



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

## Ethno-religious Cleavages and Voting Behaviour in the 2015 General Election in Bauchi State, Nigeria

**Abubakar Muhammad Ali**

Deputy Manager, States Operations Department (Inspectorate Division)  
National Pension Commission, Bompai Kano-Nigeria

**Adamu Suleiman Yakubu**

Lecturer, Department of General Studies,  
Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic, Bauchi, Wuntin Dada, Jos Road, Bauchi State, Nigeria

### **Abstract:**

*This paper examined the extent to which ethnicity and religion played a vital role in the voting behaviour of 2015 General election in Bauchi State. The 2015 general elections in Nigeria had come and gone but the indelible features it left in our memories will linger for some time to come. Apart from the fact that the election resulted in the defeat of a ruling government, it also exposed the unflinching role of ethnicity in the voting pattern of the people. This study adopted quantitative means of data collection. Two research question were raised and answered in the study. The findings of the study revealed that ethnicity has played role in the voting behaviour of the Bauchi state electorates in 2015 General election. On the basis of findings of this study, it is recommended that, there is urgent need for public enlightenment by appropriate authority on the dangers of voting based ethnic consideration. Voting a candidates is supposed be based on competence of contestant not ethnicity and other parochial sentiments.*

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Religion, Voting behaviour, Bauchi state

### **1. Introduction**

In Nigeria, Ethnic and religious politics had been nurtured since colonial era with new trends and dimensions taking place in the contemporary era. Political parties and candidates are easily perceived as representatives of a particular ethnic or religious group and voting pattern in Nigeria largely mirrors the various cleavages in the country – North-South, Christian-Muslim, among others. The dominant role of ethnicity in Nigerian democratic and partisan politics and the struggle for political power has been reflected through the results of previous elections from the First Republic to the recently concluded 2015 general elections. Thus, ethno-religious cleavages have continued to remain a major determinant of electoral outcome and related political issues with attendant implications for democratisation and nation building in Nigeria.

The results of the 2015 general elections clearly revealed the preponderance of ethno-religious sentiments as determinants of voting behaviour and political participation across the country. From the presidential through gubernatorial, national and state assemblies' elections, aspirants were largely chosen on the basis of ethno-religious identities. In the presidential election, the president and vice president elect received almost 90 per cent of their votes on the basis of ethno-religious identity.

In addition to being the most competitive election in Nigeria since independence, the 2015 general elections were held amid rising tensions on account of terror attacks by the Boko Haram Insurgent group. Ahead of the elections, there had been increasing tension between the north and the south due to what the northerners perceived as their 'lost opportunity' to reclaim the presidency and reverse the continued economic marginalization of their region. All these factors exacerbated the traditional ethnic, regional, and religious cleavages that have defined Nigerian and Bauchi state politics since independence.

### **2. Statement of the Problem**

In spite of the several attempts made by the past regime/administration to ensure free and fair elections since independence to date through organizing training programmes for electoral officials such as returning officers, supervisors, presiding officers, polling clerks and orderlies, security men and Public enlightenment campaign for the voters about the conduct of election, the level of political awareness among electorates seems very low. Majority of the voters lack basic knowledge about the entire political process to take rational decisions on elections matters. This manifest in their traditional voting pattern as they vote on the basis ethnic ties rather than on important issues that are critical to human existence.

### 3. The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study objective of this paper is to,

1. Find out to what extent did ethnicity influenced the voting behaviour of Bauchi State electorate in 2015 general election.
2. Find out the strengths of Religious affiliation as a determining factor of their voting behaviours in 2015 General Election.

### 4. Research Questions

1. To what extent did ethnicity influenced the voting behaviour of the people of Bauchi State in the 2015 General election?
2. How important is religious affiliation as a determining factor of your voting behaviour in 2015 General election in Bauchi state?

### 5. Conceptual Clarifications

#### 5.1. Ethno-Religious Cleavages

Ethno-religious cleavage is the division or polarization of voters into voting blocks along the line of ethnic identities and religious affiliations. Ethno-religious relies on both claims of religious identity and ethnic distinction as basis for political mobilisation and participation. Ethno-religious cleavages are the national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious divisions that affect political allegiances and policies. Ethnic nationalism is the mobilisation of ethnic groups by using language, ethno-history, religion, traditions and customs for political purposes. In other words, through the rediscovery of an ethnic past, national identity could inspire ethnic communities to claim some political rights as nations within a nation-state. (Isiksal 2002:9). A belief in common historical evolution provides an inheritance of symbols, heroes, events, values, and hierarchies and confirms the social identities for separating both insiders and outsiders (Ake, 2000:93). Ethno-nationalism is defined in this study as people's loyalty to and identification with a particular ethnic nationality groups within a nation state for the purpose of mobilisation for collective social, political and economic interests.

#### 5.2. Voting Behaviour

Voting is the basic decision-making process in a democracy by which citizens choose candidates for public office or the formal recording of opinion of a group on any subject. In either sense, it is a means of transforming numerous individual opinions into a coherent and collective basis for decision. Voting behaviour is defined as a set of personal electoral activities, including participation in electoral campaigns, turnout at the polls, and choosing for whom to vote (Bratton, 2013). Voting behaviour is likely influenced by a multiplicity of factors; it is 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 influenced the pattern of voting.

### 6. Literature Review

Many scholars have argued and written much on election and voting pattern in Nigeria .This leads to a large and continuously expanding literature on voters and their behaviours during elections. One of the first studies in the field was conducted by Cutright and Rossi (1958) where they stated that the election outcome is a bundle of several factors; "the characteristic of the candidate, the activities of the competing party organizations, the processes of communications and the influence involving the mass media and informal groups, and finally, the social and psychological characteristics of individual voters.

The analysis of voting behaviours invariably focuses on the determinants of why people vote as they do and how they arrive at the decisions they make. Sociologists tend to look to the socio-economic determinants of support for political parties, observing the correlations between class, occupation, ethnicity, sex, age and vote; political scientists have concentrated on the influence of political factors such as issues, political programmes, electoral campaigns, and the popularity of party leaders on voting behaviour (Olaniyi 2004:16).

Mudasiru (2015) identifies three main propositions on voting behaviour in Nigeria to have included Sociological Approach; party identification model and rational choice. The sociological model emphasise on voting behaviour as a result of impact of social structure suggesting that social group membership influence voting behaviour. This is visible in Nigerian context where belonging to a religious group or ethnic group or certain geographical area determines voters' behaviour in an election. Belonging to a particular social group automatically qualifies a candidate to receive votes of such members of that group. Presidential elections in Nigeria are understood along that line.

The party identification approach is a situation where partisanship is highly stable over time. Here, voters are less likely to make distinctions between their vote choice and partisan dispositions. This situation is also applicable within Nigerian context where some sections of the population became attached to a given political party irrespective of the candidate as a result of their partisan position towards that particular party (Mudansiru, 2015).

The rational choice approach lays much emphasis on voters' choice of their candidates in an election based on issues and policy design of the political parties. The choice here is rational. This situation, however, is not obtainable in Nigerian system except to a smaller extent and even this one; is found among elites who chose their party or candidates due to the economic or political benefits they will gain from voting such candidates. But, common voter in Nigerian democracy has no rationality in choice as they tend to vote according to sentiments.

Lenshie (2014) identifies that the role played by ethnicity and religion in democratisation process in Nigeria is harmful to the system. He argued that, the tremendous effects of ethnic and religious crises faced by Nigeria in the current phase of democratisation are the outcome of the elite's manipulation of ethnic and religious identity. This has been associated with the problems of historical configuration of the country, the nature of political class and the manner in which they struggle. This has led to an exclusive nature of the politics of ethnic and religious identity among different groups in the country. This has affected the political behaviour of the electorates to align themselves with ethnic and religious political parties. This in return affects voting pattern during any elections whether Presidential or Gubernatorial.

Olayode (2015) opined that general elections are generally portrayed with dominance of ethno-religious sentiments as determinants of voting behaviour and political participation across the country. According to Olayode (2015): "From the presidential through gubernatorial, national and state assemblies' elections, aspirants were largely chosen on the basis of ethno-regional identities. 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.

Ojie (2006) believed that the inherent colonial legacies of merging multi-ethnic and multi-religious groups to form the present day Nigeria give the political elites the chance of usurpation of ethnic and religious variables in Nigeria's democracy towards their quest for power and this has made the political behaviour and voting pattern of the electorates to be divisive and sentimental towards the elite's manipulation of ethnicity and religion.

Egharevba & Iruonagbe (2015) stress that ethnicity in Nigeria does not only affect the political behaviour and voting pattern in Nigerian democracy but it also lead to the emergence of ethnic groups insurgents as witnessed recently. They observed that over the last decades, the activities of ethnic insurgents have permeated the Nigerian state ranging from the activities of Niger Delta militants to that of OPC in Yoruba land and Boko Haram in the North. They relate such ethnic insurgency to some factors like economic, political and cultural marginalization, widening social inequalities, lack of basic infrastructure and exclusion. They conclude that ethnicity in Nigeria has been allowed to take a new dimension from electoral politics to national threat and insecurity.

One other main issue that determines political behaviour and affects voting pattern in Nigeria is religion. Nigeria is mainly divided among Muslim/Christian dichotomy. For instance, Ukiwo (2004) observed that since Nigeria's political independence in 1960, ethno-religious factor determines largely who becomes what in Nigerian politics. Onapajo (2012) believed that Nigerians are more loyal to religion than state. This according to him can be observed from the trend of what he termed "Religiosity of politics" where religious affinity determines the outcome of election in a democratic dispensation. This affects voting behaviour of the electorates and one can never imagine doing away with the influence of religion in Nigerian election.

Similar to the above, Rufai (2011) emphasises that Nigeria is one of the most populous Muslims countries in the world where religion is a major factor in politics. In his assertion, Islam has been the major determinant of politics in the country for many decades as the candidates' religion is first considered during voting before anything else and since the Muslims are the majority, a Muslim candidate always likely emerged. Just like Rufai (2011) above, Onuora (2014) also is of the view that religion plays a vital role in shaping political behaviour and voting culture of the electorates in Nigeria. Unlike Rufai (2011), Onuora (2014) sees both Islam and Christianity playing an influential role in voting behaviour of Nigerian electorates in any election.

## 7. Theoretical Frame Work

A number of different theoretical approaches to the explanation of voting behaviour can be distinguished in the literature. Structural (or sociological) approaches concentrate on the relationship between individual and social structure. These approaches situate voting in a social context, and examine the effects of variables such as social class, language, nationalism, religion, and rural-urban contrasts on voting. Ecological (or aggregate statistical) approaches relate voting patterns to the characteristic features of a geographical area (ward, constituency, state, or whatever). Social psychological approaches relate voting decisions to the voter's psychological predispositions or attitudes, for example his or her party identification, attitudes to candidates, and such like. Finally, rational-choice approaches attempt to explain voting behaviour as the outcome of a series of instrumental cost-benefit calculations by the individual, assessing the relative desirability of specific electoral outcomes in terms of the issues addressed and policies espoused by the different parties or candidates. Each of these broad approaches tends to be associated with different research techniques and each makes different assumptions about what motivates political behaviour.

While many scholars have employed variety of analytical models to examine voting behaviour empirically, this paper adopts the social cleavage theory within the broader structural model. Specifically, social cleavage theory claims that social identities determine voting choices for any given individual or social group. Ethnic ties based on kinship and family, language and dialect, tribal customs and local communities, as well as shared religious faiths, have long been regarded as playing a critical role in party politics and electoral democracies in sub-Saharan Africa (Horowitz, 1985).

Arguably, one of the most influential perspectives concerning the relationship between ethnicity, party systems, and voting behaviour in developing societies was provided by Donald Horowitz (1985, 1993). Horowitz argues that the bond of ethnicity has a strong direct impact on electoral behaviour in ethnically-segmented societies, generating a long-term psychological sense of party loyalty anchoring citizens to parties, where casting a vote becomes an expression of group identity (Norris and Mattes 2003). In many African societies, ethnic mobilization, whether for political party formation, electoral campaigns or patronage, is widespread and, when combined with economic disparity and inequitable access to political power, has actually become a source of long-drawn-out conflicts, with far reaching destabilization effects.

While ethnicity has long been understood as playing a crucial role in structuring party politics in Africa, Nigeria and Bauchi state in particular; some recent studies have suggested that the impact of ethnic identities is extremely complex and variable. For example, Erdmann (2007) in a study of Zambia reports that ethnicity matters for voter alignment and even more so for party affiliation. The survey results indicate that ethnicity or ethno-political identity matters but certainly not the only factor that accounts for election outcomes. In a study of Uganda, Conroy-Krutz (2013) shows that goods distribution and ethnicity become less important as constituents gain more political information.

In Bauchi state and Nigeria at large, Three major ethnic groups - Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo - dominate the political landscape while other ethnic groups are regarded as minorities. This has created sub-nationalism. Ekeh (1973) has argued that ethnicity has flourished because the Nigerian elite who inherited the colonial state have conceptualized development as transferring resources from the civil public to the primordial public.

Nigerian electoral choice is largely based on ethnic considerations as successive elections from the colonial era through the post-independence period to the current Fourth Republican election have been seriously undermined by ethno-regional cleavages. Party politics in Nigeria during the colonial era was based on ethnic factor and one can assert that the seed of ethnic politics was sown at this period, germinated in the First Republic and the products started spreading during the 3rd and 4th Republics. For example, the Action Group (AG) as a party developed from a Yoruba Cultural Association, Egbe Omo Oduduwa; the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) was closely allied with the Igbo Union while the Northern People's Congress (NPC) developed from Jamiyyar Arewa. The leadership of the aforementioned political parties was along ethnic cleavages. The A.G. was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba; the NCNC leadership fell on Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo while NPC was led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, a Hausa- Fulani.

## 8. Research Methodology

### 8.1. Sources of Data, Sample and Sampling Methods

This research involved the use of both primary and secondary sources data while the Sampling method entails the "way sample units are selected from a parent population" (McNabb, 2009:127). This study used a combination of cluster and systematic sampling techniques in determining the unit and size of the population and questionnaires distribution. The area of study, Bauchi state has twenty local government areas and three senatorial zones. Furthermore, the three senatorial zones constituted the units of the study. For each of the three units of the study, one local government was systematically selected, making the sum of three local government areas. The three local government areas selected are Bauchi Local Government, as the state capital, representing Bauchi South Senatorial Zone; Ningi Local Government, representing Bauchi Central Senatorial Zone and Katagum Local Government, representing Bauchi North Senatorial Zone. The selection of these local government areas, to represent their respective Senatorial zones, is due to the fact that they are well known centres of politics, trade and commercial activities in their senatorial zones. Accordingly, the local governments are also divided into wards and three wards are selected on the basis of raffle draw which represented the local government area. The selected wards are Dankade, Dawaki and Dan-amar, representing Bauchi Local Government Area; Ningi east, Burra and Kurmi wards, representing Ningi Local Government Area; and Nasarawa, Kafin kuka and Yayu, wards representing Katagum Local Government Area.

Questionnaires are also distributed fairly among the three local governments. The 2011 population projection provided that Bauchi local government area has 228,325, Ningi local government has 181,366 and Katagum Local Government Area has 137,577 population of 18 years and above.; and the total number of the projected population of 18 years and above in the three local government areas is 547,268 and thus, 547,268 formed the actual population size in this research.

Statistically, to get the actual number of questionnaires that were administered in each local government area, the research divided the projected population of 18 years and above of each selected local government to the actual population size of this research which is 547,268 and multiply it with the number of questionnaires generated from Krejcie and Morgan (1970) scale which is 384. For instance, if one taken says Bauchi Local Government, the result shown that 228,325 divided by 547,268; it gave us 0.4172088 and multiplied it by 384; one got 160.2 into one significant figure. Therefore, 160 questionnaires were administered in Bauchi Local Government Area, and the same formula were used in arriving at the

number of questionnaires administered in other two local government areas, Ningi and Katagum, 127 and 97 questionnaires respectively.

## 9. Results

This research is based on three hundred and eighty four (384) questionnaire distributed out of which only eight hundred (380) were duly collected or returned back. All the findings was discussed based on three hundred and eighty (380) questionnaires successfully collected from the respondents. Data would be presented in table of numbers on left and percentages on the right followed by a brief analysis.

Sex	Number	Percentages
MALE	230	60.50
FEMALE	150	39.50
TOTAL	380	100

*Table 1: Sex of Respondents  
Source: survey research, 2017*

In the question of sex 230 (60.50%) of the respondents were males while 150 (39.50%) were females. That is the electoral activities involves and effects both male and female. For example, the political activities like elections, campaigns and registration of voter entails both male and female.

Age Group	Male	%	Female	%	Number	%
21-30	50	22	22	15	72	19
31-40	70	30	43	29	113	30
41-50	50	22	35	23	85	22
51-60	35	15	30	20	65	17
61 & above	25	11	20	13	45	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 2: Age Distributions of Respondents  
Source: survey research, 2017*

From the above table 72 (19%) of the respondents are between the ages of 21-30, 113 (30%) of the respondent fall within the age range of 31-40, while 85 (22%) are within the range of 41-50, 65 (17%) of the respondents fall between 52-60 years only 45 (12%) are 61 years and above. This clearly reveals that majority of the respondents are youths. Therefore, the youth being the vanguard of any project or programme, play important role in Bauchi State election activities. This is because they have the zeal and determination for ensuring credible, free and fair election in Bauchi State. Likewise they serve as a watch dog against political domination.

Occupation	Male	%	Female	%	Number	%
Civil/Public Servant	50	22	40	27	90	24
Politicians	60	26	20	13	80	21
Academicians	20	19	10	7	30	8
Private/Self Employed	70	30	50	33	120	31
Others	30	13	30	20	60	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 3: Occupational Distribution of Respondents  
Source: survey research, 2017*

The above table of the occupational distribution reveals that 120 (31%) of the respondents are private/self-employed (with higher percentages) compared to other professions like civil/public service with 90 (24%), politicians 80 (21%), Academicians, 30 (8%) and others 60 (16%). This variation occurs due to the fact that majority of the Bauchi State electorates are self/private employed and have more interest or rather are more interested than the rest of professions, this may be due to their political awareness.

Qualification	Male	%	Female	%	Number	%
Primary	50	22	20		70	18
Secondary	60	26	60		120	32
Tertiary	45	19	15		60	16
Qur'anic/ Islamiyyaa	75	33	55		130	34
Others	Nil	NIL	NIL		NIL	NIL
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4: Respondents Educational Level  
Source: survey research, 2017

Table 4 illustrates different level of educational background of the respondents. That is 70 (18%) have primary education while those with secondary leaving certificate constituted 120 (32%), those with tertiary education were 60 (16%) and those with Qur'anic/ Islamiyya were 130 (34%) and there were none with the others qualification. This clearly indicated that those with Qur'anic/Islamiyya education participated more in responses of the questionnaires distributed and Bauchi Populace have high number of such people. On the other hand those with secondary qualifications are second in number of people followed by Primary certificate and tertiary institution respectively. They are therefore, competent enough to make reasonable inferences from their observations.

Respondents	Male	%	Female	%	Number	%
YES	228	99	149	99	377	99
NO	02	1	1	1	03	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5: Did You Take Part in the 2015 Governorship Election?  
Source: survey research, 2017

When asked whether they had voted during 2015 governorship election, in fact, majority 377 (99%) of the respondents said "yes" and only 03 (1%) indicated "No". It's clear from the available records that, the majority of the respondents participated in 2015 governorship election in the state.

#### • If Not, Why Were You Not Able To Vote?

With regard to the above question, most of the respondents indicated that they were in the school during the election period that is why they were unable to vote. This means that some school still remain in operation during governorship election in Bauchi State. This makes a lot of electorate's unqualified to votes as they registered at home, not in school and school pooling unit recognized only those that registered there.

Response	Male	%	Female	%	Number	%
Party affiliation	70	30.4	40	27	110	29
Credibility and Competence	60	26.1	30	20	90	24
Ethnic or kinship consideration	100	43.5	80	53	180	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6: What Is The Factor That Influences Your Choice of Candidates?  
SOURCE: Research survey, 2017

When asked about factors that influence their choice of candidates 180 (47%) indicate ethnic or kinship consideration of candidates as influencing their votes, 110 (29%) identified party affiliation while 90 (24%) indicated credibility and competence of contestants influencing their votes.

Response	Male	%	Female	%	Number	%
To a greater extent	140	61	70	47	210	55
To some extent	60	26	45	30	105	27
No extent at all	30	13	35	23	65	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 7: To What Extent Do You Think Members of Your Ethnic Group Influenced Your Voting Behaviour?  
Sources: research survey 2017

From table 4. above, majority of the respondents 210 (55%) indicated that, members of their ethnic group influencing their voting behaviour and 105 (27%) indicated to some extent, only 65 (17%) identified no extent at all.

Response	Male	%	Female	%	Number	%
Not important	145	63	75	50	220	58
Important	55	24	50	33	105	28
Very important	30	13	25	17	55	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 8: How Important Is Religious Affiliation As A Determining Factor for Your Voting Behaviour?  
Source: Research Survey, 2017

Contrary to my expectations, when asked how important religious affiliation is served as determined factor on whom to vote. The majority 220 (58%) of the respondents said not important, 105 (28%) indicates important and 55 (14%) indicates very important, therefore, religion is not a yardstick for winning Bauchi state in 2015 General election.

## 10. Conclusion

In conclusion, when going through the research questions the data analysis revealed that electorates in Bauchi State participated in election because of the awareness of the candidates(s) contesting in the elections. And that the conditions which influenced people decision to vote in election is not competence of contestants or party affiliation but ethnic and religious affiliation, therefore, lack of voting in an election do not reflect incompetence or poor qualification of candidates contesting for election. The researcher recommended for the need to enlighten the electorates or general public through the use of mass media, schools and traditional rulers etc. on the dangers voting a candidates base on ethnic and religious considerations. Election is supposed to be based on issues on the ground like competence of contestants regardless of ethnic and religious sentiment.

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