CHAPTER EIGHT
RELIGION AND ELECTORAL OUTCOMES IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC: THE 2015 AND 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

Religion has played a major role throughout Nigerian history, right from the colonial administration, through the post-independence period, and up to the present republic. The 'religious question' is only a part of the larger national question about what Nigeria is. Today, both Islam and Christianity are straddled across the Nigerian polity, each no longer knocking and pleading to be admitted, but seeking to take over the architectural design and construction of the Nigeria polity. In matters of religion and political competition, despite the claims of democratic procedures as spelt out in the legal and political documents, the realities belie the claim (Kukah, 1993; Salahu, 2017).

There are several narratives concerning the separation of religion from politics. However convincing some of these narratives may appear to be, we should not forget the fact that for most of human history, politics and religion have continued to influence one another (Salahu, 2017). In the great ancient civilizations of the world, kingship and priesthood were very closely related. At times it was not too clear whether we were dealing with a king with sacred powers or a priest with political authority. The priest-king was a common phenomenon. Examples cut across all continents: the Egyptians in Africa, the Assyrians in the Middle East, the Greeks and Roman empires in Europe, and the Incas in the Americas, to mention a few. Similarly, in African traditional societies, political life was shot through by religion. The rulers were agents of the gods of the land and custodians of the wishes of the ancestors. The people on their part accepted the political arrangements governing their lives as religious obligations. (Onaiyekan, 1993; Salahu, 2017).

The question of the relationship between religion and politics is therefore an inevitable and important one. The strident call for a separation of politics from religion often becomes a slogan used according to the convenience of the moment. The reality is that both are tied together, by the very nature of things- and this is for at least two reasons: First, there is something inherently sacred about political power. History has shown that power can only be properly exercised when handled with sacred attention. In religious parlance, we say, 'all powers belong to God'. Secondly, it is the same concrete human person who assumes both political and religious identity, and one necessarily affects the other. No wonder, even nations which make much of the separation of religion and politics find many ways in practice to act against this principle (Onaiyekan, 1993; Salahu, 2017). If truly politics is all about the 'authoritative allocation of values' (Easton, 1957), or "who gets what, when and how"(Lasswell, 1930); if it also remains uncontroverted that politics and religion are inseparable within the Nigerian political matrix, logically, we therefore, may be tempted to accept the fact that religion could produce variation in our electoral outcomes (Salahu, 2023). In light of the above, this chapter endeavours to explore the extent to which religion has influenced politics in Nigeria, how it has shaped the outcomes of the 2015 and 2023 Presidential Elections and attempts to seek a lasting solution to this disintegrative phenomenon in our society. It is of great importance to note that the justification for putting the 2015 and 2023 Presidential elections in perspective within the Fourth Republic was the very high level of disintegrative tendencies generated by the two leading religions- Christianity and Islam before and during the two elections compared to other elections within the same Republic.

Putting these two elections in perspective, this study, concerning methodology relies heavily on secondary data sourced from the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC. It adopts a combination of both quantitative and qualitative techniques in analyzing the outcomes of the 2015 and 2023 Presidential elections. Also, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data was used in the course of our analysis. Quantitative data were generated from the INEC database and analyzed using simple percentages as the statistical instrument of analysis, while qualitative data for this study were sourced from academic journals, academic textbooks, and newspapers'

reports on the 2015 and 2023 Presidential elections. For this study, we are chiefly interested in the results of the two major political parties for the 2015 Presidential elections- Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC), since it was a two-horse-race contest, and the three main political parties for the 2023 Presidential election- Peoples Democratic Party, All Progressives Congress and Labour Party, since it was a contest virtually between these three parties. Note that, out of the 24,025,940 total valid votes cast during the election, 21,880,779 votes were shared among these three parties, PDP, APC, and LP, which represents 91.1% while 2,145,161 votes were shared among the other fifteen political parties (INEC, 2023).

Religion and Electoral Outcomes: Exploring the Nexus

Scholars of different orientations hold divergent views on whether Nigeria is a religious, secular or ecumenical state. The individual opinions are based on the perspectives through which the country is assessed. In the first assumption, it is believed that since there is hardly anything done or embarked upon in Nigeria without directly or indirectly mentioning the name of God Almighty, the country should therefore, be considered as a religious or a multi-religious state. This religious nature of Nigeria therefore, may take the form of formal or informal acknowledgement of one religion or another: Islam, Christianity or African Traditional Religion (Salahu, 2017). The second assumption contends that the fact that no one specific religion is adopted as an official state religion in Nigeria, even though the country's constitution guarantees freedom of religion for the citizens, Nigeria remains a secular state. The third assumption is more of an intellectual conviction. It holds the view that Nigeria is neither a secular nor a theocratic state. The argument here is that a secular state is where religion is not given any role to play in its affairs. However, contrary to all arguments, this school of thought believes that religion is a big factor in Nigerian politics. To it, Nigeria is an "ecumenical state where deals are made between the state and religious institutions involving power sharing without reducing these deals into law"(The Democrat, 1994; Salahu, 2017).

Jamiu, (2012), exploring further the nexus between religions and politics, argues that although, the political development under the banner of federalism, requires that the government of the federation or

a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion, individuals, groups or even government officials perform and function within the realm of religion in force, be it paganism, atheism, Christianity or Islam. This is to say that the spirit of the constitution of Nigeria favours religion of any kind. What the Constitution objects to is an attempt by either the federal or state government to adopt any religion as the state religion. However, in reality, what is obtainable in some states in Nigeria today is an unofficial adoption of either Christianity or Islam as state religion, to the extent that individuals in some states are denied certain political rights, just because they belong to the 'minority' religion. The situation is such that in a predominantly Muslim state, all is against the emergence of a Christian Governor. The situation is no different in a predominantly Christian state. With this scenario and the constitutional provision in mind, it will therefore be pertinent for us to take a look at some issues which could be considered as politicization of religion in Nigeria. Although there had been few cases of politicization of religion right from the introduction of colonial rules in the country, this development did not fully manifest in Nigeria, until the time when the debate on the Draft Constitution triggered controversy over issues of the demand for the inclusion of Shari'ah in the constitution by the Constituent Assembly between December 1976 and June 1978.

Notably, as observed by Jamiu (2012), neither the Jama'at Nasril Islam (JNI) nor the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), before then was conscious, or ready to express its awareness of any implication of government decision on its religious principle or practices. Within this period, some events started craving the indulgence of these religious organizations to rise to their feet and safeguard the interests of their religions politically. One such outstanding event was a meeting between the Christian leaders and the federal government which took place in February 1976 at the instance of the latter (Jamiu,2012). As recorded by Rev. Kukah from Rev. Aledeino, who said "At the meeting, one member asked that the participants at least round off with a prayer, even though the meeting had not opened with a prayer. Brigadier Yar'adua, the host, continued the account, and said that since there were various denominations, he did not know who could be called upon to lead the prayer. Consequently, the worries from such observation by the government

spontaneously precipitated the formation of a more nation-widely represented Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) from the already existing Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) and Northern Christian Association (NCA) with headquarters in Oyo and Kaduna respectively (Kukah,1993).

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was in reality the coming together of Christians from the dealings with the government, as observed by Kukah (1993). It could be observed here that the formation of CAN in 1976 was the beginning of the real politicization of religion in Nigeria because there was also a spontaneous response from the Muslim side. It included the re-activation of JNI's and Da'awah activities and the Muslim Students Society's (MSS) literary activities towards political awareness. The formation of the CAN and the re-activation of the JNI and the MSS, which came about as a result of their adherents' re-commitment to religious call to propagate their religions, set in motion all the subsequent events, simply referred to the politicization of religion. The Muslim and Christian organizations started watching one another's activities with suspicion; and more often than not with fear of one attempting to dominate the other through numerical strength or by occupying strategic positions in government, both at the federal and state levels (Jamiu, 2012).

Another issue was the establishment of Muslim and Christian pilgrim welfare boards at the state and federal levels for the followers of the two religions. The establishment of the Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board dates as far back as 1958 and 1959 when the Western Region and the Northern Region established their boards respectively. In response to that, the Christians in Nigeria demanded for what was termed "equal treatment and right' for the establishment of the pilgrims' welfare boards for both Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. The request was granted by the government and the Boards were established for both Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. During the formation of political parties in the Second Republic, two major factors were paramount in deciding the nature of party officials nation-wide; ethnic affiliation, geographical spread and religious inclination. These factors were represented in who occupied which position in the party offices. In light of this, when a Muslim presidential candidate comes from the North for a party, his Vice-President running-mate should be a Christian from the South. The same thing applied to the office of the

Chairman and the Secretary of the five registered political parties in 1978, except in the UPN whose presidential candidate and party chairman was the same person- Chief Obafemi Awolowo. His running-mate also a Christian came from the south, Anambra state, in person of Mr. Philip Umeadi. This strategy might not be unconnected with the failure of the UPN in the 1979 General Elections (Jamiu, 2012).

It should be noted that the situation is not different from what was obtainable during the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria, with APC fielding General Muhamadu Buhari, a northern Muslim and Professor Yemi Osinbajo, a southern Christian as the presidential and vice-presidential candidates respectively. The same could be said of the PDP's presidential flag-bearers- Former President Goodluck Jonathan and Vice-president Namadi Sambo, who also rode on a "Christian-Muslim ticket" (Salahu, 2017). It is worth noting that the "Muslim-Christian ticket" or the "Christian-Muslim ticket" has always been the 'Electoral- talisman' when it comes to winning elections in Nigeria. As such, this type of political development does confirm the fact that the impact of religion on Nigerian politics, and by extension, on the outcomes of elections in the country appears and remains unquestionable (Salahu, 2017). However, the 2023 Presidential election was a departure from the political tradition of flying either a "Muslim-Christian ticket" or the "Christian-Muslim ticket", that was the norm among the major political parties. Daringly, one of the three major parties, the party in power, the All Progressives Congress, against all calls and warnings from religious institutions across the country ran on a "Muslim- Muslim ticket", while the other two major political parties, PDP and LP, ran "Muslim-Christian ticket" and "Christian- Muslim ticket" respectively. A development which heated the polity so much, leading to the Christian communities openly challenging the party and its candidate and even threatening to vote against the party (Salahu, 2023).

The 2015 Presidential Election in Perspective

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999 till 2015, the Peoples Democratic Party, (PDP), had always enjoyed overwhelming victories in elections, both at the state and national levels. Most of these victories were attributable to its membership size to the other parties, national

spread and the fact that the opposition parties had always been very weak in the arts of opposition politics. The 2015 elections presented a serious challenge to the PDP's political hegemony over other political parties. This was partly due to the merger secured by the Action Congress of Nigeria, (ACN), led by Asiwaju Ahmed Tinubu, the General Muhammadu Buhari-led CPC and other smaller political parties in the opposition then; and the crisis within the PDP, which eventually led to five PDP governors joining the party that was formed as a result of the above merger, the All Progressive Congress, APC.

Undoubtedly, the emergence of General Muhammadu Buhari as the winner of the APC presidential primary election sent a negative signal to the PDP's camp; and threw up rays of revolutionary hope, as witnessed in the ways and manners in which an average commoner in the country associated with the change mantra on which the APC eventually rode to power. In fact, with regards to the emergence of the APC presidential flag-bearer, The Nation Newspaper on Sunday, December 14th, 2014, in one of its columns had the following as its opener, 'Given his landslide victory at the just concluded APC presidential primary, General Muhammadu Buhari seems to be on the cusp of history once again. It is history steeped in and dripping with paradox. It has been said that thunder does not strike twice. But if the loud rumblings for change across the country and the sudden tectonic shift in favour of a sanitizing presidency are anything to go by, the Daura-born general has another rendezvous with history' (Alamu,2014, p.3).

The battle for Nigeria's presidency therefore became a two-man contest between the then incumbent, President Goodluck Jonathan, and his main rival, Muhammadu Buhari. It was indeed the closest election since the return to civilian rule in 1999. Nigeria's Presidential and National Assembly elections took place on 28 March. The election was postponed from the original date of 14 February to allow the military to launch an operation against the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast of the country. Notwithstanding rumours of another last-minute postponement or challenges to the legality of General Buhari's eligibility, the election was a test of the use of new technology by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In an attempt to combat the fraud that had plagued previous

elections in the country, INEC had to produce permanent voter cards for Nigeria's 68 million registered voters which were expected to match their details to a biometric register (Salahu, 2017).

However, there were widespread concerns that the system, though sound in theory, may fail in practice. There were serious insinuations that the card readers would not work and that even if the accreditation and voting processes were smooth, the process would still be vulnerable at the point of collation. Some even believed that, even in the event of a free and fair election, the period was likely to trigger some level of violence, as inflammatory language coming from supporters of the two main parties could only make the mood more toxic. It was so unfortunate, that the election revealed that the political elite class in Nigeria lacked what was required in terms of political skills, hence the engagement of mindless campaigns by the two main political parties, deploying every political and religious antics in running down political opponents. Concerning the mindless campaigns, there was a piece in The Nation Newspaper on Sunday, December 14th, 2014, p.14, which warned the political elite class that 'Citizens are more likely to want to hear from all the candidates how each of them plans to address the real issue: corruption, security, an economy that appears to have been degraded by the diminishing value of petroleum, an education and health sector in shambles, a polity being broken into two by the diversionary tactics of Christian and Islamic fanatics besotted to political power at all cost' (Sekoni, 2014, p. 14).

Also, there were serious allegations and counter-allegations, on the part of the two main parties over plots to use religion for vote hauling. There were allegations that some pastors collected six billion naira on behalf of CAN to campaign against the APC candidate, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, during church services. There was also counter-allegation that billions of naira were made available to Islamic clergies to preach in mosques against the emergence of President Goodluck Jonathan as the winner of the 2015 presidential election. However, amidst all these fear and endless, mindless campaigns, INEC was able to conduct the election with a reasonable mark of success, the outcomes accepted by the political parties, the civil society, domestic and international observers, and adjudged as the best election that had ever been conducted in the country (Salahu, 2017).

It is important to note that there were a large number of defections between the two main political parties, the PDP and APC. It is equally important to note that the new technology, the introduction of card readers reduced the rate of electoral fraud to the barest minimum. This, interestingly, placed the opposition party almost on an equal pedestal with the then-ruling People's Democratic Party, and by extension, the eventual victory of the opposition party, APC. The election was certainly historic, as the continent's most populous country moved from democratic transition to consolidation with a truly open contest that ushered in a new government formed by the opposition party, APC. Indeed, it was a marked departure from what was an intra-party transition, to an inter-party transition of administrations in Nigeria.

Going by INEC official results, the 2015 Presidential election was a tight contest between APC and PDP. Out of the 28,587,564 valid votes cast, 28,278,083 were shared between the two political parties, leaving just 309,481 to be shared among the other 12 political parties. APC had 15,424,921, while PDP had 12,853,162 votes, as shown in Table 1. below. Although, for every contest, there must be a winner, however, this chapter is not interested in which party wins or loses in the election. The main thrust of our analysis is to show how each of the two candidates performed in terms of electoral outcomes in each geo-political zone, juxtaposing the outcomes with the religious distribution pattern of each of these geo-political zones (INEC, 2015; Salahu, 2017).

Table 1: 2015 Presidential Election Results of the Two Major Political Parties, APC and PDP

S/N	Geo-Political Zone	State	APC (Votes)	PDP(Votes)	Total Votes Cast
1	North-West	Kano	1,903,999	215,779	2,172,447
2	,,	Kaduna	1,127,760	484,085	1,650,201
3	,,	Katsina	1,345,441	98,937	1,481,714
4	,,	Kebbi	567,833	100,972	715,122
5	,,	Jigawa	885,988	142,904	1,071,889
6	,,	Sokoto	671,926	152,199	876,369
7	,,	Zamfara	612,202	144,833	780,179
	Sub-total(votes)		**7,115,149**	**1,339,709**	**8,747,921**
8	North-East	Bauchi	931,598	86,085	1,039,775
9	,,	Yobe	446,265	25,526	491,767
10	,,	Gombe	361,245	96,873	473,444
11	,,	Adamawa	374,701	251,664	661,210
12	,,	Taraba	261,326	310,800	602,716
13	,,	Borno	473,543	25,640	515,008
	Sub-total(votes)		**2,848,678**	**796,588**	**3,783,920**
14	North-Central	Benue	373,961	303,737	703,131
15	,,	Kogi	264,851	149,987	439,287
16	,,	Kwara	302,146	132,602	461,401
17	,,	Niger	657,678	149,222	844,683
18	,,	Plateau	429,140	549,615	1,000,692
19	,,	Nasarawa	236,838	273,460	532,641
20	,,	FCT	146,399	157,195	316,015
	Sub-total(votes)		**2,411,013**	**1,715,818**	**4,297,850**
21	South-West	Lagos	792,460	632,327	1,495,975
22	,,	Oyo	528,620	303,376	928,606
23	,,	Osun	383,603	249,929	663,373
24	,,	Ondo	299,889	251,368	582,435
25	,,	Ekiti	120,331	176,466	309,445
26	,,	Ogun	308,290	207,950	559,613
	Sub-total(votes)		**2,433,193**	**1,821,416**	**4,539,447**
27	South-East	Imo	133,253	559,185	731,921
28	,,	Enugu	14,157	553,003	585,632
29	,,	Anambra	17,926	660,762	703,409
30	,,	Ebonyi	19,518	323,658	393,337
31	,,	Abia	13,394	368,303	401,049
	Sub-total(votes)		**198,248**	**2,464,911**	**2,815,348**
32	South-South	Akwa Ibom	58,411	953,304	1,028,551
33	,,	Bayelsa	5,194	361,209	371,739
34	,,	Rivers	69,238	1,487,075	1,584,768
35	,,	Cross Rivers	28,368	414,863	465,906
36	,,	Edo	208,469	286,869	522,785
37	,,	Delta	48,910	1,211,405	1,284,848
	Sub-total(votes)		**418,590**	**4,714,725**	**5,258,597**
	Total (validvotes)		**15,424,921**	**12,853,162**	**28,587,564**

Source: Generated from the INEC database (2015) ,Salahu, 2017

In addition to the above-presented data, it is also critically important to run a brief description of the distribution of religion in the country with regard to the six geopolitical zones before proceeding to the analysis of the quantitative data. Note that Nigeria is nearly equally divided between Christianity and Islam. The majority of Nigerian Muslims are concentrated in the northern area of the country, while Christians dominate in the south. Muslims form a slight majority of the nation, comprising 50.8% of the population, while Christians make up 47.9%. According to the 2001 CIA Factbook and other sources, 50% of the population is Muslim, 40% Christian and 10% follows traditional

beliefs. However, in some recent reports, the Christian population is now slightly larger than the Muslim population. An 18 December 2012 report on religion and public life by the Pew Research Center stated that in 2010, 49.3 per cent of Nigeria's population was Christian, 48.8 per cent were Muslims, and 1.9 per cent were followers of indigenous and other religions, or unaffiliated (Pew, 2012). However, whichever report we choose to adopt, one thing is clear, most of these reports agree in clear terms, on some qualitative descriptions as regards religious distribution regarding each geo-political zone. This is represented below in Table 2 as follows:

Table 2: Religion Distribution of the Six Geo-Political Zones.

S/N	Geo-Political Zone	Number of States	Description of Religion Distribution
1	North-West	7	Predominantly Muslim(Some communities in Kaduna state have Christian majorities)
2	North-East	6	Predominantly Muslim (In Taraba state, Christians hold a slight majority)
3	North-Central	6	An almost equal mix of Christians and Muslims (none of the two predominates)
4	South-West	6	An almost equal mix of Christians and Muslims(none of the two predominates)
5	South-East	5	Predominantly Christian (Muslims are insignificantly few in this region)
6	South-South	6	Predominantly Christian (Edo has several communities with Muslim majorities)

Source: Derived from PEW's 2011, PRB's 2005 Survey Reports and the Researcher's field study.
*Note that there are more Christians in the North-West and North-East than there are Muslims in the South-East and South-South geo-political zones.

Table 1 above shows that in the North-West geo-political zone which is made up of seven states, predominantly Muslim region, a total of 8,747,921 votes were recorded out of the 28,587,564 overall total valid votes cast across the six geo-political zones in the country. It is interesting to note that out of the 8,747,921 votes in the region, APC's candidate, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim, polled a whopping 7,115,149 votes against the PDP's candidate, former President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian, who managed to poll just 1,339,709 votes across the seven states that made up the North-West geo-political zone. The situation was not too different in the North-East except for Taraba state, where PDP won with 310,800 votes as against APC's 261,326 votes. It should be noted that the slight victory had by PDP in the state could be attributed to the fact that the Christians are on a slight majority in the state. The results suggest that in the two predominantly Muslim geo-political zones in the country, the North-West and North-

East, the APC's Muslim candidate polled 9,963,827 votes, 79.5% of the total votes cast in the two geo-political zones; while the PDP's candidate, a Christian managed to poll just 2,136,297 votes, 17% of the votes from the two regions (INEC, 2015; Salahu, 2017).

On the contrary, the reverse is the case, looking at INEC results in the same election from the South-South and the South-East zones. In all the five states that make up the South-East, there was no state where the APC candidate, a Muslim, scored above 18% of the total votes cast in the state. It was only in Imo state that the APC's candidate had 18%. In the other four states, the party polled between 2% and 5%. Going into the South-South, a predominantly Christian region, PDP's candidate, a Christian, polled an overwhelming 4,714,725 votes, 90%; while APC's candidate, a Muslim, polled 418,590 votes, 8% of a total 5,258,597 votes cast in the region. It is clear from Table 1 that, it is only in Edo state within this region, that APC gave a good fight. Though the PDP got 55% of the votes, APC was able to poll 40% of the votes. This could also be attributed to the fact that Edo state has several communities that are predominantly Muslim. Data from the two geo-political zones, South-South and South-East reveals that about 56% of the PDP total votes (12,853,162) come from these two predominantly Christian regions.

In a similar vein, the APC's candidate, polled just 2,136,297 votes, 17% of the votes from the two regions. A Muslim got 65% of his total votes of 15,424,921 votes from the North-West and North-East, the two predominantly Muslim regions in the country. It is equally interesting to note that the battleground in terms of a contest between the two political parties was the North-Central, the South-West and the Federal Capital Territory, FCT. In all of these regions and territories, there were no landslide victories, which could be attributed to the almost equal mix of Christians and Muslims in terms of distribution. It is clear that no single religion predominates in these two regions and the FCT, hence the slight victories witnessed by the two parties in these regions (Salahu, 2017).

It is also clear from the above analysis that certain revelations were made, which seemingly appear uncontroverted. In the first instance, premised on our analysis, it becomes clearer that the Christian candidate of the PDP got 56% of his total votes from just two out of 6 geo-political zones in the country. Incidentally, these zones are

the only two predominantly Christian regions in the country, South-South and South-East. The same candidate got just about 16% of his total votes from the North-West and the North-East combined. These, we know are predominantly Muslim regions. Similarly, from our analysis, the APC candidate, a Muslim, got about 65% of his total votes from just two geo-political zones, North-West and North-East, which incidentally are the two predominantly Muslim regions in the country. In the course of our analysis, it was noted that those geo-political zones, where there was a stiff contest between the two major political parties, PDP and APC, are those geo-political zones where we have almost an equal mix of Christians and Muslims, the South-West and North-Central (Salahu, 2017). Going by this analysis, it is clear from Table 1 and Table 2 above that the outcome of the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria was greatly influenced by the activities of the two major religions- Christianity and Islam.

The 2023 Presidential Election in Perspective

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) have always enjoyed overwhelming victories in elections both at the state and national levels since 1999, For the past twenty-four years, power has been shared between these two parties, sixteen years of PDP's four by four years administration back to back and eight years of APC's two by four years administration also back to back. The battle for Nigeria's presidency since 2015 had always been a two-horse contest between the then two major political parties' candidates. As earlier noted, the "Muslim-Christian ticket" or the "Christian-Muslim ticket" has always been an unwritten tradition that the two major political parties unquestionably considered when fielding candidates for Presidency and Vice Presidency positions (Salahu, 2023).

Interestingly, the 2023 Presidential election was a clear departure from the unscripted political tradition of flying either a "Muslim-Christian ticket" or the "Christian-Muslim ticket", that was the norm among the major political parties. However, one of the three major parties, the All Progressives Congress, against all calls and warnings from religious institutions across the country ran on a "Muslim- Muslim ticket", while the other two major political parties, PDP and LP, ran "Muslim-Christian ticket" and "Christian- Muslim

ticket" respectively. A development which heated the polity so much, leading to the Christian communities openly challenging the party and its candidate and even threatening to vote against the party. Despite the pressure from concerned party members and the Christian community for the APC Presidential candidate to shelve the idea of a "Muslim-Muslim ticket", he daringly declined, giving the reason that with his emergence as the APC Presidential candidate, the only option that could guarantee his party's victory in the general election was to run on a "Muslim- Muslim ticket", since the majority of people from the North- Western and North-Eastern zone where he was expecting block votes are predominantly Muslims. His insistence heated the polity more than ever before, to the extent that the Christian communities openly challenged the party and its Presidential candidate and even threatened to vote against the party (Salahu, 2023).

Initially, at the beginning of the build-up to the 2023 Presidential election in 2022, it thus looks like it was going to be the usual two-horse race, between PDP and APC, but the circumstances surrounding the "Muslim- Muslim ticket produced a third force, the Labour Party, with a Christian-Muslim ticket, since in the first instance, both the PDP and APC through their primary elections have returned all Muslims as their Presidential candidates- Atiku Abubakar and Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu.. Consequently, the President, of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), reaffirms the association's position on the "Muslim-Muslim ticket, maintaining that they took a position against the same faith ticket imbroglio under the leadership of Rev. Samson Ayokunle and as his successor, he still stands on the same position (Okoh, 2022). The above position by CAN, saw most Christian communities overtly and covertly campaigning vigorously for the Labour Party and its presidential candidate, Peter Obi.

Notably, the results of the 2023 election were a reflection of the APC Presidential candidate's claim of where he was expecting block votes and also a reflection of the Christian community's open challenge and threat to vote against the party. The results of the 2023 Presidential election clearly showed that the APC Presidential candidate got more than 60% of his votes from the Northern States of the country, which are predominantly Muslim enclaves, a clear reinforcement of his claim, while the Labour party candidate, who incidentally is the only Christian among the big three candidates, got

well over 60% of his votes from the South-East and South-South and South-West geopolitical zones. Apart from the issue of the "Muslim-Muslim ticket" which heated the polity, there were issues generated from the introduction of the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System BIVAS machines, an electronic device designed to read Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and authenticate voters, using the voters' fingerprints to prove that only eligible voters can vote at a particular polling unit. The BVAS was introduced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 2021 to promote credible elections and prevent rigging. Apart from being a device used to register voters, it is also used to accredit voters before voting on election day. While it helps in scanning voters' cards, it is equally used for transmitting election results to the INEC viewing portal in real time on the day of the election. It is important to note that BVAS doesn't require internet connectivity during voting. It only requires internet connectivity when transmitting election results to the INEC portal (Isreal Arogbonlo, 2023; Salahu, 2023).

Due to the already religion-induced heated political atmosphere, there were serious insinuations that the challenges that came with the deployment of BVAS for the election may not allow INEC to conduct a free and fair presidential election. There were accusations and counter-accusations among the three big political parties on INEC's preparedness and its status as a fair electoral umpire was continuously questioned, going into the election, but INEC was able to douse the tension with a promise of uploading election results on its portal in real-time on the day of the election. With such assurance, from the electoral management body, some level of confidence was restored in the electorate, believing their votes would eventually count. However, a few number of critics still believe that the BVAS would not work and that even if the accreditation and voting processes were smooth, the process would still be vulnerable at the point of collation. Some even believed that, even in the event of a free and fair election, the period was likely to trigger some level of violence, as inflammatory language coming from supporters of the three major political parties could only make the mood more toxic (Salahu, 2017).

Just like in the 2015 elections, unfortunately, the political elite class in Nigeria refused to learn the required political skills, hence the engagement of mindless campaigns by the three major political parties, deploying every political and religious antics in running down political opponents. Also, there were serious allegations and counter-allegations, on the part of the three major political parties over plots to use religion for vote hauling. However, amidst all these fears and endless, mindless campaigns, coupled with the challenges associated with the Central Bank of Nigeria's naira swap policy and scarcity of fuel in the country, INEC was able to conduct the election with a reasonable mark of success. Though there were some pockets of infractions reported by some political parties, civil society, and domestic and international observers, especially to non-uploading of election results in real-time as promised by INEC, it could still be said to be the best election that had ever been conducted in the country. This is because the deployment of BVAS in the election has to a great extent reduced ballot box snatching, rigging of elections, and multiple voting, while the Central Bank of Nigeria's naira swap policy, reduced to the barest minimum the incidence of vote-buying. It is important to note that the new technology, the introduction of BVAS has reduced the rate of electoral fraud to the barest minimum (Salahu, 2023).

This, interestingly, placed the two major opposition parties almost on an equal pedestal with the ruling, All Progressive Congress, to the extent that parties were losing their strongholds to opposition parties in the election. For instance, APC Presidential candidate, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu lost Lagos State to a relatively new Labour party during the presidential polls, a state that he had total political control over for the past twenty-four years. Some incumbent governors also lost their senatorial elections to opposition candidates in their various states, even President Muhammadu Buhari could not win his home state, Katsina for his party, APC. It was so interesting that the ruling party, APC lost in twelve states in the Presidential election, which include Kano, Kaduna and Lagos among others. The outcome of the 2023 Presidential election was quite interesting. The candidate of the ruling, All Progressive Congress, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, eventually won the election with 8,794,726 votes, despite running on a Muslim-Muslim Ticket' amidst warnings and threats from the Christian Association of Nigeria CAN. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar and

Peter Obi of the Peoples Democratic Party and Labour Party polled 6,984,520 and 6,101,533 votes respectively, as presented in Table 3 below. The election was certainly historic, this is the first time since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999, that a party will run on a Muslim-Muslim ticket and win the election (Salahu, 2023).

Below is a table containing the 2023 Presidential Election's results, generated from the Independent National Electoral Commission's portal:

Table 3: 2023 Presidential Election Results of the Three Major Political Parties, APC, PDP and LP

S/N	Geo-Political Zone	State	APC (Votes)	PDP(Votes)	LP(Votes)
1	North-West	Kano	517,341	131,716	28,513
2	,,	Kaduna	399,293	554,360	294,494
3	,,	Katsina	482,283	489,045	6,376
4	,,	Kebbi	248,088	285,175	10,682
5	,,	Jigawa	421390	386,583	1,889
6	,,	Sokoto	285,444	288,679	6,568
7	,,	Zamfara	298,396	193,978	1,660
	Sub-total(votes)		**2,652,235**	**2,329,536**	**350,182**
8	North-East	Bauchi	316,694	426,607	27,373
9	,,	Yobe	151,459	198,567	2,406
10	,,	Gombe	146,977	319,123	26,160
11	,,	Adamawa	182,881	417,611	105,648
12	,,	Taraba	135,165	189,017	146,315
13	,,	Borno	252,282	190,521	7,205
	Sub-total(votes)		**1,185,438**	**1,741,446**	**315,107**
14	North-Central	Benue	310,468	130,081	30,637
15	,,	Kogi	240,751	145,104	56,217
16	,,	Kwara	263,572	136,909	31,166
17	,,	Niger	375,183	284,898	80,452
18	,,	Plateau	307,196	243,808	466,272
19	,,	Nasarawa	172,922	147,093	191,361
20	,,	FCT	90,902	74,194	281,717
	Sub-total(votes)		**1,760,994**	**1,162,087**	**1,137,822**
21	South-West	Lagos	572,606	75,750	582,454
22	,,	Oyo	449,884	182,977	99,110
23	,,	Osun	343,945	354,366	23,283
24	,,	Ondo	369,524	175,463	44,405
25	,,	Ekiti	201,494	89,554	11,397
26	,,	Ogun	341,554	123,831	85,829
	Sub-total(votes)		**2,279,007**	**1,001,941**	**846,478**
27	South-East	Imo	66,406	30,234	360,495
28	,,	Enugu	4,772	15,749	428,640
29	,,	Anambra	5,111	9,036	584,621
30	,,	Ebonyi	42,402	13,503	259,738
31	,,	Abia	8,914	22,676	327,095
	Sub-total(votes)		**127,605**	**91,198**	**1,760,589**
32	South-South	Akwa Ibom	160,620	214,012	132,683
33	,,	Bayelsa	42,572	68,818	49,975
34	,,	Rivers	231,591	88,468	175,071
35	,,	Cross Rivers	130,520	95,425	179,917
36	,,	Edo	144,471	89,585	331,163
37	,,	Delta	90,186	161,600	341,866
	Sub-total(votes)		**799,960**	**717,908**	**1,210,675**
	Total (validvotes)		**8,794,726**	**6,984,520**	**6,101,533**

Source: Generated from the INEC database (2023)

Table 3. above shows that just like the 2015 elections, the 2023 Presidential election was also a tight contest between APC, PDP and LP. This is because out of the 24,025,940 total valid votes cast during the election, 21,880779 votes were shared among these three parties, APC, PDP and LP, which represents 91% while 2,145,161 votes (9%) were shared among the other fifteen political parties. APC had 8,794,726 votes, PDP had 6,984,520 votes, and LP had 6,101,533 votes. Although, for every contest, there must be a winner, however, this chapter is not interested in which party wins or loses in the election. The main thrust of our analysis in this section is to show how each of the three major candidates performs in terms of electoral outcomes in each geo-political zone, juxtaposing the outcomes with the religious distribution pattern of each of these geo-political zones. In the North-West geo-political zone which is made up of seven states, all predominantly Muslim states, a total of 5,331,953 votes out of the 21,880779 votes were shared among these three political parties. It is interesting to note that out of the 5,331,953 votes, APC's candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a Muslim, from the South-West geo-political zone polled 2,652,235 votes, 49.7% of the votes. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, also a Muslim from the North-East geo-political zone polled 2,329,536 (43.7%) of the votes, while Peter Obi of the Labour Party, a Christian from the South-East geo-political zone got just 350,182 votes, (6.6%) across the seven states that made up the North-West geo-political zone. It should be noted that between the two Muslim candidates of the APC and PDP, is 93.4% of the votes, which translates to 4,981,771 out of 5,331,953 votes.

Data from Table 3 also shows that a similar situation was presented in the North-East. Out of the 3,241,991votes recorded by the three parties in the Presidential election, 2,926,884 (90.3%) votes went to the two Muslim candidates of APC and PDP, while 315,107 (9.7%) votes were recorded for Peter Obi. The above data suggests that in the two predominantly Muslim geo-political zones in the country, the North-West and North-East, the APC and PDP Muslim candidates polled 8,573,944, votes, 92.8% of 9,239,233 votes for the three candidates in the two geo-political zones. Peter Obi of the Labour Party managed to get 665,289 votes, 7.2% of votes from the two zones. By implication, the data suggests that most people from these two geo-political zones, who are predominantly Muslims voted for either the

APC or PDP candidates, who are Muslims, while some of the very few Christians assumedly voted for the LP candidate, Peter Obi, who got 7.2% of votes from the two zones

On the contrary, according to INEC results in the same election from the South-South and the South-East geo-political zones, the APC candidate, a Muslim, scored 6.4% of the total votes for the three candidates in those five states, while the PDP candidate, also a Muslim had 4.6% of the votes (127,605 and 91,198 votes for APC and PDP respectively, out of a total of 1,979,392 votes accruable to the three candidates). However, an overwhelming victory was recorded in the same South-East geo-political zone by Peter Obi of the Labour Party, of the Christian faith, who polled 1,760,589 votes, 89% of the 1,979,392 votes cast for the three candidates in that zone. Going into the South-South, also a predominantly Christian region, the Labour Party's candidate, a Christian, polled an overwhelming 1,210,675 votes, while APC and PDP candidates, Muslims, polled 799,960 and 717,908 votes respectively. Data from both the South-South and South-East reveals that LP candidates got 63.1% of votes, while APC and PDP candidates polled 19.7% and 17.2% respectively from these two predominantly Christian regions. In a similar vein, the APC's candidate, a Muslim, got 63.5% of his total votes of 8,794,726 votes from the Northern states, predominantly Muslim regions in the country.

It is equally interesting to note that the battleground in terms of contest among the three political parties was the North-Central, just like we had in the 2015 Presidential election. In this geo-political zone, the three candidates of the APC, PDP and LP got over one million votes each (APC- 1,760,994, PDP- 1,162,087, LP- 1,137,822), which could be attributed to the almost equal mix of Christians and Muslims in terms of distribution. No single religion dominates in this region. It is also evidently clear from the above analysis that certain revelations were made, which seemingly appear uncontroverted, that the geo-political zone, where there was a stiff contest between the three major political parties, PDP, APC and LP, is that geo-political zones where we have almost an equal mix of Christians and Muslims, the North-Central (Salahu, 2023). The above analysis suggests that the outcome of the 2023 Presidential election, just like the 2015 Presidential

election in Nigeria was greatly influenced by the activities of the two major religions- Christianity and Islam.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

According to the above analysis, based on the electoral outcomes as presented in INEC's portal, it is clear that the 2015 and the 2023 Presidential elections present another case of "Religion in Politics" in Nigeria. This chapter in clear terms, based on the outcome of the above analysis, has been able to establish and affirms that voters in predominantly Christian regions voted more for a Christian candidate, while voters in predominantly Muslim geo-political zones voted more for a Muslim candidate. On these notes and in the final analysis, this chapter therefore concludes that more than ever before and more than any other factor, religion to a large extent determines *'who gets what, when and how'* and by extension varies the outcomes of elections in Nigeria. Although, constitutionally, Nigeria remains a secular state, but in the real sense of it, Nigeria is a multi-religion state.

For the nation to witness any meaningful development, this chapter recommends that we need to, as a people allow our democracy, to grow far above religion among other diversities plaguing Nigeria as a state. The role of Nigeria as a secular state has been severely compromised, as such; it should be redesigned without the current religious overtones and practice true secularism as entrenched in our constitution. It equally recommends that there is the need for mass re-orientation of the citizens to eschew religious bigotry. There is a need for the government to strengthen the National Orientation Agency, NOA, Federal and States' Ministries of Information; and fund relevant Civil Society Organizations in other to achieve this goal. This effort can be reinforced by encouraging frequent collaborative efforts among adherents of the two prominent religions, Islam and Christianity, especially in areas of nation-building. And finally, legal sanctions should be introduced within our legal framework against any individuals or groups that promote 'Religion in Politics'. This would serve as a deterrent to those religious bigots, who preoccupy themselves with promoting religious-laden 'hate statements', especially in critical political periods, such as in election campaign periods. A jail sentence is suggested, with no option of a fine. These will in no small measure drive the nation close to the secular status as entrenched in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

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