# Ethno-Religious Factor and Voting Behaviour in Nigerian Elections. A Comparative Analysis of 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections.

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*Abstract: Identity politics is susceptible to developing plural democracies. Its intensity embellishes in ethno-religious voting orientation in sensitive national elections. On this premise, this discourse argued that  ethno-religious voting behaviour was visible in 2011 and 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria. In a methodological sense, the design of the discourse is qualitative in secondary and textual methods  of data collection and analysis. The sociological model of voting behaviour was applied to further establish that voter preference is a function of cleavage mobilization and enthusiasm in pursuit of identity interests.  The discourse in underscoring the varied intensity of the functionality of ethno-religious voting behaviour  in the two successive elections, revealed that the  incumbent candidate of PDP won 16 states in the South and 7 in the North and FCT while the frontline opponent candidate of CPC secured a landslide victory in 12 states in the North in 2011 presidential election that witnessed 53.7 percent voter turnout of 73.5 million registered  voters occasioned with post-presidential election violence in the North. In 2015 presidential election, the PDP candidate won 12 states in the South and 3 states in the North and FCT while frontline opponent candidate won 16 states in the North and 5 in the South in voter turnout of 43.65 percent from 68.8 million registered voters. These realities amid adverse effects on governance and national development resonates the need for national advocacy, new orientation among other fundamentals to entrench sense of nationhood in the democratization of Nigerian presidential elections.*

**Keywords: Ethno-religious, voting behaviour, identity politics and election.**

## Introduction

In a presidential democracy, the imperative of popular sovereignty in transition to power is embellished in the democratic process of election. The substance of election remains the hallmark of democratization and democratic consolidation. This is in cognizance of the fact that modern democracy expresses the expedience of elections and popular sovereignty in determining who occupy and direct the administrative and legislative output structures of the political system.

Thus, the affinity between elections and democracy underscored the importance of liberty, popular sovereignty and competition (Nnoli, 2003: 220, Adele, 2012: 6, Awopeju, 2011: 3 and Abaass 2008: 8). Beyond its affinity with democratic process, elections provide insight on voter orientation and choice of the electorate. To this extent, presidential election symbolizes process of national civic responsibility and expectation as seen in citizen's participation. However, observations and scholarly submissions had over the decades and years showed that issues and intrigues that inform voter orientation and choice in presidential democracies differ remarkably across space to accentuate the imperative of peculiarities of political systems. Hence, the national political culture of electioneering in developing plural democracy reflects certain obvious contradictions to the system and process of advanced democracies of the West.

Nigeria is a federation of ethnic nationalities structured in states and municipal authorities. And, its heterogeneous background is susceptible to its cleavage politicking which underlines the criticality of regionalism, ethnicity and religion in transition to power. As observed, Nigeria's voter environment showed that voting behaviour is influenced by certain tendencies that stem from identity politics such as regionalism, ethnicity, religion etc (Ekenna 1989:5 and Adenyi, 2012:16). In this vein, Olayode (2015) cited in Ezirim, *e tal* (2016) argued that identity politics nurtured from colonial era had assumed new trends and dimensions in which political parties and candidates are easily perceived as representatives of a particular ethnic or religious group and voting pattern in Christian

– Muslim states. In reference to the presidential elections, the fault lines of region, ethnicity and religion run deep in Nigeria. Virtually, every part of the country has an institutionalized memory of injury  or feeling of injustice which often feel will be best addressed if one of their own wide power at the center preferably as the president               (Adibe, 2015:2). The assertions made by Ezirim, *e tal* and Adibe therefore elicit the need to ascertain the significance or insignificance of ethno-religious specifities and its influence on voting behaviour of  Nigerians in two historic  successive presidential elections in 2011 and 2015 respectively.


**Conceptual Analysis**

The organic unity of ethnicity and religion is embellished in the term, "ethno-religious''. Accordingly, ethno-religious refers to ethnic group which are aside from ethnicity but unified by a common religion. Usually in these cases, religion is closely tied to a particular ethnic group and those who belong to an ethno-religious group usually define their identity through both their ethnic background and through religion (not always the case, but it often is). Examples of ethno religious groups are Jews. Jews have a common religion (Judaism) and being a Jew is either through the mother or through conversion of Judaism (Novakov, 2017:1).

Subsequently, the term, ethno-religious is used to explain how societies are divided. People belong to one ethnic group are often different from those who belong to another. People who follow one religion are often different from those who follow another. Therefore, political scientists, social scientist and historians look at divisions and they don't want to limit themselves to only ethnic or only religious differences, they use the term, ethno-religious to show that they are applying both classification at same time (Wittenberg, 2017:2). Similarly, ethno-religious is a mixture of ethnicity and religion in the lives and expression of a people (Terry, 2015:5).

Significantly, the affinity between ethnicity and religion reflect enormously in Nigeria's polity underscoring the buzz/hyper word of "ethno-religious". It further illuminates the heterogeneous cleavages and centrifugal conditions in Nigeria-nation state. Thus, ethnic nationalities in Nigeria are known by certain religious identities. For instance, Igbos in the Eastern part of the country is predominantly Christians, Hausa-Fulani of the North are dominantly Muslims and Yoruba of the West were mixture of Muslims and Christians (Nonli, 2008, Okpanachi, 2010; and Ade, 2014). As Paden (2011) remarked that the ethno-religious realities of Nigeria are at the heart of its contemporary search for unity.  Robert, *et al* (2011) also establish the adverse effects of the religion on the ethnicity with reference to Nigeria state,

> There is, then an overlap of religion on ethnicity that intensifies the north-south cultural split, and the case can be made that the most sensitive issues now involve religion rather than ethnicity. These overlapping cleavage are more dangerous because they accentuate regional differences. Nigeria lead a special problem in this regard in that the Christian – Muslim split is near fifty-fifty.

Although, the general presumption is that ethnic identity is a more prominent and stable source of identity in Nigeria. Some researchers have illustrated that religion was more significant than ethnicity as a source of identity and conflict in Nigeria (Ruby and Shah, 2007, Pew Research Center, 2010, Green, 2011). In the North, religious identity is more pronounced than ethnic identity and only serves to stimulate ethnicity (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005:10). In contrary, among the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Yoruba are more likely to identify themselves with their ethnic group than the Northern Hausa-Fulani (Lewis and Bratton, 2000:20). The submissions by these scholars undoubtedly provide an incisive insight on the character of ethno-religious specifities however the intensity of influence among these variables (ethnicity or religion) on the electoral behavior of Nigeria voters in 2011 and 2015 presidential elections form the thrust of this discourse.

Election is a concept replete with 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. Nnoli (2003) went further to assert  that election are so clearly tied to the growth and development of representative democratic government that they generally hold to be single most important indicator of the presence or absence of such government. From Nonli's view, election represents the hallmark of representative democracy. To further illustrate the affinity 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. The notion is that it is through elections that the electorate exercises their popular sovereignty to give their consent to a particular political office holder to rule (Awopeju, 2003:21). Basically, election provides avenue for the expression of preference or choice between candidates and political parties. Thus, election is the process of choice expression between candidates and political parties as determined by many variables. In this regard, presidential election is

the most sensitive national election in Nigeria because it illuminates the pattern and trend of electoral behavior across states and regions of ethnic-religious divide.

Voting facilitates expression of choice over alternatives. Thus, voting illuminates the orientation and disposition of a voter in an election. And, this is otherwise known as voting behaviour. In this sense, Mahmud (2015), conceived voting behavior as 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, voting behavior is a function of myriad of variables that determine preference over competing candidates and political parties. The study of these factors has over the decades stimulated scientific research on the rationale, development and analysis of voting behavior among scholars of political science.

**Theoretical Analysis**
Scientific analysis of the influence of identity cleavages in voter preference in presidential elections of a plural democratizing polity is appropriately dissected in the logics of sociological model of voting behaviour. Hence, sociological model of voting behaviour represents the appropriate scientific model to analyze the influence of ethno-religious factor in voter orientation of Nigerians in 2011 and 2015 presidential elections.

Basically, the growth of academic interest in voting behavior coincided with the rise of behavioural political science. As the most widespread and quantifiable form of political behavior, voting quickly became the focus for new technique of sample surveying and statistical analysis (Heywood, 2007:265). Accordingly, Antunes (2011) embellished that the scientific study of voting behavior is marked by three major research schools:
a. The Sociological Model identified as School of Columbia with the main reference in Applied Bureau of Social Research of Columbia University, whose work begins with the publication of the book, "The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign" (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1944) and focuses on the influence of social factors.
b. The Psychological Model also identified as School of Michigan which has its major reference in the works of Campbell, Converse, Mill and Stokes (1960)-"The American Voter" and assumes that party identification is the main factor behind the behavior of voters.
c. Rational Choice Theory also referenced to as a model of economic voting or even as School of Rochester whose landmark work is the work of Anthony Downs (1957)-An Economic Theory of Democracy-and that put emphasis on the variables such as rationality, choice, uncertainty and information as predisposing factors to voter preference.
On the sociological model of voting behaviour, Bartels (2008:2) writes,

> The modern history of academic voting research began in 1940 at Columbia University, where a team of social scientists assembled by Paul Lazarsfeld pioneered the application of survey research to the study of electoral behavior. Lazarsfeld and his colleagues surveyed 600 prospective voters in a single community (Erie County, Ohio) as many as seven times over the course of the 1940 presidential election campaign with a complex mixture of new and repeated questions in each successive interviews, and with additional fresh cross-sections to serve as baselines for assessing the effects of repeated interviewing or the respondents in the main panel.

Succinctly, Lazarsfeld's panel studies were carefully designed to measure changes in individual vote intentions over the course of presidential campaign. The Columbia Study was published in a book titled, "The People's Choice" which revealed that voters who changed their position during the campaign period were classified into following three categories:
a. Those who decide their vote before the beginning of the campaign.
b. Those whose decisions were taken during the party convention.
c. Those that decided their vote only at the advanced stage of the campaign (Stone *e tal*, 2010:93).

A second panel study conducted by the Columbia team in Elmira, New York culminated in a book titled, "Voting": A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign (Berelson, *e tal,* 1954:66) also reinforced the methodology and findings of the first panel. Interestingly, the Columbia scholars initially intend to explore the criticality of the mass media influence in voter's preference.

As Bartels (2008) observed that given their interest and study design, the Columbia research must have been surprised what they found that their careful measurement of media content turned out to be a little use in accounting for voter's choices, most of which seen to be based upon strong "brand loyalties" rooted in religion and social class. To their credit, the Columbia research did not cling to their pre-conception about the nature of electoral choice but followed where the data led them as illuminated in the following assumptions:

i. It was established that careful measurement of media content turned out to be of little use in accounting for voter's choice. Most of which seemed to be based upon strong "brand loyalties" rooted in religion and social class and reinforced by face-to-face interactions with like-minded acquaintances.

ii. In regards to the role of the election campaign, it was found that the influence of social groups is crucial for the result; since it identified as a mediation process-starring members of those groups who were committed to opinion leaders between communication conveyed by mass media and voters.

iii. It was also revealed that social differentiation-based on socio-economic status, religion, race and place of residence-is a pre-condition for political dissent and subsequent electoral cleavages.

iv. It also established that act of voting is not an individual act but rather an act of group influences. Thus, the relationship between social groups to which subjects belong, their political choices indicate that the decisions of voters are processes of group cohesion rather than individual acts.

v. It was revealed that there are conditions of transmissibility which ensure the maintenance and persistence of this differentiation from generation to generation.

vi. It was revealed that three processes-differentiation, transmission and contact guarantees the social transmission and political choices as referenced in the below remarks of Columbia scholars
"In contemporary America, these conditions are best met in class, ethnic and in ecological divisions of the population. They continue to provide the most durable social bases for political cleavages" (Berelson, *e tal,* 1954: 75).

vii. It is also established that the conditions for greater social and physical proximity between members of a group facilitates and maintain electoral cleavages.

Pertinently, Columbia team of researchers reached a logical generalization that depicts a landmark in the study and analysis of electoral behavior. On this, Berelson *et al* (1954:310) assert that,

> The usual analogy between the voting decision and the more or less carefully calculated decision of consumers or business men or courts ….may is quite incorrect. For many voters political inferences may be better be considered analogous to cultural tastes – in music, literature, recreational activities, dress, ethics, speech, social behavior. Both have their origin in ethnic, sectional, class and family traditions. Both exhibit stability and resistance to change for individuals but flexibility and adjustment over generations for the society as a whole. Both seem to be matters of sentiment and disposition rather than ''reasoned preferences'' while both are responsive to changed conditions and unusual stimuli, they are relatively invulnerable to direct argumentations and vulnerable to indirect social influences. Both are characterized more by faith than by conviction and by wishful expectation rather than careful predictions of consequence.

In specific sense, the sociological model as advanced by the Columbia School links voting behavior to group membership, suggesting that electors tend to adopt a voting pattern that reflect the economic and social group to which they belong. Thus, the model highlights the importance of social alignments reflecting the various divisions and tensions within the society. The most significance of these divisions are class, gender, ethnicity, religion and region (Heywood, 2007:267).

The work of Lazarsfeld and his Columbia Colleagues undoubtedly accentuate the imperatives of election survey as viable instrument for data and understanding campaign and elections. However, the following limitations are seen:

a) The study of Erie County (Ohio) was criticized because it is study unsupported by pervious theoretical options which translated into explanation and constructed later to give intelligibility to the findings (Rossi, 1964:31) cited in Stone, *e tal* (2010:23).

b) Erie County which represents the context of the survey research is limited and cannot possibly reflect the entire prejudices of American voting population.

c) Lazarsfeld and his colleagues downplayed the role of the parties and the mass media and elaborating their analysis on inter personal influence by measuring respondent's perception of the view of their families, friends, and co-workers which

emphasized the homogeneity of these social networks and their tendency to produce increasing political conformity over the course of the campaign (Antunes, 2010:34).

d) The sociological model however has been attacked on the ground that it focused on social groups; it ignores individual and the role of personal self-interest. Moreover, there is growing empirical evidence that the link between sociological factors and party support has weakened in modern societies. In particular, attention has been paid to the phenomenon of class dealignment (Heywood, 2007:268). However, inspite of these limitations, the scientific relevance of the model in this discourse illuminates.

In applying the logics of the sociological model of voting behaviour, it is argued that the heterogeneous character of Nigeria nation-state is replete with identity politics and cleavage affiliations embellishing in regionalism, ethnicity and religion. From the era of pre-independence to the contemporary period, Nigeria political process is driven by ethno-regional royalties which inform the orientation and disposition of politicians in fervent struggle for power and national resources. As sociology model of voting behaviour puts it, ''brand loyalties'' which is further reinforced by the euphoria of promoting regional and ethnic-religious interests in struggle for power. And, most importantly, proportional percentage of Nigeria voters expresses their electoral preference for candidates who represents the image of these ethno-religious loyalties. Additionally, sociological model of voting behaviour also revealed the criticality of social differentiation as condition of cleavages and political dissent. In other words, the Nigeria presidential elections represents contest between ethnic nationalities and regions in fervent struggle for power in deference to cleavage loyalties.

Subsequently, sociological model also illuminate the importance of social groups in electoral campaign. To this extent, the tempo of pre electoral processes of presidential election in Nigeria is heightened by the activities of cleavage affiliation platforms. In ethno-regional platforms, activities of Arewa Consultative Forum, ACF, Ohaneze Ndigbo, Aenifere and Ijaw National Congress are very visible in mobilizing Nigeria voters in their respective regions to support and vote for presidential candidates who represents the image and interests of their ethno-religious expectations. In addition to religious affiliation, the dominant influence of the Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs is very much felt by millions of Christian and Islamic faithful across the regions and ethnic nationalities in support of presidential candidates who represent the image of their respective religions.

In conclusive sense, the sociology model of voting behaviour established that act of voting is not an individual act but act of group influences. This is further justified in the influence of ethno- religious affiliations in the mobilization and orientation of voters across states and regions of Nigeria federation. From the foregoing analyses, the sociological model of voting behaviour as advanced by the Applied Bureau of Social Research at Columbia University lends empirical and methodological relevance to this discourse.

### Ethno-Religious Identities in Nigeria

Ethnic group and ethnicity are social realities in Nigeria's heterogeneous society. As earlier noted, Nigeria-Nation state as earlier established is a country of ethnic nationalities. In credence to this view, Babangida (2000) stressed that one basic fact about Nigeria social formation or the Nigeria state is its composition by multi-ethnic nationalities or multi-ethnic groups. In similar view, the interesting thing about this fact is that both scholarship and experience have not come to terms with the exact number of Nigeria's multi-ethnic groups. What is most obvious, however is that people often speak of the three major ethnic groups consisting of the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and the Igbo, while others are normally referred to as minority ethnic groups often known as the fourth force or fourth dimension" (Salawa, 2010:330). Babangida (2000) also argued that many authorities often times resort to describing the country as made up of over 250 ethnic groups or about 300 ethnic groups. Some ethnographers even put the figure at about 400 ethnic groups. Among these ethnic groups were the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba tribes.

**Table 1: Distribution of Ethnic Groups across Regions and States in Nigeria.**

| Geo-political Zone | States | Ethnic Nationalities |
|---|---|---|
| **North Central** | Benue | Tiv, Idoma, Igede, Etubo, Yachi, Jukun, Hausa, Akwenya, Ufia and Nyifon |
| | Kogi | Igala, Ebira and Okun |
| | Kwara | Yoruba, Nupe, Bariba and Fulani minorities |
| | Nasarawa | Afo, Agatu, Akye, Alago, Baribari, Bassa, Ebira, Eggon, Fulani, Gade, Gbagyi, Gwandara, Hausa, Jukun, Kanuri, Mada, Ninzom, Arum, Rinda, Yekwa and Tiv |
| | Niger | Gbagyi, (Gwari), Kambari, Ura, Kanuri, Gwandara, Gade, Nupe, Dukawa. |

|  | Plateau | Berom, Afizere, Amo, Anaguta, Aten, Bogghom, Buji, Challa, Fier, Gashish, Goemai, Irigwe, Jarawa, Jukun, Kofyar, (comprising Doemark, Kwalla and Mernyang), Montol, Mushere, Muplin, Mwagehavah, Ngas, Piapung, Pyem, Ron-kulene, Bache. |
|  | FCT | Afo, Fulani, Gwari, Hausa, Koro, Ganaganda, Gwandara and Bassa |
| **North East** | Adamawa | Fulani, Bachama, Bali, Gudu, Mbula, Bata, Koma and Mumuye |
|  | Bauchi | Gerawa, Sayawa, Jarawa, Kirfawa, Turawa, Bolewa, Karchare, Kanuri, Faawa, Butawa, Warjawa, Zulawa, Boyawa, Mbadawa, Hausa and Fulani. |
|  | Borno | Kanuri, Babur, Chibok, Kanakuru, Kanuwe, Marghi, Fulani |
|  | Gombe | Hausa, Tangele, Terawa, Waja, Kumo, Fulani, Kanuri, Bolewa, Jukun, Perol Shonge, Tula, Cham, Languda, Dadiya, Banabuka |
|  | Taraba | Jenjo, Jibana, Kuteb, Chamba, Yandang, Mumuyes, Mambila, Warkurms, Fulani, Jukun, Ichen, Tiv, kaka, Panso, Kambu, Wawa, Vute, Tikari, Hausa, Ndola |
|  | Yobe | Fulani, Ngizim, Kanuri, Karai-Karai, Bolewa, Bade, Hausa, Ngamo, Shuwa, Bura, Margi and Maga |
| **Geo-political Zone** | **States** | **Ethnic Nationalities** |
| **North – West** | Jigawa | Kanuri, Hausa, Fulani, Angas, Kurama |
|  | Kaduna | Adara (Kadara), Akurmi (Kurama), Anghan (Kamanton), Amo, Arumuma (Ruruma), Atachaat (Kachechere), Atyab (Kataf), Atuku, Ayu, Bajju, Bakulu, Bhazar(Koro), Bur (Saya), Binawa, Dingi, Fantswam, Fulfulde, Gbagyi, Gure, Gwandara, Gwong, Itam, Hausa, Jangi, Kaibi, Kahugu, Kanufi, Kigono, Kinugu, Kiwafa, Kiwollo, kono, Kuvori, Kuturmi, Lemoro, Mada, Nandu, Nduyah, Numana, Nindem, Ningeshe, Ninkyop, Ninzo, Nyenkpa, (Yeskwa), Oegworok, Pikal, Pitti, Ribang, Rishuwa, Raimada, Ruruma, Rumayya, Shemawa,Sholio, Siyawa, Takad, Tari and Tsam (Chawai) |
|  | Kano | Hausa, Ijawh |
|  | Kebbi | Hausa, Fulani, Lelna, Bussawa, Dukawa, Darakari, Kambari, Gungawa, and Kamuku. |
|  | Sokoto | Hausa, Fulani, Zabaramawa |
|  | Zamfara | Hausa, Fulani Gwari, Kamuku, Kambari, Dukawa, Bussawa |
|  | Katsina | Hausa – Fulani |
| **South – South** | Akwa Ibom | Anag, Andoni, Okobo, Oron, Ibiobio, Ibeno, Ekete |
|  | Bayelsa | Ijaw, Sub tribes-Akasa, Apoi, Basan, Buseni, Gabran, Iduwini, Kolokuma. |
|  | Cross River | Efik, Ejagham, Yakurr, Bette, Yela, Igede, Ukelle and Bekwarra |
|  | Delta | Ijaw, Isoko, Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ukwani |
|  | Edo | Edo, Okpe, Esan, Afemai, Etsako, Ora, Akoko-Edo, Igbanke, Emai and Ijaw |
|  | Rivers | Ogoni, Ijaw and Ikwere |
| **South – East** | Anambra | Igbo |
|  | Abia | Igbo |
|  | Enugu | Igbo |
|  | Ebonyi | Igbo |
|  | Imo | Igbo |
| **South –West** | Lagos | Yoruba |
|  | Ekiti | Yoruba |
|  | Ondo | Yoruba |
|  | Osun | Yoruba |
|  | Ogun | Yoruba |

| | Oyo | Yoruba |
|---|---|---|

Source: Authors Compilation.

The perversity of ethnicity in the social relation and interactions of Nigeria's ethnic nationalities permeates all facet of national life and its adverse effects as aptly established by Nnabuihe, *et al* (2014:150):

> Ethnicity is apparently experienced in every facet of our national life and has also been blamed for the many woes that have befallen Nigeria. Such problems as electoral – malpractice and inability to practice democratic governance have their basis, to a large extent in ethnicity. Military incursion into politics is seen in some cases to be ethnically motivated. Another example is the issue of census in Nigeria which has never been successfully conducted without reports of widespread malpractices and protests from various parts of the country. These acts are largely perpetuated in the name of ethnic groups, just as the phenomenon of ethnicity cannot be said to be peculiar to our country. Rather it is widespread and every ethnic group in Nigeria is guilty of it in various ways and in varying degrees. Ethnic nationalism has earned us unforgettable and bitter experience such as blood bath of the thirty dark months of civil war and other civil unrests, which have had heavy toll on human lives.

In reference to religious identities, Nigeria has three major religious identities; Christian, Islam and traditional religions (Omorogbe and Omohan, 2005:557; Osaghae and Suberu, 2005:11). Christian and Muslim identities have continued to be backbone of religious disparities (Lewis and Brathon, 2005:5 and Osaghae and Suberu, 2005.11). Nigeria nation-state is regionally divided between the two fundamental religions-Islam and Christianity. In this sense, Okpanachi (2010) observed that the Hausa-Fulani residing in Northern Nigeria are mainly Muslims while the South-South minorities and Igbo speaking in the South East are predominantly Christians. The Middle Belt (or North-Central Zone) is a mixture of Christian and Muslim populations while the Yoruba-speaking communities in the South West are about half Muslim and half Christian.

Basically, Islam and Christianity are alien religions in Nigeria, and not indigenous in the primitive kingdoms, empires and republics that existed and flourished for hundreds of years or centuries. In other words, traditional religious practices predate Islam and Christianity in the kingdoms, empires and republics that existed before colonial annexation. However, the internalization and spread of these religions (Islam and Christianity) was facilitated through trade and Euro-colonialism but traditional religious practices prevailed in pre-colonial Nigerian societies.

Succinctly in similar perspective, Ntamu, *et al* (2014) writes that the first contact of Nigeria with Islam predates the country's contact with that of Christianity and European colonialists. This was orchestrated by trade and commerce interests of the Arabs who first made contacts with the Northern part of the continent and country in particular. In Nigeria, the Northern part of the country is symbolic with the history of Islam in Africa, South of the Sahara and Nigeria in particular as it penetrated the area through the Kanem – Borno Empire in the 11th century before spreading to other Hausa states. The entrance of Islam into the traditional Yoruba land was through the establishment of commercial links with the Northern part of the country, particularly the Nupe and Fulani speaking people. This was made possible through the initiation and conversion of the kings and traditional rulers of the Yoruba people. Hence, the conversion of some influential rulers and chiefs in the western region of the country became a significant milestone in the religious history of Islam in Yoruba land.

In Christian perspective, the visitation of the Roman Catholic missionaries to the coastal areas of the Niger-Delta region in the Southern part of Nigeria marked the beginning of Christianity in the 15th century where few churches were built with reasonable number of converts recorded. At this period, Christianity was felt most in a few selected areas, but the proper evangelization of Christianity was felt most during the return of some freed and liberated slaves from Sierra-Leone and Brazil in 1842 through during the period of return of these liberated slaves, since then missionaries were sent to evangelize the Western region of the country through Badagry and Abeokuta and the Southern part through Calabar, these missionaries include the Church Missionary Society and Roman Catholic Mission (Fafunwa, 1968, Sanusi, 2003).

Although, majority of the scientific academic sources accepted that half of the population is Christian, the other Muslim. However, there is uncertainty about the exact percentages; hence various sources give different figures (Haldun and Opeyemi, 2015:95). In a report published by Pew Research Center in 2010, the numbers from different sources indicated that 1963 census certified 36% Christians, 48% Muslim and 16% others. However, the Demographic and Health survey (2008) gave 53% Christian, 45% Muslim and 2% others. Finally, Pew Forum declared 46% for Christians, 52% for Muslim and 2% for others in 2009(Pew Research Center, 2010). To this extent, whatever the exact percentages are, it is clear that Nigeria is a country with a very large Christians and Muslim population in the world can be defined as a "cleft country" (Paden 2007; Olojo, 2014:7). Again, it is worth noting that, within the

wide Christian and Muslim categories, there lie many sub-cleavages and intra-group conflicts that have either been active politically in the past or have a potential of being salient in the future. Among the Christians, sub-cleavages include the protestant (Anglican 10%, Baptist 8%, Methodist 5% and Lutheran 5%), the Catholic 15%, the Evangelical Church of West Africa 2%, Jehovah's witness 5% and a myriad of other local (Aladura, Cherubim and Seraphim, Celestial church of Christ) constituting 20% and Pentecostal churches 30% (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005:11). Muslims also belong to a number of sub-cleavages that include Ahmadiyya 12%, Sanusiyya 5%, Tiyanniya 3% and Quadriyya 8% which in turn was in conflict (Haldun and Opeyemi, 2015:97). All this identifies further underlines the cleavages of Nigerian society.

**Ethno-Religious Factor and Voting Behaviour in 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections.**
The 2011 and 2015 presidential elections are the seventh and eighth presidential polls after the first historic presidential election on August 11th 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. On this premise, Again Oluwatula and Arogundade (2010:323) 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.

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. It is therefore pertinent to establish the significance or insignificance of this assertion in Nigerian recent presidential elections in 2011 and 2015. Hence, the assessment of statistics of votes secured by the frontline candidates in the two successive presidential elections will indeed underscore the significance or insignificance of ethno-religious voting pattern.

The 2011 presidential election was held on 16th April, 2011 and, the result was declared by the Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC on 18th April, 2011.

**Table 2: Votes Secured by the Frontline Presidential Candidates and Political Parties in Thirty-Six States of the Federation in 2011 Presidential Election.**

| | States | Goodluck Jonathan PDP | Muhammadu Buhari CPC | Nuhu Ribadu ACN | Mallam Shekarau ANPP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Abia | 1,175,984 | 3,743 | 4,392 | 1,455 |
| 2 | Adamawa | 508,314 | 344,526 | 32,786 | 2,706 |
| 3 | Akwa Ibom | 1,165,629 | 5,348 | 54,148 | 2,000 |
| 4 | Anambra | 1,145,169 | 4,223 | 3,437 | 975 |
| 5 | Bauchi | 258,404 | 1,315,209 | 16,674 | 8,777 |
| 6 | Bayelsa | 504,811 | 691 | 370 | 136 |
| 7 | Benue | 694,776 | 109,680 | 223,007 | 8,592 |
| 8 | Borno | 207,075 | 909,763 | 7,533 | 37,279 |
| 9 | Cross River | 709,382 | 4,002 | 5,889 | 2,521 |
| 10 | Delta | 1,378,851 | 8,960 | 13,110 | 2,746 |
| 11 | Ebonyi | 480,592 | 1,025 | 1,112 | 14,296 |
| 12 | Edo | 542,173 | 17,795 | 54,242 | 2,174 |
| 13 | Ekiti | 135,009 | 2,689 | 116,981 | 1,482 |
| 14 | Enugu | 802,144 | 3,753 | 1,755 | 1,111 |
| 15 | Gombe | 290,347 | 459,898 | 3,420 | 5,693 |
| 16 | Imo | 1,381,357 | 7,591 | 14,821 | 2,520 |
| 17 | Jigawa | 419,252 | 663,994 | 17,355 | 7,673 |

| 18 | Kaduna | 1,190,179 | 1,334,244 | 11,278 | 17,301 |
|----|--------|-----------|-----------|--------|--------|
| 19 | Kano | 440,666 | 1,624,543 | 42,353 | 526,310 |
| 20 | Katsina | 428,392 | 1,163,919 | 10,945 | 6,342 |
| 21 | Kebbi | 369,198 | 501,453 | 26,171 | 3,298 |
| 22 | Kogi | 399,816 | 132,201 | 6,516 | 16,491 |
| 23 | Kwara | 268,243 | 83,603 | 52,432 | 1,672 |
| 24 | Lagos | 1,281,688 | 189,983 | 427,203 | 8,941 |
| 25 | Nasarawa | 408,997 | 278,390 | 1,204 | 1,047 |
| 26 | Niger | 321,429 | 652,574 | 13,344 | 7,138 |
| 27 | Ogun | 309,177 | 17,654 | 199,555 | 2,969 |
| 28 | Ondo | 387,376 | 11,890 | 74,253 | 6,741 |
| 29 | Osun | 188,409 | 6,997 | 299,711 | 3,617 |
| 30 | Oyo | 484,758 | 92,396 | 252,240 | 7,156 |
| 31 | Plateau | 1,029,865 | 356,551 | 10,181 | 5,235 |
| 32 | Rivers | 1,817,762 | 13,182 | 16,382 | 1,449 |
| 33 | Sokoto | 309,057 | 540,769 | 20,144 | 5,063 |
| 34 | Taraba | 451,354 | 257,986 | 17,791 | 1,203 |
| 35 | Yobe | 117,128 | 337,537 | 6,069 | 143,179 |
| 36 | Zamfara | 238,980 | 624,515 | 17,970 | 46,554 |
| 37 | FCT | 253,444 | 131,576 | 2,327 | 3,170 |

Source: inec.nigeria.org, 2011.

**Table 3: The 2011 Election Result of the Twenty Presidential Candidates**

| | **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).

Succinctly, Madunagu, (2011) stressed that the relative distribution of these votes showed that Jonathan won in 23 states and FCT (16 in the South and 7 in the North). He obtained 25 percent or more of the votes cast in the 32 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Buhari won in 12 states (all in the North). The General scored 25 percent or more in 16 states (all in the North) and FCT. Ribadu won in one state, Osun (in the South West) and scored 25 percent or more in 4 states (all in the South) and Shakarau did not win any state and did not scored up to 25 percent in any state. The two major contenders, Goodluck and Buhari gained proportional percentage of the 38, 209, 978 valid vote cast from the Southern and Northern states. Interestingly, the CPC presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari failed to win any state beyond North while the incumbent president won overwhelmingly in the Southern states and marginally in the North. As observed in the 2011 presidential election, the voter turnout was 39,469,484 which represent 53.7% from 73.5 million registered voters (Mahmud, 2015:7). The analysis of the regional voter turnout further revealed that South-East (63%) and South-South (62%) recorded the highest number of regional electoral turnout followed by North-East

(56%), North-West (56%) and the North-Central (49%) while the voter turnout was very low in the South West (32%) of the country (Report of the Center for Public Policy Alternatives, 2015:2).

In establishing the intensity of ethno-religions realities in the voting pattern and voter turnout, Paden (2012) further argued that Buhari (CPC) won in the twelve (12) sharia states in far North and Jonathan (PDP) won in all other states in the West except Osun (where the ACN won). Also, the outcome of the presidential election revealed that the Christian states in the South-South and South-East voted for Jonathan and religiously mixed states split but clearly supported the incumbent candidate. Again, the national turnout was 53% while the lowest turnout was seen in the South-West.

The outcome of the presidential election and voting pattern ostensibly showed marginal influence of ethno-religious influence in voter behaviour of Nigeria electorate. And, this is further embellished in the post-presidential violence. In credence, the euphoria of ethno-religious voting exacerbated violent regional resentment of the 2011 presidential election result as Madunagu, (2011:13) explicate further;

> The post-presidential elections killing and destruction in parts of the Northern Nigeria started before the dark on the day of the elections: Saturday, April 16th 2011 voting and announcement of the results had ended in most polling center but collation of these results to determine the winner of the contest was still going on nation-wide. The winner was officially announced about 48 hours after the start of the slaughter which went on for three more days. Just before the announcement of the result some senior military officers visited the headquarters of the electoral body. This indicates, at least, the level of the perceived threat to national security. Estimates of the total number of victims ranged from 500 to 800 dead including at least 10 National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members who were on election assignment.

More succinctly on the regional and state sphere of the post-election violence, it was observed that the 2011 presidential post-election violence was recorded in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states. However, the gravity of the violence in Kaduna, Zaria and Kano was unprecedented. These increasing violent attacks followed the declaration of President Goodluck Jonathan as the winner of the presidential election, 2011. (Kwon-Ndung, *etal* 2015:229). The observations made by scholars obviously revealed the functionality of ethno-religious sentiment as regarding the cause of the violence on the premise of regional spread of the violence and outcome of the presidential election.

In apt sense, a presidential election that featured an incumbent president perceived to be a Christian/Southern versus an opposition party challenger perceived to be Northern Muslim was bound to run the risk of splitting the country along regional and religious lives. This danger was created when the PDP decided to abandon (temporarily least) the principle of zoning and power shift spelled out in its character. In short, the seeds of post-election violence were sown at the PDP nominating conference (Paden 2012: 216).

Furthermore, 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 (Ayo *e tal,* 2012, p.17). Hence, this elicited fundamental question in Ayo's assertion which is further embellished by Nwobasi (2015) who argued that 2011 presidential election held on 16th April showed that the Northern part of the country was determined and wanted power back to the North. To this extent, this revealing trend therefore underscored the import of critical observation of the next presidential election as regarding the popularity of contending political parties, candidates and voting behavior of Nigerian electorate across states and regions of the federation.

The 2015 presidential election was held on 30th of March, 2015 and the result was declared by the Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission on 1st April, 2015. The election was intensely contested by the two frontline candidates of Peoples Democratic Party, PDP and All Progressive Congress, APC.

**Table 4: The Official Result of the Presidential Election Held on the 28th March 2015.**

| | Candidates | Political Party | Votes received | % of votes received |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Muhammadu Buhari | APC | 15,424,921 | 53.96 |
| 2 | Goodluck Ebele Jonathan | PDP | 12,853,162 | 44.96 |
| .3 | Ayeni Moses Adebayo | APA | 53,537 | 0.19 |
| 4 | Alhaji Ganiyu. O. Galedima | ACPN | 40,311 | 0.14 |
| 5 | Chief Sam Eke | CPP | 36,300 | 0.13 |
| 6 | Rafiu Salau | AD | 30,673 | 0.11 |
| 7 | Mallam Ibrahim Ahmad | ADC | 29,666 | 0.10 |
| 8 | Allagoa Kelvin Chinedu | PPN` | 24,475 | 0.09 |
| 9 | Martin Onovo | NCP | 24,455 | 6.09 |
| 10 | Tunde Anifowose-kelani | AA | 22,125 | 0.08 |
| 11 | Chekwas Okorie | UPP | 18,220 | 0.06 |
| 12 | Comfort Oluremi Sonaiya | KOWA | 13,076 | 0.05 |
| 13 | Godson Mgbodile okoye | UDP | 9,208 | 0.03 |
| 14 | Ambrose Albert Owuru | HOPE | 7,435 | 0.03 |

Source: inec. gov.ng. http://www. Inecnigeria.org

From the index of the above table, 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.

Furthermore, Onwuanabile went further to provide explicit analysis of regional distribution of votes secured by the two frontline presidential candidates, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan and Major-General Muhammadu Buhari to illuminate the trends of ethno- religious voting behavior as seen in the table below:

**Table 5: Geo-Regional Distribution of Votes between Two Major Presidential Candidates in the 2015 Presidential Election.**

| | South-East | Geo-Political | Zones |
|---|---|---|---|
| | States | Presidential Candidates | |
| | | APC Candidate | PDP Candidate |
| 1 | Abia | 13,394 | 368,303 |
| 2 | Anambra | 17,926 | 660,762 |
| 3 | Enugu | 14,157 | 553,003 |
| 4 | Imo | 133,253 | 559,185 |
| 5 | Ebonyi | 19,518 | 323,653 |
| | **South-South** | | |
| 1 | Akwa-Ibom | 58,411 | 953,304 |
| 2 | Bayelsa | 5,194 | 361,209 |
| 3 | Cross River | 28,368 | 414,863 |
| 4 | Delta | 48,910 | 1,211,405 |
| 5 | Edo | 208,469 | 286,869 |
| 6 | Rivers | 69,238 | 1,487,075 |
| | **North-East** | | |
| 1 | Adamawa | 374,701 | 251,664 |
| 2 | Bauchi | 931,598 | 86,085 |
| 3 | Borno | 473,543 | 25,640 |
| 4 | Gombe | 361,245 | 96,873 |
| 5 | Taraba | 261,326 | 310,800 |
| 6 | Yobe | 446,265 | 25,526 |

| | **North-West** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Jigawa | 885,998 | 142,904 |
| 2 | Kaduna | 1,127,760 | 484,085 |
| 3 | Kano | 1,903,999 | 215,779 |
| 4 | Katsina | 1,345,441 | 98,937 |
| 5 | Kebbi | 567,883 | 100,972 |
| 6 | Sokoto | 671,926 | 152,199 |
| 7 | Zamfara | 612,202 | 144,833 |
| | **North-Central** | **Geo-Political** | **Zones** |
| | **States** | **Presidential Candidates** | |
| | | **APC Candidate** | **PDP Candidate** |
| 1 | Benue | 373,961 | 303,737 |
| 2 | Kogi | 264,851 | 149,987 |
| 3 | Kwara | 302,146 | 132,602 |
| 4 | Nasarawa | 236,838 | 273,460 |
| 5 | Niger | 657,678 | 149,222 |
| 6 | Plateau | 429,140 | 549, 615 |
| 7 | FCT | 146,399 | 157,195 |
| | **South-West** | | |
| 1 | Ekiti | 120,331 | 176,466 |
| 2 | Lagos | 792,460 | 632,327 |
| 3 | Ogun | 308,290 | 207,950 |
| 4 | Ondo | 298,889 | 207,950 |
| 5 | Osun | 383,603 | 249,929 |
| 6 | Oyo | 528, 628 | 303, 376 |

Source: Onwuanabile (2015: 244).

In explicit sense, Muhammadu Buhari defeated Goodluck Jonathan, the incumbent president with 15,424,921 votes (53.96%) against the 12, 853,162 votes (44.96%) secured. The 29,432,083 votes cast were proportionally shared by the two frontline presidential candidates of People's Democratic Party, PDP and All Peoples Congress, APC. In further reference to the analysis of voter choice as embellished in votes won across states in the six geo-political zones, Ayorinde (2015), noted that Buhari had defeated his challenger, Goodluck in all the Northern states except in Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau and in the South West states, except in Ekiti. Even in the three states where he lost the election in the two regions, the APC presidential candidate put up a respectable showing, garnering about 40 percent of the votes. On the other hand, the PDP presidential candidate won overwhelmingly in all the South-South and South-East states. In addition, President Jonathan won in Plateau, Nasarawa and Taraba states in the Northern part of the country. Buhari also met the constitutional requirement to be declared president-elect by getting more than one quarter of the votes in the 27 states. The APC candidate won in Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Lagos, Niger, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. The President, Jonathan was victorious in Rivers, Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa, Imo, Enugu, Ekiti, Edo, Delta, Ebonyi, Cross River, Bayelsa, Anambra, Akwa – Ibom, Abia and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. In an explicit manner, it further implied that Jonathan won 16 states and FTC (12 states in the South, 3 states in the North and FCT) and Buhari won 21 states (16 states in the North and 5 states in the South). Interestingly, Buhari won states in the South for the first time since he began to compete fervently for the office of the president in 2003, 2007 and 2011 presidential elections. While Jonathan lost five states in the South particularly in the West and failed woefully in the North. In contrast as observed in the 2015 presidential election, voter turnout was 29,432,083 (43.65%) from the registered 68.8 million voters (Adewale, *e tal*, 2015:242). It implied that the 2015 presidential election recorded poor voter turnout with a marginal decline from what was seen in the 2011 presidential election. In the analysis of the regional voter turnout, the South-South (58%) and North-West (55%) geo-political zones interestingly leads other regions. This development was followed by North-East (45%), North-Central (43%), South-East (41%) while South-West (40%) again recorded lowest voter turnout as seen in the 2011 presidential election (The report of Center for Public Policy Alternatives, 2015:4).

In more explicit sense, there are indications to justify the functionality of ethno-religious factor in 2015 presidential election as argued by Onwuanabile, (2015:187),

> while some sections of Nigerians were still basking on the false euphoria of the country having overcome ethno-religious sentiment in taking decisions at the polls, there were reasons for scholars to believe that religion and ethnic sentiments played out in the 2011 presidential election was a reminder of the role of ethno-religious chauvinism could play in the voting habit of the people, the

2015 presidential election proved that the country had taken backwards in its state-building efforts as the election reinvigorated the old memories of ethnic and religious sentiments in the voting behavior of the electorate. The 2015 presidential election therefore marked the height of identity politics in Nigeria.

Beyond ethno-religious sentiments, some scholars of the historic presidential election however believed that personality and political platform of the opponent president candidate, Buhari contributed enormously to the puzzled electoral victory. In regards to personality attribute, Aminu (2015) stressed that many Nigerians perceived Buhari as a frugal leader and a strong disciplinarian, incorruptible and leader capable of providing the country with a strong leadership and put an end to endemic corruption that has eaten deep into the national fabric. For instance, as a military Head of State, Buhari jailed many politicians for corruption following the overthrow of the Shehu Shagari administration in the Second Republic. He also tried to institute orderliness and eradicate indiscipline. His Spartan and stern lifestyle has especially endears him to ordinary Northerners.

Beside his personality attribute of the opponent candidate, the political platform of All Progressive Congress, APC also contributed to the electoral victory of March 2015 as Oluokun (2015:18) noted that,

> Buhari was fourth time lucky. The former military Head of State had contested for the presidency in 2003, 2007 and in 2011 without success. He had actually said he would stop what was beginning to be a perennial bid to rule Nigeria if he would lost 2011 presidential polls to President Jonathan. But this time around the former Head of State contested on a bigger platform, the APC which is a merger of the defunct Action Congress of Nigeria, the All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP, a part of All Progressive Grand Alliance, APGA and the Congress for Progressive Change, CPC under which Buhari contested the presidency in 2011. The APC thus gave Buhari a more national platform with 14 governors in its ranks following the defection of four governors of PDP to its ranks. Notably, the APC was in control of most of the South-West except Ondo State at the inception. The loss of Ekiti to PDP in 2014 does not seem to have significantly diminished the strength of the party in the region. Apart from the bigger national platform, the APC also offered Buhari a much stronger financial muscle to prosecute his campaign.

In other words, the personality and political party identification beside ethno-religious factor is also significant towards the electoral victory of first opponent presidential candidate in the 2015 election.

## Comparative Analysis of 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections

Basically, the 2011 and 2015 presidential elections remained historic in process, events and outcome. A cursory examination of literature of recent presidential elections in Nigeria showed the dearth of conceptual analysis on the comparative study of the two successive historic presidential polls in reference to the impact of ethno-religious factor. However, Nwobasi (2015) identified comparable elements of the two presidential polls with reference to pre and post- election processes.

(i) 20 presidential candidates contested the 2011 presidential election while 14 candidates contested 2015 presidential poll.

(ii) The ruling party, Peoples Democratic Party lost approximately 43% of the votes it received (22,495,187) in 2011 to 12,853,162 in 2015.

Furthermore, Araba and Braimah (2015) established the political parties and votes received in the 2011 and 2015 presidential elections respectively.

**Table 6: Comparative Analysis of Results of 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections in Nigeria**

| 2011 Presidential Election | | | 2015 Presidential Election | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Political Parties** | **Votes received** | **Percentage %** | **Political Parties** | **Votes received** | **Percentage %** |
| ADC | 51,682 | 0.14 | AA | 22,125 | 0.08 |
| ANPP | 917,012 | 2.40 | ACPN | 40,311 | 0.14 |
| APS | 23,740 | 0.06 | AD | 30,673 | 0.11 |
| ARP | 12,264 | 0.03 | ADC | 29,666 | 0.10 |
| BNPP | 47,272 | 0.12 | APA | 53,537 | 0.19 |
| CAN | 2,079,151 | 5.41 | APC | 15,424,921 | 53.96 |
| CPC | 12,214,853 | 31.98 | CPP | 36,300 | 0.13 |
| FRESH | 34,331 | 0.09 | KOWA | 13,076 | 0.05 |
| HDP | 12,023 | 0.03 | PDP | 12,853,162 | 44.96 |

| LDPN | 8,472 | 0.02 | PPN | 24,475 | 0.09 |
|------|-------|------|-----|--------|------|
| MPPP | 16,492 | 0.04 | UDP | 9,208 | 0.03 |
| NCP | 26,376 | 0.07 | HOPE | 7,435 | 0.03 |
| NMDP | 25,938 | 0.07 | NCP | 24,455 | 0.09 |
| NTP | 19,744 | 0.05 | DPP | 18,220 | 0.06 |
| PDC | 82,243 | 0.21 | | | |
| PDP | 22,495,187 | 58.89 | | | |
| PMP | 56,248 | 0.15 | | | |
| PPP | 54,203 | 0.14 | | | |
| SDMP | 11,544 | 0.03 | | | |
| UNPP | 21,203 | 0.06 | | | |

Araba and Braimah (2015: 254).

Furthermore, Araba and Braimah (2015) identified the following comparative indicators in the two successive presidential elections in 2011 and 2015.

(i) 16th April 2011 presidential election had registered voters of 73,528,040 with voter turnout of 53.7% (39,469,484) while 28th March 2015 presidential election had registered voters of 67,422,005 and voter turnout of 29,432,083.

(ii) 14 political parties participated in 2015 presidential election compared to 20 political parties in the 2011 presidential election or that contested the election.

(iii) In 2011 presidential election, more votes (38,209,978) were cast higher than the votes (28,587,564) cast in 2015 presidential election with reference to 25% difference.

(iv) In 2015 presidential poll, the incumbent PDP candidate with 12,853,162 votes (45%) lost to opponent APC candidate with 15,427,943 votes (54%). The incumbent presidential candidate lost by a relatively wide margin of total votes cast for the opposition candidate with about 2,574,781 (20%). It is important to note that APC opponent candidate in 2015 presidential election won more states and secured at least 25% of votes in 21 states won.

(v) In the presidential poll, the PDP incumbent candidate earned 22,495,187 votes in the 2011 presidential election but lost 43% of these votes in the 2015 presidential election with reference to 12,853,162 votes.

In contrast, the APC gained approximately 26% more votes between 2011 and 2015 (12,214,853 to 15,424,921). The PDP won 31 states in the 2011 but could only muster 16 states in 2015.

**Table 7: Voter Turnout in Nigeria 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections across the Six Geo-Political Zones**

| Geo-Political zone | Percentage % of Voter Turnout in 2015. | Percentage % of Voter Turnout in 2011. |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| North Central | 43.47 | 49 |
| North East | 45.22 | 56 |
| North West | 55.09 | 56 |
| South East | 40.52 | 63 |
| South South | 57.81 | 62 |
| South West | 40.26 | 32 |

Source: African Elections Data Base, 2015 cited in Araba and Braimah (2015:255).

Furthermore, it is argued that ethno-religious voting behaviour is a trend in the two successive presidential elections in 2011 and 2015 respectively. Hence, it marginally occurred in 2011 presidential as embellished in the statistics of votes secured by the frontline candidates in Table 2 and intensely observed in 2015 presidential election voting pattern as seen in the statistics of votes won by the two frontline candidates (PDP and APC) across regions and states of the federation.

In reference to the implications of ethno-religious euphoria and voting orientation on future presidential elections particularly the much anticipated 2023 presidential election, Onwuanabile (2015) stressed that there may be apprehension that subsequent elections may spring up agitations from other ethnic and religious groups to produce the next president. Issues bordering on economy, security, social welfare, job creation etc, may no longer matter to the people, as long as they share the same group identity with the president. Any president elected under this circumstance may not enjoy national support and legitimacy; and this will ultimately result into two similar but regrettable scenarios.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

A cursory review of submissions of scholars and empirical findings reveals that Nigeria heterogeneous background is susceptible to identity politics which has been reflective from pre-independence to contemporary political process. Ethno-religious voting behaviour is also visible in Nigerian two successive presidential elections (in 2011 and 2015) but in varied intensity and dimensions.

Most importantly, this cleavage orientation in Nigeria political process is adverse to the lofty ideals of democratic consolidation, national cohesion and national development.

In reference to these realities, this discourse suggest for formation of national vanguard for voter re-orientation and sense of nationhood. This vanguard should emerge from the synergy of election advocacy groups and civil society organizations to educate Nigerians on the rationale and essence of issue-based voting for national development.

The same euphoria of advocacy should also be extended to party politics and electoral campaign.        In political parties, candidate recruitment process should reflect democratic ideals where credibility and personality of party aspirant for presidential election shall be issue of consideration beyond cleavage politicking.  Also, it is also advocated that 2023 presidential electoral campaign should be premised on fundamental issues of governance, security and economy. This is imperative because political parties constitute viable mechanism of interest aggregation that reflects public anxiety and expectation.

Furthermore, the identity socio- religious and ethnic alliances should deemphasize on their divisive tendencies and begin to build bridges of goodwill and harmony  to rescue a nation-state in search for national identity. This disposition may also entrench a new narrative of voter orientation for purpose good governance and national development.

Finally, the process towards a genuine democratic consolidation in African most populous country begins with a  new civic orientation and attitude of Nigerian political elite and the masses. This is fundamental for the election of a Nigerian President for the Nigerian People in 2023.

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