality and delivery of public services (Akinola, 2015).
iv. The underdevelopment and inequality that afflict many parts of the country, especially the rural areas and the northern regions. This is partly due to the lack of inclusive and participatory governance and policy-making processes that address the needs and aspirations of all Nigerians, regardless of their identity (Ezeibe *et al.,* 2018).

Challenges and Opportunities of Identity Politics in Nigeria's Electoral System

In Nigeria, identity politics has been a dominant factor in the electoral system, influencing voters' choices, candidates' strategies and party formations. However, identity politics also poses challenges and opportunities for Nigeria's democracy and development.

Some of the challenges of identity politics in Nigeria's electoral system are:

i. It can fuel violence and insecurity, as different groups compete for power and resources, often along ethnic or religious lines. For example, the 2011 post-election violence that claimed over 800 lives was largely triggered by perceived marginalization of the northern region by the incumbent president from the south (Ojo, 2011).

ii. It can undermine the quality and credibility of elections, as electoral institutions and processes are manipulated or compromised by identity-based interests. For example, the 2019 elections witnessed widespread irregularities, such as vote-buying, ballot-box snatching, intimidation and harassment of voters and officials, which were attributed to the desperation of politicians to secure votes from their loyal constituencies (Adetual *et al.,* 2019).
iii. It can hinder national integration and cohesion, as identity politics reinforces divisions and distrust among Nigerians, preventing them from embracing a common vision and agenda for the country. For example, a recent survey by Afrobarometer showed that only 36% of Nigerians trust people from other ethnic groups, while 58% think that Nigeria is more divided now than a few years ago (Afrobarometer, 2021).

Some of the opportunities of identity politics in Nigeria's electoral system are:

i. It can enhance political participation and representation, as identity politics motivates people to vote and engage in civic activities, especially when they feel that their identity is threatened or disadvantaged. For example, the 2015 elections recorded the highest voter turnout in Nigeria's history (44%), partly due to the mobilization of voters along regional lines.
ii. It can foster accountability and responsiveness, as identity politics creates pressure on elected officials to deliver on their promises and address the needs and aspirations of their constituents. For example, some state governors have initiated development projects and reforms in response to the demands of their ethnic or religious groups.
iii. It can promote diversity and pluralism, as identity politics reflects the rich and varied cultures and identities of Nigerians, which can be harnessed for national development. For example, some political parties have adopted inclusive and balanced policies and structures that accommodate different identities, such as gender quotas, zoning arrangements and power-sharing formulas.

Identity politics in Nigeria's electoral system is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that has both positive and negative implications for the country's democracy and development. The challenge for Nigerians is to find ways to manage and mitigate the risks of identity politics, while maximizing its benefits for the common good.

Recommendations for Fostering More Inclusive and Issue-based Electoral Outcomes in Nigeria, Moving Beyond Identity Politics

Based on the arguments of the researcher, the following recommendations were made:

1. **Electoral system design**: Nigeria should consider adopting a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system that combines single-member districts with proportional representation. This system would ensure that every vote counts, reduce the incentives for ethnic or religious voting, encourage coalition-building and inter-party dialogue, and enhance the representation of women and minorities.
2. **Political party reform**: Nigeria should strengthen the regulation and oversight of political parties, especially in terms of their internal democracy, transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness. Political parties should also adopt voluntary measures to increase the representation of women and minorities in their leadership and candidate selection processes, as well as to develop clear policy platforms and manifestos that address the issues and concerns of the electorate.

3. **Civic education and engagement**: Nigeria should invest more in civic education and engagement programs that aim to increase the political awareness, knowledge, and participation of citizens, especially young people, women, and marginalized groups. Civic education and engagement should also foster a culture of tolerance, dialogue, and respect for diversity among citizens and political actors.
4. **Electoral dispute resolution**: Nigeria should improve the effectiveness and credibility of its electoral dispute resolution mechanisms, both judicial and non-judicial. This would entail enhancing the independence, capacity, and accessibility of the courts and tribunals that handle electoral disputes, as well as promoting alternative dispute resolution methods such as mediation, arbitration, or dialogue.

Summary

Identity politics plays a significant role in shaping electoral outcomes in Nigeria. The country's diverse ethnic, religious, and regional identities contribute to the formation of political alliances and voting patterns. This paper examines how identity politics affects electoral outcomes in Nigeria and argues that it plays a pivotal influence in shaping election results. It examines the various forms and manifestations of identity politics in Nigerian elections; assesses the impact of identity politics on electoral behaviour and decision-making; explores how identity politics shape voter mobilization and electoral campaigns; explores the role of identity politics in shaping party dynamics and coalitions; analyzes the consequences of identity politics on governance and policy-making processes; identifies the challenges and opportunities of identity politics in Nigeria's electoral system and provides recommendations for fostering more inclusive and issue-based electoral outcomes in Nigeria, moving beyond identity politics.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the role of identity politics in shaping electoral outcomes in Nigeria, a country with diverse ethnic, religious and regional groups. It has argued that identity politics is a pervasive and influential factor in Nigerian elections, as voters tend to align with candidates who share or appeal to their identity markers. The paper has also discussed the implications of identity politics for democratic consolidation, national integration and political development in Nigeria. It has suggested that identity politics poses significant challenges for the quality of democracy, the stability of the polity and the prospects of development in Nigeria. The paper has concluded by recommending some possible ways of mitigating the negative effects of identity politics and promoting a more inclusive and participatory political culture in Nigeria.

However, these recommendations are not exhaustive or prescriptive, but rather indicative of some possible ways to foster more inclusive and issue-based electoral outcomes in Nigeria. They require political will, commitment, and collaboration from all stakeholders, including the government, the electoral management body, political parties, civil society organizations, media outlets, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and citizens. By moving beyond identity politics and embracing a more inclusive and issue-based approach to electoral politics, Nigeria can enhance its democratic development and stability.

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