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Socio-cultural groups endorsements and voting patterns in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria: Implication for 2023 general elections

Barr Uzochukwu I Ozumba ¹, Paul C Ezinna ²

¹⁻² Institute of Maritime Studies, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Barr Uzochukwu I Ozumba

Abstract

The study examined the nexus between socio-cultural groups' endorsement and counter-endorsement of presidential candidates and voting patterns in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria and the consequent implications for 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to examine if the overt endorsement and counter-endorsement of presidential candidates by Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, Arewa Consultative Forum, Afenifere, Middle belt Forum, Pan-Niger-Delta Forum, Southwest Youth Forum Orhobo Youth Forum among others had a significant influence on the voting pattern in such region. The research design adopted for the study was ex-post factor research design. Secondary sources and nonparticipant observation were the major data collection instruments. Data collected were analyzed using table, percentage as well as qualitatively. Rational Choice Theory provides a strong explanatory compass and insight to

what influence voting pattern as recorded and observed in the 2019 general election in Nigeria. The study revealed that, the endorsement and counter-endorsement of presidential candidates by ethnic social cultural organizations like Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, Afenifere of Yorubas, Arewa Consultation Forum, Pan-Niger-Delta Forum, Southwest Youth Forum, and Middle Belt Forum among others significantly influence the percentage of votes each presidential candidate got in each geo-political zone. In the light of the above findings, the study recommended among other things that, The ethnic socio-cultural organization should stop endorsing political candidates during elections because it influence the rate of ethnic motivated voting pattern as against issue based voting pattern which is ideal for a democracy that wants to develop.

Keywords: Ethnicsocio-cultural groups, Voting Patterns, Political endorsement, Counter-endorsement, 2019 general elections, 2023 general elections

Introduction

Nigeria is a multicultural state and the interplay of the various ethnic groups manifest majorly during general elections. The ethnic groups in Nigeria is estimated at 250 or more, however during general elections, the struggle is majorly between and among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria- Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba while others form alliance based on the perceived political cum economic benefits. Just like there are many ethnic groups in Nigeria, so there are many socio-cultural groups/organizations to promote and protect interest of the peoples of each ethnic group politically and economically. Some of these socio-cultural groups/organizations in Nigeria are Afenifere, Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo, Arewa Consultative Forum, Pan-Niger-Delta Forum, Orhobo Youth Forum, Middle Belt Forum and so on. These socio-cultural groups/organizations were formed to by the various ethnic groups to protect and promote their interest, however, scholars have argued that their leaders are using it for their self-interest (Gabriel, 2018). No matter the diverse views, these groups still have significant influence in the Nigeria political atmosphere to a high extent. Their influence has manifested in their overt endorsement of presidential candidates in the general elections. Since the return of civilian rule in 1999 these groups have been at the fore front of promoting and protecting the interest of the ethnic group they represent. Different government have sought their advice for policies, projects and programmes. However, their recent covert endorsement of presidential candidates during general elections have raised a lot of controversies, opinions and views among scholars and the public as to whose interest a candidate is endorsed? The people or the leaders? The romance between socio-cultural groups and political candidates seeking public endorsement by the group have been witnessed majorly during the 2015 and intense in the 2019 general elections, and this calls for the attention of researchers as to whether these series of endorsement and counter-endorsement influence the voting pattern of the electorate.

Though researches on the ethnic nature of Nigerian politics cum voting pattern are numerous and well established. For instance, Sule (2019) ^[24] argued that, the result of the 2019 General Election continued to reflect the ethnic voting pattern in Nigeria.

In earlier study, Sule, Azizuddin, Sani, & Mat (2017) [25] opines that, the political culture of ethnic and regional voting inherited from the nationalists during the colonial was transferred to the present era and it seems to be continuous increasing geometrically from one general election to another. Little effort has been given to the influence of socio-cultural group endorsement on the voting patterns of electorates especially in the general elections characterized by constant covert endorsement and counter-endorsement by socio-cultural groups in Nigeria, which have the tendency to threaten the united Nigeria if not assessed and controlled. 2019 general election witnessed an overt display of political endorsements and counter-endorsements which some time led to violence among the leaders of the socio-cultural groups. There is still paucity of empirical study on the influence of socio-cultural group endorsement on the voting pattern of Nigerian electorates during general elections, and the consequent implications for 2023 general elections. From the forgoing, the study raised the question; does the overt endorsement and counter-endorsement of presidential candidates during general elections in Nigeria influence the voting pattern? To answer this question, this paper examined the interplay and series of endorsement and counter-endorsement in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria by socio-cultural organizations/groups like Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Northern Leaders Forum, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Afenifere, Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF) and Orhobo Youth Forum among others, and how these influenced the outcome of the election, must especially the voting pattern of the electorates within such ethnic voters. Also, to predict the implications of such influence on the 2023 general elections that is already causing debate whether political power will be zoned to the south or remain in the North. A study of this nature is urgently required so as to understand the politics behind the overt endorsement and counter-endorsement of presidential candidates among socio-cultural groups.

Ethnicity and voting pattern in Nigerian general elections

No doubt, Nnoli remains one of the leading scholars on ethnicity in Africa. According to Nnoli, (1978) [17] ethnicity is a social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of the largest possibly competing communal groups (Ethnic groups) seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system. Nnoli (1978) [17] further stated that, ethnicity is an act of ethnocentrism, which he identified as attitudinal, meant to demonstrate ethnic prides and belonging to an ethnic group. General Elections in Nigeria usually has the political culture and voting pattern of ethnicity, religion and regionalism which is part of the issues that are bedeviling the successful choice of good leaders in the country (Abdullahi, 2015) [1]. The political elites found it expedient to manipulate ethnicity and tribalism as the easiest means of acquiring power because of their failure to deliver their responsibilities. The aforementioned factors are the major cause of voter's apathy in the subsequent general elections in Nigeria. As observed by Olayode (2015) [18], Metumara (2010) [16], & Rufai' (2011) Voters are voting during elections based on their affinity with leaders that belong to the same ethnic cleavages, region and other sentiments. Yakubu and Ali, (2017) [28] postulated that political behaviour of voters is that of having their votes casted on those whom they belong to the same ethnic, religious and regional affiliation even if the other candidate is better and has an outstanding record of better performance.

Olayode (2015) [18] opined that general elections are generally portrayed with dominance of ethno- religious sentiments as determinants of voting pattern and political participation across Nigeria. In the presidential election, the president and vice president elect received almost 90 per cent of their votes on the basis of ethno-regional identity. Similarly, the incumbent president received en masse votes from his ethno-regional zones". This has been the culture in Nigerian political theatrical arena where votes are allotted according to ethnic allegiance and religious sentiments by each particular section or group in the country where their candidate emerge irrespective of whether he will win through their votes or he will loss. Metumara (2010) [16] postulated that the voting pattern in Nigeria is affected by an amalgam of rival ethnic groups that were set against each other in a fierce rivalry in a struggle for power and competition for control of scarce resources and this has been visible in the political processes. Onapajo (2012) [21] believed that Nigerians are more loyal to ethnic group than state. Election in Nigeria usually has the voting pattern of ethnicity, religion and regionalism which is part of the issues that are bedeviling the successful choice of good leaders in the country (Abdullahi, 2015) [1]. According to Lawal (2017) [13] the central argument is that the votes cast in the presidential election did not reveal a significant change in voting patterns along ethnic, religious and geospatial lines. A majority of voters in the largely Muslim-dominated Hausa/Fulani ethnic group of Northern Nigeria voted for the APC presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a northerner and Muslim from Katsina state. A majority on the South voted for the incumbent President, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, and a Christian from Balyelsa in the South-South of Nigeria who led the PDP. Beyond the significance of regionalism, ethno-religious bias weighed heavily in support for the two main candidates across much of Nigeria's 36 states, thus reinforcing the argument that amongst other factors, the politicization of ethnicity is important in understanding why people merely vote in Africa but do not choose (Ake, 1996) [3]. Also, Eifert, Miguel, and Posner (2013) [9] have shown that 'close' elections in Africa are associated with increase in the salience and strength of ethnic voting.

While there may be other variables underlying the voting pattern of an average Nigerian voter, ethnicity remains a potent force in the history of Nigerian politics. Stressing its relevance in Nigeria's political landscape, Joseph, (2013) [12] argues that, even though ethnicity might not be sufficient explanation of Nigerian voting pattern, yet, it is the most accessible yarn from which political cloth can be sown" In essence, the voting pattern of Nigerians has tended to be influenced by the sentiments of kinship and ethnicity as assets exploited by high-status seekers when canvassing for votes (Szlarski, 2000). Ethnic voting pattern can take different dimension. Wolfinger (1965) [27] remark that ethnic voting has two manifestations, (1) Members of an ethnic group show an affinity for one party or the other which cannot be explained solely as a result of demographic characteristics (2) Members of an ethnic group will cross party lines to vote for or against a candidate belonging to a particular ethnic group. Wolfinger, argues that several political circumstances are also associated with the strength of ethnic voting-that ethnicity will be more important in the absence of plain cues to guide voters' decision, ethnicity is likely to play a greater role in non-partisan election, where voters cannot rely on the party label alone. Ethnic sentiments play a role in shaping

vote choice, but noted that rational calculations about material welfare are apparently at the forefront of voters' minds (Bratton, Bhavnani and Chen, 2011) ^[7].

Socio-cultural groups in Nigeria and the politics of endorsement and counter-endorsement in the 2019 general elections.

2019 Nigerian general elections witnessed series of endorsement and counter endorsement by the various Socio-cultural groups in Nigeria. The series of endorsement started with the public endorsement of President Muhammadu Buhari re-election bid by the acting Chairman of the National Executive Committee of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Musa Kwande at the ACF secretariat in Kaduna (Daily post, 2019). Similarly, a faction of Afenifere (the socio-cultural groups of southwestern, Nigeria) led by Chief Ayo Fasnmi endorsed the candidature of President Muhammadu Buhari re-election on the 20th December, 2018. In a counter-endorsement, another faction of Afenifere led by Reuben Fazoranti has countered the endorsement of President Muhammadu Buhari by a faction of the group. In a reaction to the counter-endorsement of President Muhammadu Buhari by Mr. Reuben Fazoranti led faction of Afenifere, a group of youth from the southwest rejected the endorsement of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar by a faction of Afenifere. The youth spoke under the aegis of Southwest Youth Forum (SWYF).

In the southeastern Nigeria, Pulse Nigeria (2019) reported that Ohanaeze Ndi-igbo (the socio-cultural group of southeastern, Nigeria) endorsed the presidential candidature of Atiku Abubakar of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for the 2019 general election (Pulse Nigeria, 24th January, 2019). Supporting the endorsement of Atiku Abubakar by Ohanaeze Ndi-igbo, other socio-cultural groups from other geopolitical zones like Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), Middle Belt Forum (MBF), and Northern Elder Forum (NEF) also endorsed the presidential candidature of Atiku Abubakar. Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF) is the socio-cultural group of the south-southern part of Nigeria. While Middle Belt Forum (MBF) is the socio-cultural group of North-central geopolitical zone, Nigeria. The politics of endorsing a candidate over others among the socio-cultural groups is determined by the perceived benefits, the various group will receive from the candidate when he wins. Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo endorsed Alhaji Atiku Abubakar because he promised to restructure Nigeria, which is one of the demand of the southeastern region over the years. Also, his running mate is from the region. Similarly, PANDEF endorsed Atiku Abubakar for the same reason of accepting to restructure Nigeria. On the contrary, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) endorsed President Muhammadu Buhari re-election bid because he is strongly against the restructuring agenda which the Northeast and Northwest part of Nigeria is totally against.

Methodology

The research design adopted for the study is *ex-post* factor research design. Cohen and Manion (1980) explained *ex-post facto* to mean "after and fact" or "retrospectively" and this is applied to studies which investigate possible cause and effect relationships by observing an existing condition, and searching back in time for plausible causal factors. Asika (2006) ^[6] explains that the "ex-post facto or single case design is characterized by form of experimental design where an existing case is observed for some time in order to evaluate it". He further observes that the event that are observed have

already taken place. Here we will attempt to link some existing effects or observations to some causative agent or agents and variables. In other words, the experimental variables had already been assigned and cannot be altered by the researcher. That is to state that data are collected after the event or phenomenon under investigation had happened. The method of data collection for this study is the documentary method. Documentary method is the use of outside sources, documents, to support the viewpoint or argument of an academic work. For secondary source of data, this study focused on institutional and official documents that were sourced from among others, Newspapers, journal articles, conference papers, INEC official documents, NGOs reports, UN electoral observer's reports, domestic electoral observer's reports, etc. for data analysis, We relied on qualitative descriptive analysis. This entails extracting meaning and making logical deductions from the already documented mass of data.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the intellectual tenets of Rational Choice Theory by Anthony Downs (1957) ^[8]. The Rational Choice Theory of Election is a political economy approach towards understanding the nature and pattern of voters' choice during election in a particular democratic setting. The Theory originates from the writings of Anthony Downs (1957) ^[8] in his discourse of "An Economic Theory of Democracy". Another scholar behind the postulation of this theory is Kenneth Arrow (1986). The basic assumptions of rational choice theory include: firstly, individuals act in their self-interest and not in the interests of others. They are considered rational, calculating choosers who seek to maximize their own utility. Secondly, individuals have enough information about how to make the maximal use of their preferences. These preferences are influenced from the external environment and are not the consequences of social, cultural or historical influences. Finally, the preferences are transitive (Mueller, 2003). According to Ezeibe, (2016) ^[10] the political market is made up of those who demand certain type of public policies and those who supply them. He furthered that, these actors are self-interested. They are motivated to better off themselves. The interest of the actors and the resources they command determine the policy made and implemented in any political environment.

The Rational Choice Theory of Election identifies that political behaviour which manifest either through voting pattern of the electorates is a rational choice based on some indicators such as economic benefit, resources allocation, distribution of public services, allocation of juicy political offices and favour (Downs, 1957; Arrow, 1986) ^[8]. This view has been consolidated by Farber (2009) ^[11]. Rational Choice Theory of Election is either evaluative or non-evaluative according to Downs (1957) ^[8] and Arrow (1986). Evaluative is the process of measuring and evaluating the performances of regimes to determine whether they deserve voters' choice or not and, in this regard, rationality is based on performance measurement. The non-evaluative is based on clientelistic considerations such as favouritism, patronage, ethnicity, religion, regionalism and family. Lindberg & Morrison (2008) ^[14] observed that elections in African countries are mostly considered on clientelistic rationalism where the ethnic, religious and regional cleavages are given much consideration. Furthermore, Lindberg and Weghorst (2010) ^[15] identified what they called "Swing votes" in developing

democracies like Nigeria where they analyzed that ethnic, religious, patronage and clientele satisfaction of the voters when measured with evaluation of performances of the leaders in office can influence the outcome of an election. Drawing a comparison to a marketplace, this model holds that in the political marketplace the voter will cast his or her vote for the party that is most likely to serve the ends of the voter and the model emphasizes the importance of issues, interests and concerns in elections, most important of such is ethnicity (Ball and Peters, 2005). Voting is thus considered a rational act, where individual actors act on personal self-interest which are later aggregated in ethnic group interest for themselves and for party they prefer (Heywood, 2002). Voting is also seen as a retrospective comment on the party in power and how its performance has influenced citizen's choice (Heywood 2002). According to Aldrich (1993) electoral turnout assumes a special place in the Rational Choice Model where citizens' preferences are transformed into "utilities for outcomes" when the extent to which one citizen prefers one outcome over another one matters. In the Rational Choice Model it is important that voters, or individuals, choose or prefer outcomes with higher utility to those with lower utility and choose actions to receive more highly valued outcomes.

Applying the theory to this study, First and foremost, rational choice theory emphasized and recognizes that the actions and inactions of electorates during elections are guided by self-interest. This self interest in an ethnic oriented society like Nigeria is manifested in ethnic self-interest. Since, every individual belong and is fundamentally loyal to the ethnic group, his rational actions on how to vote, who to vote for, why to vote and why not to vote are more influenced by ethnic inclination than other factors like political parties, religion, literacy level or even issue based policy position of the candidates. Thus, using rational choice theory to explain the influence of socio-cultural groups political endorsements on the voting pattern, one will appreciate that since the

individual is first and foremost loyal to their ethnic group above other factors, this loyalty influences his self-interest and ethnic affiliation is considered supreme in deciding the voting alignment and direction to vote, who to vote for etc. From the forgoing analysis, it is clear, the rational evaluation of the utility outcome of the elected politicians from the prism of ethnic and tribal viewpoints can influence their voting pattern in Nigeria, that is ethnic oriented and ever loyal to it above other factors. In fact, studies has shown that Nigerian political parties are ethnic based, hence, even a rational choice based on political party in Nigeria is indirectly ethnic oriented actions and inactions.

Results

Endorsement of Atiku/Obi Candidacy by Ohanaeze Ndigbo and PDP overwhelming Performance in Southeast

In the 2019 general elections, The Eagle Online (2019) reported the tensions, ignited by the recent endorsement of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party, by the Ohanaeze Ndigbo over and above the incumbent President, Alhaji Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress. Those in the pro-Buhari camp disagreed vehemently with and, in fact, rejected the endorsement. Those who want to dismiss the disagreement with a wave of the hand should be concerned that Barrister Uche Okwukwu, the Secretary General of Ohanaeze, has endorsed President Buhari, obviously conveying the lack of consensus on such a serious matter. Despite the initial disagreement, the overwhelming percentage of votes PDP got from southeast geopolitical zone, confirms that the overt endorsement of Atiku/Obi Candidacy by Ohanaeze Ndigbo influenced the voting pattern of electorates in the zone. The table below present the percentage of votes PDP got versus that of APC in Southeast geopolitical zone in the 2019 general elections.

Table 1: Voting Pattern of States in the Southeastern geopolitical zone, Nigeria

States	APC votes	Percentage	PDP votes	Percentage	Winner
Abia State	85,058	27.9%	219,698	72.1%	PDP
Anambra State	33,298	6%	524,738	94%	PDP
Ebonyi State	90,726	26%	258,573	74%	PDP
Enugu State	54,423	13.3%	355,553	86.7%	PDP
Imo State	140,463	29.5%	334,923	70.5%	PDP
Total	403,968	20.54%	1,693,485	76.46%	PDP

Source: Analyzed and computed by the researcher

Table 1 above shows the voting pattern of states in the southeastern part of Nigeria in the 2019 general elections. Based on the table, in Abia State, PDP got 219,698 (72.1%) of the total votes. In Anambra State, PDP got 524,738 (94%) of the total votes. In Ebonyi, PDP got 258,573 representing (74%) of the total votes. In Enugu State, PDP got a total of 355,553 (86.7%) of the total votes. And finally, in Imo state, PDP recorded 334,923 (70.5%) of the total votes.

Endorsement of Buhari/Osinbajo Candidacy by Northern Leaders Forum, and Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), and APC overwhelming Performance in Northeast/west

Owete, (2019) ^[22] reported the endorsement of Buhari/Osinbajo Candidacy by Northern Elders Forum (NEF) and Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) ahead of the

2019 general elections on the February, 4th 2019 (Premium times Newspapers, 2019). Olowolagba, (2019) ^[19] reported that Shehu Sani, the senator representing Kaduna Central, has reacted to Northern Leaders Forum and Arewa Consultative Forum, endorsement of President Muhammadu Buhari ahead of 2019 presidential election. Northern Elders Forum (NEF) and Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) on Tuesday Febuary, 7th endorsed the re-election bid of President Muhammadu Buhari based on track records and achievements. Acting chairman of the National Executive Committee of the ACF, Musa Kwande, made the disclosure at the forum's secretariat in Kaduna. Kwande said the strides by the Buhari administration to improve and re-position the nation economically as well as its achievements in combating insurgency led to the forum's decision to stand by him. The overt endorsement of Buhari /Osinbajo Candidacy by

Northern Elders Forum (NEF) and Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) greatly influenced the voting pattern in Northern Nigeria, as observed in the overwhelming votes

APC recorded in the northern, Nigeria in the 2019 general Elections. The table below further exposes the voting pattern as influenced by the overt endorsement.

Table 2: Voting Pattern of States in the Northeast and Northwest geopolitical zone, Nigeria

States	APC votes	Percentage	PDP votes	Percentage	Winner
Northeast, Nigeria					
Taraba state	324,906	46.4%	374,743	53.6%	PDP
Adamawa state	348078	45.9%	410266	54.1%	APC
Gombe state	402,961	74.4%	138,484	25.6%	APC
Bauchi state	798,428	79.2%	209,313	20.8%	APC
Yobe state	497,914	90.7%	50763	9.3%	APC
Borno state	836,446	92.1%	71,788	7.9%	APC
Kaduna	993,445	60.5%	649,612	39.5%	APC
Northwest, Nigeria					
Sokoto state	490,333	57.6%	361,604	42.4%	APC
Kebbi state	581,552	79%	154,282	21%	APC
Samfara state	438,682	77.8%	125,423	22.2%	APC
Jigawa state	794,738	73.3%	289,895	26.7%	APC
Kano state	1,464,768	78.9%	391,593	21.1%	APC
Borno state	836,496	92.1%	71,788	7.9%	APC
Katsina State	1,232,133	80%	308,056	20%	APC

Source: Analyzed and computed by the researcher

Fictionalization of Afenifere in the Endorsement of Presidential Candidacy and the distribution of Southwest votes between APC and PDP in the 2019 general Elections According to Owete, (2019) ^[22] a faction of Afenifere led by Ayo Fasanmi, endorsed the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), President Muhammadu Buhari. On the contrary, Oluwole, (2019) ^[20] reported that Afenifere that endorsed Buhari are impostors. The Yoruba socio-political group, Afenifere, led by Reuben Fasoranti, has denounced the endorsement of President Muhammadu Buhari by a faction of the group. Another issue of ethnic inclination in the 2019 general elections was reported by Aliyu, (2019) ^[4] that South-West youths disagree with Afenifere, endorse Buhari. The coalition of southwest youth Ahead of Saturday’s presidential election, a group of youths from the south-west has rejected the endorsement of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar by the pan-Yoruba group, Afenifere. The

youths speaking under the aegis of South-West Youth Forum (SWYF) however hailed the endorsement of President Muhammadu Buhari by another faction of group led by Pa Ayo Fasanmi. From the forgoing, it is evident that there was disagreement in the endorsement of a presidential candidate among southwest ethnic social organization, this disagreement led to the division of the group into two factions. While the faction led by Pa Ayo Fasanmi, overtly endorsed President Muhammadu Buhari re-election, the other, faction led by Reuben Fasoranti countered the endorsement, and in reaction endorsed Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar. While the youth supported the faction that endorsed Buhari/Osinbajo re-election. These interplay of endorsement and counter-endorsement in southwest led to the nearly equal distribution of votes in southwest as evident in the table below, showing the voting pattern by states in the southwest.

Table 3: Voting Pattern of States in the Southwest geopolitical zone, Nigeria

States	APC votes	Percentage	PDP votes	Percentage	Winner
Ekiti State	219231	58.7%	154,032	41.3%	APC
Lagos State	580825	56.5%	448,015	43.5%	APC
Ogun state	281,762	59.1%	194655	40.9%	APC
Ondo State	241769	46.7%	275901	53.3%	PDP
Osun State	347,634	50.7%	337,377	49.3%	APC
Oyo state	365,229	49.9%	366,690	50.1%	PDP

Source: Analyzed and computed by the researcher

Endorsement of Atiku/Obi Candidacy by Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), Orhobo Youth Forum and PDP overwhelming Performance in South-South

According to Kabir, (2019), the Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), endorsed the candidate of PDP for presidency. Reacting to the endorsement, Edwin Clark, a former minister of information has revealed why a south-south group endorsed Atiku/Obi candidacy. While speaking on Channels TV, Sunday politics, Mr. Clark said they settled for Atiku/Obi because they are the only candidates that believes in restructuring Nigeria. Clark argued that South-south had

been marginalized for long and such, necessitated the forum’s agreement to support a man with restructuring mantra. Similarly, PM News, (2019) reported the endorsement of Atiku/Obi candidacy by the South-South Community Association of Nigeria (SOSCAN) has agreed to float a common campaign strategy to assist the PDP presidential candidate win the 2019 presidential election. The overt endorsement of Atiku/Obi candidacy in the south-south is responsible for the high votes PDP got in the region. The table below expatiates the voting pattern of states in south-south region.

Table 4: Voting Pattern of States in the South-South geopolitical zone, Nigeria

States	APC votes	Percentage	PDP votes	Percentage	Winner
Akwabom state	175,429	30.7%	395,832	69.3%	PDP
Bayelsa state	118,821	37.5%	197,933	62.5%	PDP
Rivers state	150,710	25.6%	437,971	74.4%	PDP
Cross River state	117,302	28.3%	295,817	71.7%	PDP
Delta state	221,292	27.2%	595,737	72.8%	PDP
Edo state	267,842	49.3%	275,691	50.7%	PDP

Source: Analyzed and computed by the researcher, October, 2019

Implications of the endorsement and counter-endorsement of presidential candidates among socio-cultural groups in the 2019 general elections for 2023 general elections

One major implication of the politics of endorsement and counter-endorsement of presidential candidates among socio-cultural groups in the 2019 general elections for 2023 elections is that political candidates will focus more energy and tactics in lobbying and romancing leaders of the socio-cultural groups to endorse them instead of focusing their energy on winning the votes of the masses. This will further lead to increase antagonism between and among the ethnic groups in the country, thereby threatening the unity of the country.

Secondly, the interplay of lobbying for endorsement will skyrocket the cost of political power acquisition, increase the cases of political corruption as well as lead to opposition of a candidate on the masses against their will. Gradually, the romance for seeking political endorsement will manifest in in-group crisis cause of political affiliation. It is worthy of mention at this point that there will be prevalence of political thugs who are ready to highjack and manipulate figures to favour the candidate endorsed by the socio-cultural group of the particular region.

Conclusion

In this study, we have examined the nexus between socio-cultural groups' endorsement and counter-endorsement of presidential candidates and voting patterns in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria and the consequent implications for 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Rational Choice Theory provides a strong explanatory compass and insight to what influences voting pattern as recorded and observed in the 2019 general election in Nigeria. It was observed that the endorsement and counter-endorsement of presidential candidates by ethnic social cultural organizations like Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, Afenifere of Yorubas, Arewa Consultation Forum, Southwest Youth Forum, and Middle Belt Forum among others influence the percentage of votes each presidential candidate got in each geo-political zone. On the other hand, the geo-political zones with presidential candidates recorded higher voters turnout as compared to zones without. Similarly, states with a candidate recorded higher voter's turnout compared to when the states has no candidate and viz a viz. On the basis of the analysis above, we stated the following findings; That the endorsements and counter-endorsements by ethnic socio-cultural organizations like Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, Arewa Consultative Forum, Afenifere, Middle belt Forum among others influenced the voting pattern on the 2019 general elections as evident in the percentage of votes each candidate got. The implications of this for 2023 general election is that political candidates will focus more energy and tactics in lobbying and romancing

leaders of the socio-cultural groups to endorse them instead of focusing their energy on winning the votes of the masses. This will further lead to increase antagonism between and among the ethnic groups in the country, thereby threatening the unity of the country. In the light of the above findings, the following recommendations are put forward to ethnic organizations, policy makers, government and INEC.

1. The ethnic organization should stop endorsing political candidates during elections because it influences the rate of ethnic motivated voting pattern as against issue based voting pattern which is ideal for a democracy that wants to develop.
2. The policy makers should make and amend the law of existing restructuring ethnic organization to overtly endorse and counter-endorse candidates. The endorsements and most times disagreement among the members of such ethnic socio-cultural groups leads to confusion among the electorates from such ethnic groups and may lead to voting apathy.
3. Government and INEC should ensure to implement the restructure of ethnic motivated endorsements by organizations in Nigeria like Ohaneze Afenifere, Arewa Consultative Forum etc. during electioneering period.

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