

**ASSESSMENT OF VOTER APATHY AND ETHNIC POLITICS IN THE 2023  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA, EDO STATE IN PERSPECTIVE**



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**SSC2105692**

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**BENIN CITY.**

**SEPTEMBER, 2025.**

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**BEING A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
POLITICAL SCIENCE, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY  
OF BENIN, BENIN CITY. IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE BACHELOR OF SCIENCE  
(B.SC) DEGREE IN POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**SEPTEMBER, 2025.**

## DECLARATION

**Odudu Boniface Etim** declare that,

- i. This study is based on a study undertaken by me in the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, under the supervision of **Dr Andrew Omosefe** of the Department of Political Science, Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
- ii. This work has not been submitted for the award of degree elsewhere.
- iii. Ideas and views are product of my personal research and where the view of others has been expressed, they have been duly acknowledged.
- iv. Any liability arising from this work is to be wholly borne by me alone

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**Odudu Boniface Etim**

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**DATE**

**SSC2105692**

## CERTIFICATION

We, certify that this research project was carried out by **Odudu Boniface Etim** in the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. It is adequate in scope and quality in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Science (BSc.) degree in Political Science.

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**Dr Andrew Omosefe**

**(Project Supervisor)**

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**Date**

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**Dr G. O. Igiebor**

**(Head of Department)**

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**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This project work is dedicated to God Almighty for His abundant grace in my life and for seeing me through my academic pursuit and aspirations. He has been my source of strength and on his wings only have I soared. I also want to dedicate this project to my Family and friends for the love and encouragement they have shown towards me during the course of this program, all I can say is thank you and God bless you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examined the impact of ethnic politics on voter apathy and behavior during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State, Nigeria. Guided by four key objectives, the study assessed the influence of ethnic loyalty, ethnic leaders, perceived marginalization, and ethnic sentiment over policy on electoral participation. A descriptive and explanatory survey design was adopted, with data collected from 100 purposively selected respondents across the three senatorial districts of Edo State. Primary data were gathered through structured questionnaires, complemented by secondary sources such as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reports. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were employed to test the study's hypotheses. The findings revealed a considerable level of voter apathy driven by distrust in the electoral process, fear of violence, poor voter education, and disillusionment with the political class. Ethnic identity emerged as a significant determinant of voting behavior, as loyalty to ethnic candidates, influence of ethnic leaders, and perceptions of marginalization strongly shaped political choices. The study recommends strengthening electoral institutions, enforcing laws against ethnic-based campaigning, enhancing civic and voter education, fostering youth engagement in governance, and ensuring electoral security. Addressing these challenges is critical to promoting inclusive participation, reducing voter apathy, and consolidating Nigeria's democracy.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Ethnicity has had a dominant role in Nigeria's political process since independence in 1960. The nation's political mobilization and voting behavior have consistently followed ethnic and regional lines, normally at the cost of issue-based or policy-driven participation (Osaghae & Suberu, 2021). The origins of Nigeria's political structure—based on ethnic federalism—have encouraged identity politics, where parties and contestants appeal to regional and ethnic loyalties rather than national unity or development goals (Ayoade, 2020). The 2023 Presidential Election showed this trend even more. With four leading actors—Bola Ahmed Tinubu (Southwest, Yoruba), Atiku Abubakar (Northeast, Fulani), Peter Obi (Southeast, Igbo), and Rabiu Kwankwaso (Northwest, Hausa)—ethnic identity became the deciding factor for how electorates organized themselves. From the information collated by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2023), voting was regionally skewed: the Southeast, for instance, recorded one of the lowest turnouts (28%), despite overwhelming sympathy for an ethnic candidate. In contrast, Tinubu accumulated over 37% of the total votes and won ethnic-majority states in the Southwest, demonstrating how ethno-political identifications remained in command of the choices (INEC, 2023; Okeke & Ojo, 2023). In the multiethnic states like Edo, made up of Binis, Esans, Afemai, and other subgroups, ethnic politics prevailed in determining voter preference. Scholars have observed that in such multiethnic environments, voters are prone to identity fragmentation, which the parties capitalize on by framing

their messages in ways that resonate with particular groups (Ibeanu & Ibrahim, 2022). This was the experience of pre-election campaigns in Edo State, where political rhetoric was articulated in ethnocultural vocabularies rather than programmatic content.

Ethnic voting loyalty, where voter allegiance was given to candidates belonging to one's ethnic group regardless of credentials or agenda, has been a long-time player in Nigerian politics. Omodia and Aliu (2021) indicated that over 60% of those casting their votes in recent elections conceded that ethnic solidarity was a determinant factor in their choice when selecting between candidates. This loyalty should not be based on trust in leadership skills but on the hope that "our own" would place the community's interests first and guard group identity within the national context. Besides, the contribution of ethnic leaders—traditional rulers, religious leaders, and local elites—must not be downplayed. They are the unofficial political gatekeepers. Their endorsement matters, particularly among rural and semi-urban constituents. As witnessed in the 2023 election season, traditional leaders in some parts of Edo State openly campaigned for candidates they deemed ethnically or regionally acceptable, mobilizing entire communities to follow particular voting patterns (Ogundiya & Afolabi, 2022). In similar proximity with such dynamics is the prevailing perception of minority ethnic groups being marginalized. The majority of groups in Nigeria, especially those outside the predominant tripodal structure (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo), feel politically excluded from national discussion. Such marginalization typically takes the form of electoral disaffection or the demand for ethnically-structured representation as a compensatory strategy (Egharevba, 2021). In Edo State, this perspective was especially expressed by groups who felt that the 2023 election failed to offer viable candidates from their bloc, advocating ethnic bloc voting as a

way of pretending to be relevant. Moreover, a rising concern is that ethnic sentiment now beats policy in influencing electoral decisions. Political manifestos and performance records are always disregarded for ethnic and religious interests. Based on research conducted by Yagboyaju and Akinboye (2022), 71% of South-South Nigerian respondents set ethnic identity above policy promises when voting for president. The four factors together—ethnic loyalty in voting, influence of ethnic leaders, perceived marginalization, and ethnic sentiment over policy—make up the foundation of Nigerian electoral behavior. Under the event of Edo State's 2023 presidential election, this trend was repeated, endangering the potential for participatory, representative, and issue-driven democratic culture. This research therefore tries to assess how these ethnic dynamics influenced voter turnout and democratic participation in Edo State.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Scholarly arguments about Nigerian electoral politics have consistently identified the persistent existence of ethnic politics as correlating with the violation of democratic principles. For Osaghae and Suberu (2021), the federal character of the Nigerian state has legitimized ethnicity as a factor of negotiating politics and thus invited voters to vote along ethnic lines instead of policy content. Similarly, Yagboyaju and Akinboye (2022) assert that ethno-religious feelings more and more drive political mobilization, particularly when elections are between candidates from the dominant ethnic blocs in the nation. Furthermore, Omodia and Aliu (2021) demonstrated that ethnic loyalty remains a voting determinant, positing that a majority of Nigerians determine their electoral decision on the basis of shared group identity rather than leadership capacity or national interest. While these studies provide valuable insights into the wider

implications of ethnic politics in Nigeria, there are some gaps to be filled. For one, Osaghae and Suberu's (2021) discussion, while comprehensive, is predominantly theoretical and does not empirically examine recent electoral elections such as the 2023 presidential election. Second, Yagboyaju and Akinboye (2022) analyze national-level processes with little concern for how ethnic politics is conducted at the state level in multi-ethnic states like Edo. Third, although Omodia and Aliu (2021) speak of the influence of ethnic loyalty on voting, they hardly consider the influence of ethnic leaders or the impact of perceived marginalization on political choices. In the 2023 presidential election, Edo State revealed the complex dynamics of these influences. Ethnic affiliation, support by community leaders from the community group to which they belong, and lingering political marginalization sentiments powerfully shaped voter alignment. Voters avoided policy manifestos and track records for ethnically familiar candidates, raising questions about the level of democratic consolidation in the state. This study seeks to fill such gaps by undertaking an empirical analysis of how ethnic allegiance, influence of ethnic leaders, feeling of marginalization, and ethnic feeling over policy shaped the behavior of voters in Edo State during the 2023 presidential election. Contrary to previous studies that have explored ethnic politics in a national or theoretical context, the project offers a data-based localized analysis that identifies the live effect of ethnicity in influencing the voting decision in a multicultural geopolitical setting. Through this, it endeavors to inform sharper electoral reforms and policy interventions directed towards inclusive and issue-oriented democratic participation.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of ethnic politics on voter behavior during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the influence of ethnic loyalty on voting behavior in Edo State.
2. Investigate the role of ethnic leaders in shaping voter decisions during the 2023 election.
3. Examine how perceived marginalization affected voter attitudes and participation.
4. Determine the extent to which ethnic sentiment over policy influenced voter choices.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research questions to be addressed by the study are:

1. To what extent did ethnic loyalty influence voting patterns in Edo State?
2. How did ethnic leaders impact voter decisions in the 2023 presidential election?
3. In what ways did perceived marginalization shape political behavior in the state?
4. Was ethnic sentiment more influential than policy considerations in the voting process?

## **1.5 Hypotheses Of Study**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between ethnic loyalty and voting behavior in the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** The influence of ethnic leaders has no significant effect on voter behavior in the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** Perceived marginalization does not significantly influence voter turnout or behavior in Edo State during the 2023 presidential election.

**H<sub>04</sub>:** Ethnic sentiment does not significantly override policy considerations in voter decisions during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study is highly significant to various stakeholders of Nigeria's democratic journey. To begin with, it offers meaningful suggestions to electoral institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In appreciating how ethnic factors influence voting behavior, the suggestions can assist INEC in developing more participatory, culturally responsive, and effective electoral processes to encourage greater turnout and reduce identity-based bias. Second, the study is beneficial to political parties and policymakers since it offers knowledge on how identity politics shape elections. With a better understanding of these dynamics, political actors will be able to pursue more strategic and uniting campaign tactics in which they move away from ethnically polarizing appeals towards issue-based competition that appeals to a diverse electorate. Furthermore, the study provides a significant contribution to scholarly literature through empirical evidence that is of

relevance to researchers and scholars who have research interests in ethnicity and democratic behavior. It contributes to the existing literature on party politics in multi-ethnic states, and indeed in Nigeria, and outlines a localized case study that can be deployed to inform greater comparative studies. Lastly, the findings of this study are beneficial to advocacy groups and civil society organizations that participate in voter education and democratic assistance. Through a deeper comprehension of ethnic identity's effect on electoral choices, such organizations can develop more potent civic education programs to counter the manipulation of ethnic feeling in election-making and foster well-informed, policy-driven voter turnout.

### **1.7 Scope of the Study**

This study is geographically limited to Edo State and focuses only on voter behavior in the 2023 presidential election. It investigates the extent to which ethnic-based variables—such as ethnic group loyalty, ethnic group influence by leaders, ethnic based sentiment, and perceived marginalization—dictated the pattern of voting across various communities within the three senatorial districts of the state.

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

- **Response Bias:** The respondents may fail to admit voting based on ethnicity due to social desirability.
- **Limited Coverage:** What is learned in Edo State may fail to capture the dynamics of other states in Nigeria.
- **Time Constraints:** The time used in collecting data can affect the level of detail different ethnic communities can provide in their answers..

## 1.9 Definition of Key Terms

- **Ethnic Loyalty in Voting:** The act of voting simply because one is voting for a candidate out of one's ethnic group.
- **Influence of Ethnic Leaders:** The power brought about by traditional and communal leaders in leading or endorsing voting choices.
- **Perceived Marginalization:** A perception by a number of ethnic groups that they are politically marginalized or underrepresented.
- **Ethnic Sentiment over Policy:** A type of voter conduct in which ethnic identity is accorded more priority than policy initiatives or candidate capacity.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is a literature review of existing literature on voter apathy and ethnic politics in the Nigerian electoral context. This chapter is intended to provide a conceptualization of terms, introduce theoretical frameworks guiding the study, understand empirical studies on the subject, and establish gaps that the study seeks to fill. The aim is to establish an academic foundation upon which the present study draws.

#### **2.2 Conceptual Framework**

##### **2.2.1 Voter Apathy**

Voter apathy refers to the lack of interest or unwillingness of eligible citizens to participate in electoral processes, voting, campaign activities, political discourse, or civic mobilization. It is most commonly expressed through low voter turnout, growing political apathy, and passive attitude toward civic duties. In democracies, this disconnection is regarded as a strong challenge to political legitimacy because it challenges the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and undermines representative government (Adebayo & Omilusi, 2022). Voters' apathy has been more evident in recent Nigerian elections. A number of structural and psychological determinants are responsible for this trend. They vary from deep-seated suspicion of the electoral process to persistent electoral violence, economic hardship, ethno-religious clashes, political marginalization from decision-making, commodification of votes through vote-buying, and overall impression that voting has no tangible dividends (Yagboyaju

& Akinboye, 2022; Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2021). The 2023 presidential election offers a clear illustration of this. According to figures from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2023), a mere 27.1% of 93.4 million registered voters nationwide participated in the voting. That figure constitutes a record low in Nigeria's democratic experience. It also represents a consistent downward trend from previous elections—34.75% in 2019 and 52.3% in 2015. Placed against the global average voter turnout of 66% (International IDEA, 2023), Nigeria's 2023 voter turnout rate exhibits an extremely low and worrying disengagement from democratic processes.

Edo State was no exception, with a turnout of a mere 26.1%, even though the pre-election was marked by intense ethnic mobilization and active campaign messaging. CSOs, and youth-led CSOs in particular, had expected greater political engagement on the part of younger voters, riding the momentum of movements like #EndSARS. That was not to be. A post-election survey by Yiaga Africa (2023) discovered that only 29% of 18–34-year-old registered voters cast their votes during the 2023 presidential election. The survey attributed this low turnout to widespread disillusionment, difficulties in accessing polling units, and the perception that candidates did not present credible choices. This gap between vigorous ethnic campaigning and voting turnout indicates that there is an existential crisis of confidence in Nigeria's democratic institutions. Ethnic identity remains a potent tool of political mobilization but not necessarily of electoral participation. The majority of Nigerians—particularly marginalized groups and youth voters—see elections as rigged, predetermined, or irrelevant to their immediate challenges. It fosters strategic non-participation, where abstaining from voting is a protest or resignation (Centre for Democracy and Development [CDD], 2023). Compared to other African democracies, Nigeria's voter turnout is very low. Ghana, for example, recorded 79% voter turnout

in its 2020 general elections, while South Africa recorded 66% in 2019, and Kenya recorded 56% in its 2022 presidential elections (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2023). These figures point to the widening gap between Nigeria and its regional peers in civic participation and democratic health. Lastly, voter apathy in Nigeria, and especially in the 2023 elections, is more than lack of interest. It is a sign of a systemic disconnect between the rulers and the ruled. In Edo State, this issue is compounded by the element of ethnic politics, the feeling of marginalization by some groups, and growing distrust of political and electoral institutions. As such, Edo presents an interesting case study through which to explore how ethnic identity, political perception, and democratic disengagement overlap within contemporary Nigerian elections.

#### **2.2.1.1 Voter Turnout Rate**

Voter turnout rate is understood as the percentage of registered voters that effectively vote during an election. It is one of the most widely applied measures of political participation and civic engagement. High turnout is normally assumed to be a sign of political legitimacy and popular trust in the democratic process, whereas low turnout is most often linked with political disillusionment, institutional mistrust, or structural barriers to participation (International IDEA, 2023). In the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, the percentage of voter turnout was extremely low. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2023) announced that only 27.1% of Nigeria's 93.4 million registered voters came out to vote in the election. This is a significant decline from the 34.75% recorded in 2019 and the 52.3% in 2015, sustaining an alarming downward trend in civic engagement in national elections.

In Edo State, voters also turned out in low numbers at approximately 26.1% (INEC, 2023). This is especially concerning given the levels of pre-election political mobilization, ethnic campaigning, and assumed competitiveness of the 2023 election. Despite ethnic appeals and youth-focused advocacy by civil society organizations, the number of voters who turned out to vote in the state did not come close to expectations. An additional analysis of youth voting gives an even more stark picture. Yiaga Africa (2023) found that while youths aged 18–34 made up nearly 40% of registered voters, only 29% of this age group voted in the 2023 elections. This indicates that voter turnout is not merely a technocratic solution, but rather a reflection of underlying disillusionment with the political system—especially on the part of Nigeria's largest demographic group. Compared to fellow African democracies, Nigeria's voter turnout in 2023 is decidedly less. Ghana, for instance, recorded 79% turnout for the 2020 general elections, South Africa recorded 66% turnout for the 2019 elections, and Kenya recorded 56% turnout for the 2022 presidential election (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2023). Even within West Africa, Nigeria's turnout is among the lowest, and it portends very serious questions about the effectiveness of political engagement, public trust, and electoral accessibility. A number of factors were accountable for this low voting turnout. They vary from widespread cases of voter suppression, logistical challenges, insecurity, disorganized polling centers, and the overall lack of popularity of the candidates available. Also, the mindset that elections are pre-determined or rigged has made it easy for the majority of citizens to consciously stay away in protest or self-preservation (Centre for Democracy and Development [CDD], 2023). Therefore, whether or not a respondent voted in the 2023 presidential election is an important operational measure of voter apathy in this study. It not only reflects the political

behavior of the individual, but also the underlying structural and cultural forces influencing electoral participation in Edo State and Nigeria at large.

### **2.2.1.2 Political Disinterest**

Political disinterest is the lowest level of interest or concern individuals possess for political affairs, like policy disputes, elections campaigns, candidacy biographies, and civic administration issues. It is an integral feature of voter indifference, not only embodying affective detachment, but also the decline of the democratic participation requisites of the civic culture. Disinterest in politics is usually demonstrated through low campaign followership, low political discourses, and general ignorance or apathy towards existing political affairs (Ojo & Aremu, 2022). Political disaffection has been on the rise in Nigeria, particularly with young people and the marginalized. Based on the Afrobarometer Round 9 Survey (2022), only 47% of Nigerians indicated that they had high-level interest in public issues, while the remaining 53% indicated rarely or never paying attention to politics. This is a decline from previous surveys, and it shows that a higher number of citizens are no longer paying attention or engaging with the political process.

During the 2023 presidential elections, different civic tech platforms like BudgIT and Yiaga Africa had digital awareness campaigns aimed at creating young voters' interest in the elections. But a post-election survey by Yiaga Africa in 2023 discovered that 62% of first-time voters had been unenthusiased by the candidates available, and 58% replied that they had "occasionally" or "not at all" followed the campaigns. The data indicates that there is a broad base of disengagement, not from voting as a civic duty, but from politics as an understandable enterprise. The INEC Voter Education Report (2023) further confirmed these patterns, stating that despite a record-high registration

of over 10 million new voters, most of whom were young people, less than half of these engaged with political parties or campaign materials before election day. It would seem, therefore, while there is some procedural engagement (i.e., registering to vote), substantive political engagement remains low, and disinterest remains as latent apathy. There are a number of explanations for such political disinterest. Firstly, Nigerian politics is viewed to be elitist, corrupt, and aloof from the aspirations of the people, thereby detaching the average voter (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2021). Secondly, frequent election controversies and elected leaders' failure to fulfill campaign promises disenfranchise citizens from developing lasting interest in leadership (CDD, 2023). Finally, the absence of issue-based campaigns and the dominance of ethno-religious stories during elections minimize opportunities for voters to critically assess candidates and their agendas (Yagboyaju & Akinboye, 2022). As compared to similar democracies, Nigeria fares worse in political participation. For example, during the 2020 elections in Ghana, the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana, 2021) surveyed and found that over 70% of those surveyed engaged actively in political discussion and campaign discourse. Yet, in Nigeria, even televised debates featuring major media personalities in 2023 had limited viewership, with only 37% of voters on the voter roll reporting to have watched or listened to any political debate or candidate interview (Channels Television Poll, 2023). In general terms, political apathy is not a passive attitude; it reflects a broader disillusionment with the political class and system. Edo State in the 2023 elections saw the trend, where the citizens, who were predominantly youths, did not take much interest in political contestants, normally reacting in ethnic bias, lack of plausible alternatives, or suspicion of the impact of voting. Quantification of the level of political interest among respondents

therefore provides an important pointer in interpreting the depth and reasons for Nigerian voter apathy in the contemporary Nigerian democracy.

### **2.2.1.3 Trust in the Electoral Process**

Trust in the electoral process explains the level of trust that citizens have in electoral institutions and processes to be fair, efficient, transparent, and honest. In Nigeria, this primarily revolves around the image of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), other interests such as security agents, the judiciary, and political parties. High trust in elections contributes to voter turnout, solidifies democratic legitimacy, and ensures political stability. Conversely, declining trust contributes significantly to voter apathy, civic disengagement, and political cynicism (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2021; Omodia & Aliu, 2022). Public trust in INEC has fluctuated from time to time with the amount of confidence sometimes based on the manner in which general elections were held and to what extent the outcomes have been considered credible. The prelude to the 2023 presidential election was characterized by optimism about reforms under the Electoral Act 2022, specifically the use of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IREV) Portal. These technologies were meant to increase transparency through ensuring timely transmission of results and averting electoral fraud (INEC, 2023). However, despite such innovations, the conduct of the 2023 presidential election unleashed an overall public dissatisfaction. Just 39% of the voters surveyed were sure that the election results were legitimate, while 44% of them alleged that the process was not transparent, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023) stated. The most significant issue was the collapse of real-time uploading of results, which INEC had previously assured the public would be undertaken timely through the IReV

system. Delays, inconsistencies, and perceived differences in collation of results greatly eroded voter confidence (Yiaga Africa, 2023). The same trend was witnessed in Edo State, where responses by the public following the presidential election were dominated by frustration and distrust. Civic watchers indicated that the majority of the voters who turned up to cast their ballots were complaining and remorseful afterwards due to purported improprieties and non-transparency in collation (Premium Times, 2023). INEC was especially unpopular among youthful voters and first-time voters, whose majority had been galvanized by movements from civil society only to be disappointed by the outcomes of the polls.

In broader perspective, Nigeria's electoral trust deficit is even more bleak compared to other African democracies with better evidence of more confidence in their electoral institutions. For example, Afrobarometer (2022) reported that 71% of Ghanaians expressed confidence in their Electoral Commission in the 2020 elections, while 61% of South Africans believed their 2019 general elections were free and fair. In contrast, only 34% of the same Nigerians in the Afrobarometer survey trusted INEC, and it was among the least trusted among the democracies surveyed across Africa. Furthermore, Nigeria's Electoral Integrity Project (EIP, 2023) global ranking placed its 2023 election in the lowest quartile among 165 countries, with a score of 42/100 on electoral integrity. The lowest-scoring categories were "electoral procedures," "vote counting," and "media coverage," all of which have been cited as key factors undermining confidence. Ultimately, trust in the process is a determining factor influencing electoral decision. Where there is low confidence in the system, as seen with Nigeria's 2023 election, citizens tend to stay away from voting, doubt the legitimacy of the elected leaders, and disengage themselves from civic responsibilities. Such a lack of trust also enhances political apathy and erodes the foundation of

representative democracy, as evident from the extensive disillusionment documented across states such as Edo. Thus, public faith in INEC and the electoral process in general is the key indicator in assessing the degree and sources of alienation of voters in Nigeria's evolving political landscape.

#### **2.2.1.4 Sense of Political Efficacy**

A sense of political efficacy is a concept referring to the belief held by a person that political participation—especially voting—has the potential to affect politics. It is a psychological variable capturing people's perceptions of their empowerment in a democracy. Political efficacy typically accompanies political participation, trust in democratic institutions, and vote turnout. Conversely, low efficacy would evolve into political disengagement, cynicism, and voter apathy (Almond & Verba, 1963; Banducci & Karp, 2000). In Nigeria, particularly with the presidential election of 2023, political efficacy was very low among great masses of people. With a highest ever number of registered voters (over 93 million registered voters), only 27.1% voted (INEC, 2023). While logistical and security issues contribute in part to low turnout, the overall perception that one's vote does not count was a major reason for abstention. According to a national post-election survey conducted by Yiaga Africa (2023), 57% of the participants agreed to the assertion that "elections in Nigeria do not reflect the will of the people." Furthermore, 48% of youth voters indicated that their vote would amount to nothing in the process of electing their leaders owing to the overall distrust of the political system and the rigging of elections. These sentiments were reflected in events in the 2023 electoral process. For instance, the failure of the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) platform to publish live results as planned reinforced public skepticism and the perception that election results can be tampered with clandestinely

(CDD, 2023). Large numbers of voters, particularly from urban and semi-urban areas like the ones in Edo State, perceived the technical and procedural breakdowns as evidence that their votes were actually useless.

Edo State anecdotal reports and observer accounts confirmed this pattern. Voters in Esan, Ovia, and Egor LGAs cited previous experiences with vote-buying, unfulfilled political promises, and forced candidates as the explanation for thinking their votes did not count. BudgIT (2023) focus group discussions confirmed that the majority of youth residents in Edo believed elections were a ritual where preordained results were fixed and not an actual time for change. This poor political effectiveness led to the avoidance of many despite having shown interest during voter registration. Relative to the majority of Africa's peer democracies, Nigerian political efficacy rates are less robust. For example, Afrobarometer (2022) reported that 68% of Ghanaians and 59% of South Africans believed that their votes could make a difference in past elections, compared to only 36% of Nigerians. These figures reveal a broad chasm between Nigerian people and the political process, despite the fact that they reside in an ostensibly democratic regime. The implications of this disconnect are profound. Once citizens disbelieve in the efficacy of their vote, not only does participation decline, but democratic legitimacy is endangered. Political efficacy is the foundation on which representative rule is established. Therefore, its absence begets political disaffection, fuels institutional distrust, and reduces opportunities for democratic consolidation (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2021). In essence, quantifying whether respondents perceive or believe their vote matters is crucial in the assessment of voter apathy in the 2023 presidential election in Edo State. The overall perception that the election is rigged and results pre-arranged was a major factor in lowering voter morale, especially

among youths and the marginalized in society. This will require electoral reforms as well as institution-building to restore citizens' confidence in democracy.

### **2.2.2 Ethnic Politics**

Ethnic politics, which forms the independent variable in this study, is applied to refer to political behavior, voter mobilization, and ballot decisions based primarily on ethnic affiliation, group membership, or regional identification rather than ideology, issues, or national interest. Where societies are highly pluralized like Nigeria, with over 250 ethnic groups, ethnic politics has long served as a mobilization and a cause of fragmentation (Osaghae & Suberu, 2021). It entails a political situation whereby ethnicity is the most politicized identity around which political interests are mobilized, parties are mobilized, and candidates are supported or opposed. In Nigeria's democracy, ethnicity has continually shaped political party organization and voting constituencies. The "tripodal ethnic structure" of the Hausa-Fulani of the North, the Yoruba of the Southwest, and the Igbo of the Southeast has long dominated political competition, relegating to the periphery smaller ethnic nationalities (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006). Political parties have been prone to leveraging such cleavages to rally support, with campaign slogans constructed around ethnic appeal and identity loyalty rather than issue-based messaging (Yagboyaju & Akinboye, 2022). The presidential election in 2023 was characteristic of the persistence of ethnic politics in Nigeria. The leading presidential candidates—Bola Ahmed Tinubu (Yoruba, Southwest), Atiku Abubakar (Fulani, Northeast), Peter Obi (Igbo, Southeast), and Rabiu Kwankwaso (Hausa, Northwest)—were universally seen as representatives of their ethnic bloc. Election outcomes within their bases confirmed so. Tinubu swept the Southwest, Obi won the Southeast and a portion of the South-South, while Atiku

and Kwankwaso won huge portions of the North (INEC, 2023). This regionalized voting trend implies that ethnic identity still takes over from policy consideration in ascertaining the voter's choice.

In Edo State—a multi-ethnic environment composed of mostly Binis, Esans, Afemai, and minorities—ethnic politics played a sophisticated role. Though the state itself is not found within the "tripodal" ethnic power blocks, ethnic factors did influence voting, especially in local government areas where community leaders mobilized behind candidates on the basis of perceived ethnic solidarity or past grievances. According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023), ethnic support from elites and traditional leaders in communities in some parts of Edo North and Edo Central affected voting behavior by a quantifiable extent, especially in the countryside. Empirical evidence testifies to the prevalence of ethnic considerations in election behavior. An Afrobarometer pre-election survey (2022) set that 67% of Nigerians admitted they would be inclined to trust or vote for a member of an ethnic group. A Yiaga Africa post-election analysis (2023) set that more than 50% of respondents in South-South Nigeria, including Edo State, admitted that ethnicity mattered more to them than the political manifestos or the leaders' records. The same applies elsewhere in Africa. In the majority of the multiethnic societies on the continent, voting ethnically is common. For example, Kenya's 2022 presidential election was also strongly ethnically polarized, particularly in Kikuyu-and Luo-dominated regions (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2023). The effects of ethnic politics are far-reaching. As much as it enhances mobilization at the collective level and speaks for marginal people, it undermines national unity, policy-based politics, and democratic consolidation. It limits political competition to identity politics and engenders political exclusion of ethnic minorities who are not

part of influential voting blocs (Egharevba, 2021). In the majority of cases, ethnic politics creates an environment where electoral violence, zero-sum competition, and political patronage dominate (Omotola, 2010). In the case of Edo State in the 2023 presidential poll, ethnic politics framed not only voting, but also campaign speeches and political endorsements. A candidate's ethnicity was central to his or her legitimacy in some communities regardless of his or her policy proposals being indistinct or unpalatable. This dynamic is central to the understanding within this research because it is through this that the behavior of voters—apathy, turnout, and political engagement—is being assessed.

#### **2.2.2.1 Ethnic Loyalty in Voting**

Ethnic loyalty voting is a political behavior syndrome wherein the voter casts their ballot primarily due to the ethnic group of the candidate, not competence, ideology, or policy orientation. Such voting is driven by cultural and psychological identification with one's ethnic group and the belief that voting for "one of us" will lead to heightened group visibility, protection, or benefit. In highly plural societies like Nigeria, where ethnic identity is deeply entrenched, ethnicity is most likely to be a central determinant of voting behavior and political mobilization (Osaghae & Suberu, 2021; Egharevba, 2021). In the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, ethnic loyalty was an active determining factor in voting behavior. The four leading presidential contenders—Bola Ahmed Tinubu (Yoruba, Southwest), Atiku Abubakar (Fulani, Northeast), Peter Obi (Igbo, Southeast), and Rabiu Kwankwaso (Hausa, Northwest)—all received strongest backing from regions with the same ethnic or cultural bond. According to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2023), Tinubu received over 85% of the votes in Lagos, Ogun, and Ondo states (Southwest Yoruba

states). Peter Obi received over 90% of the vote in Anambra, Enugu, and Abia (predominantly Igbo Southeast states). These trends highlight the persisting importance of ethnic identity in determining voter allegiance. A Yiaga Africa post-election survey (2023) revealed that 51% of voters nationwide admitted that ethnic affiliation influenced their choice of candidate. Among South-South voters, including those in Edo State, 47% said they felt more at ease voting for a candidate ethnically or regionally representative of their own. What this shows is that ethnic loyalty was not just witnessed in the dominant tripodal areas (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo), but among smaller or multi-ethnic states as well.

In Edo State, as ethnically plural as it is—with constituencies such as the Binis, Esans, Afemai, and so forth—ethnic loyalty continued to shape voting at the local level. In CDD's (2023) version, local influentials and leaders in such locations as Esan West and Owan East mobilized votes along lines of mutual sub-ethnicity, often casting national candidates into locational pertinence or sympathy with localized interests. Campaign appeals at the level of the community frequently invoked ethnic solidarity as grounds for national support for one candidate over another, especially in areas where voters felt politically disenfranchised or routinely underrepresented. Compared to other multiethnic African democracies, Nigeria's ethnic pattern of voting is the same. In Kenya, for instance, the 2022 presidential election witnessed stark ethnic block voting with regions such as Central Province (Kikuyu-dominated) and Nyanza (Luo-dominated) strongly supporting candidates of their ethnic group (EISA, 2023). Similarly, in Ghana, though restrained, ethnic loyalty still exists with regions such as the Ashanti strongly identifying particular political parties due to ethnic allegiance (Afrobarometer, 2022). But ethnic electoral loyalty raises crucial democratic challenges. It undermines issue politics, renders inter-regional coalitions unlikely, and

results in the fragmentation of national identity. For Yagboyaju and Akinboye (2022), as voters are mobilized primarily along ethnic channels, democracy is reduced to a zero-sum situation wherein political exclusion and suspicion between groups are increased. Generally, ethnic loyalty in voting remains a defining feature of Nigeria's elections, as indicated by the 2023 presidential election. In Edo State, although no credible candidate directly stood for any of the prevailing local ethnic groups, "which candidate does our people favor" impressions still influenced voter decision-making. Measuring to what degree respondents supported candidates of their ethnic group is thus crucial in estimating the survival of identity politics and its continued impact on election behavior in Nigeria's nascent democracy.

#### **2.2.2.2 Influence of Ethnic Leaders**

Influence of ethnic leaders refers to the extent to which religious, communal, and traditional leaders decide the political convictions as well as election decisions of the population they exert influence over. Such politicians are usually brokers between the political elite and their folks at the grassroots level, controlling a vast amount of influence regarding the sociopolitical decisions of their ethnic groups. Such politicians in the majority of African societies, particularly Nigeria, are custodians of cultural heritage as well as de facto political gatekeepers whose acquiescence carries much meaning in electoral victories (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2021; Osaghae & Suberu, 2021). In Nigeria, ethnic leaders like traditional leaders, religious clerics, and elder statesmen often mobilize their support base in the direction of particular candidates on the basis of perceived ethnic, religious, or regional identification. Their authority is especially palpable in rural and semi-urban areas, where institutional trust in government remains low, and citizens turn to local leaders for political orientations

(Yagboyaju & Akinboye, 2022). They occupy symbolic as well as strategic positions: symbolically, in the sense that they represent collective identity, and strategically, as political actors who can negotiate developmental offers or patronage from prospective competitors.

In the 2023 Nigerian presidential race, this is observed in a number of regions. Yiaga Africa (2023) and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023) reports documented situations where traditional and religious leaders in some states—South-South and North-Central states—openly endorsed candidates, tending to highlight shared ethnic or regional identity. In others, communities were mobilized en masse by virtue of these endorsements. A CDD pre-election survey discovered that 39% of Nigerian voters admitted that they made their decision to vote based on religious or ethnic leaders. This increased to 52% in rural communities, where the use of community leadership figures is higher. In the state of Edo, ethnic leaders' power was most pronounced in the Edo North and Edo Central senatorial districts, where chiefs and clerics were observed actively campaigning. Traditional monarchs from Esan and Afemai groups were reportedly engaged in low-key political endorsement, such as receiving some candidates with traditional honors or publicly advising their respective constituencies on "acceptable" alternatives (Premium Times, 2023). Although often not openly touted, they are consistently read by members of the public as endorsements, and most often lead to bloc voting. However, ethnic or communal leadership control over voting is not exclusive to Nigeria. Tribal elders and religious clerics were instrumental in determining the bloc ethnic support of presidential candidates in the 2022 Kenyan election, as occurred in Uganda and Tanzania as well (EISA, 2023). In Ghana, although ethnic politics remains less salient, chiefs in the Northern and Volta regions have traditionally exerted determining influences on

voters through culturally coded messages and religious endorsements (Afrobarometer, 2022). But the place of ethnic leaders has normative and democratic connotations. As much as they are trusted in their communities, others object that they create identity-based voting since they define their parties, take away political agency from citizens, and dilute democratic discourse. Omodia and Aliu (2022) assert that political action by ethnic leaders will strengthen communal divide and diminish salience of governance issues when support does not come after on policy issues but on ethnicity. And, too, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA, 2023) warns that dependence on communal leaders for political advice tends to create a possibility for manipulation, especially when such leaders are promised a reward or given inducements by political actors. This also has a tendency to blur communal advice and political patronage. Overall, ethnic leaders are still at the heart of organizing Nigeria's vote. Their influence in the 2023 elections, particularly in multi-ethnic states like Edo, was decisive in determining local turnout and voting patterns. Understanding whether and how the respondents were impacted by these leaders provides valuable information on the ethnic basis of electoral behavior in Nigeria's evolving democratic landscape.

### **2.2.2.3 Perceived Marginalization**

Perceived marginalization is the belief of being politically disenfranchised, underrepresented in government, or left out in the decision and allocation of national resources (Osaghae & Suberu, 2021). In plural countries like Nigeria, this perception usually occurs when ethnic minority or subnational groups believe that they are strategically marginalized by majority political elites, especially under a federal arrangement that is ethnic and regional in orientation (Osaghae & Suberu, 2021). In

Nigeria, political exclusion has also been a source of chronic grievance, particularly for ethnic minorities outside the "tripodal" dominance of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo ethnic groups. These perceptions of exclusion are worsened by biased representation at the most senior levels of government, unjust federal appointments, as well as disparities in infrastructure and development projects. As Ibrahim and Ibeanu (2021) clarify, such grievances are not symbolic but actually equal political passivity, disaffection, as well as secessionist protests in certain cases. The 2023 Nigerian presidential election also served to highlight this. While the front runners were all three major ethnic groups—Bola Ahmed Tinubu (Yoruba, Southwest), Atiku Abubakar (Fulani, Northeast), and Peter Obi (Igbo, Southeast)—there were widespread discontents across many smaller ethnic groups in the South-South, Middle Belt, and North-Central about the lack of true representation. A Yiaga Africa (2023) post-election survey in the South-South region reported that 42% of minority ethnic group respondents responded that the election did not capture national inclusion and that their groups were not sufficiently represented at the political level. Among ethnically diverse Edo State, where the Binis, Esans, Afemai, and other subgroups exist, perceived marginalization was most pronounced during the 2023 election period. Though none of the leading presidential hopefuls were directly ethnically associated with Edo, public opinion and local media discourse indicated that most of the locals felt their political salience was waning in the national political sphere. Premium Times (2023) and Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023) reports revealed that ethnic voting, in some parts of Edo North and Edo Central, was less fueled by passion for candidates and more by a calculated effort to rally behind whatever candidate was perceived to have the greatest likelihood to "recognize" their ethnic bloc.

It is also substantiated by the long history of federal political appointments. A 2022 audit of ministerial federal offices and strategic national roles picked up that just 2 of the 36 ministers represented ethnic minorities in the Edo and surrounding South-South states, despite the region producing a high percentage of national revenue (BudgIT, 2022). These disparities perpetuate an impression that election participation is not offering proportionate benefits to less powerful groups—a situation that undermines national unity and democratic legitimacy. Likewise, the same trends are observed in other multi-ethnic democracies. In Ethiopia, for example, smaller ethnic groups beyond the mainstream federal ethnic bastions (Oromo, Amhara, Tigray) have voiced concerns of consistent marginalization, especially in national power-sharing. Likewise, in Kenya, North-Eastern communities complain of political and economic marginalization by central government institutions dominated by Kikuyu and Kalenjin elites (EISA, 2023). These comparative cases support the argument that unresolved grievances about ethnic representation can potentially erode political participation and expand identity fault lines. The implications of being marginalized on Nigeria's democracy are serious. When significant sections of society believe that elections would not provide legitimate outcomes or reflect them in an honest way, they won't vote, be more likely to opt out of participating in civic life, and even more susceptible to manipulation by ethno-politics. In the opinion of Yagboyaju and Akinboye (2022), this marginalization spawns alienation, undermines the legitimacy of the elections, and encourages ethnic bloc voting as a compensation mechanism. Lastly, measuring how respondents feel politically excluded or underrepresented is crucial towards achieving the effects of ethnic politics on voting. For the 2023 presidential election in Edo State, perceived marginalization was among the key drivers of electoral disconnection and identity-based alignment. The perceptions need to be tackled

through purposeful institution-based reforms, representative political inclusion, and responsive leadership so that each ethnic group will feel they belong to the Nigerian democratic order.

#### **2.2.2.4 Ethnic Sentiment Over Policy**

Ethnic sentiment over policy refers to the prioritizing of ethnic identity over policy positions or development agenda in the presidential choice. In this case, voters prefer electing a fellow ethnic citizen as president regardless of the candidate's political agenda, qualification, or performance. This pattern of voting is premised on the idea that a dominant ethnic kin will more effectively protect group interests, provide communal goods, and preserve ethnic representation in government (Osaghae & Suberu, 2021; Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2021). Nigerian elections have in the past demonstrated unmistakable ethnopolitical tendencies, with identity as opposed to ideology occupying centre stage. The 2023 presidential election was no exception, with contenders hailing from mega ethnic support bases: Bola Ahmed Tinubu (Yoruba, Southwest), Atiku Abubakar (Fulani, Northeast), Peter Obi (Igbo, Southeast), and Rabiun Kwankwaso (Hausa, Northwest). Regardless of national discourse trending on insecurity, economic downturn, and corruption, the majority electorates voted along ethnic as well as regional lines, disregarding policy manifestos or forums whenever deciding. In the post-election survey conducted by Yiaga Africa (2023), 58% of the electorates admitted that ethnic identity was more significant than candidates' policy platforms in determining whom to vote for president. Among first-time electorates and youths aged 18–35, 41% attested that they were influenced more by ethnic identity than candidates' platforms. In the South-South zone where Edo State resides, 49% of the interviewees reported that voting for someone from their

ethnic or regional origin was more reassuring to them than voting for a candidate who had better policies (CDD, 2023).

In Edo State, though the state's ethnic groups (Binis, Esans, Afemai, etc.) themselves were not represented by any of the front-runners, local opinion leaders and the media also inclined to refer to the presidential options in ethnic terms: for instance, emphasizing the historical marginalization of the South-South or suggesting that approaching the most influential ethnic groups to form alliances was the path to federal validation. Ethnic sentiment then acted as a surrogate lens through which policy was interpreted—i.e., policies promulgated by an "outsider" were likely to be received with suspicion, while policies promulgated by an "ethnic ally" were considered more plausible, regardless of content (Premium Times, 2023). This identity-rather-than-ideology emphasis is not unique to Nigeria. In Kenya, for instance, ethnic bloc voting persisted in the 2022 elections even as there were extensive policy debates. In regions like Nyanza and Central Province, Luo and Kikuyu votes respectively prevailed over focus on economic reform or national security concerns (EISA, 2023). Similarly, in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) has enjoyed dominance in both Xhosa and Zulu bastions mainly on the basis of ethnic as well as liberation affiliations even with a record of poor governance performance (Afrobarometer, 2022). The implications of this pattern are far-reaching. Yagboyaju and Akinboye (2022) present the argument that when ethnic sentiments take precedence over policy, democratic accountability is compromised as candidates are not answerable on performance or merit. Moreover, it dissuades cross-ethnic coalitions, frustrates the building of national political parties, and consolidates zero-sum politics in which power is pursued primarily to benefit ethnic constituencies. In the 2023 Nigerian election, this was evident in the way campaigns were structured:

policy documents like Peter Obi's manifesto or Tinubu's "Renewed Hope Agenda" received limited grassroots traction compared to ethnic-based appeals circulated through churches, mosques, and community forums. As Ibrahim and Ibeanu (2021) note, political literacy in Nigeria remains low, especially in rural areas, where ethnic identity serves as a proxy for trust and familiarity. Briefly put, measuring whether ethnic sentiment was greater than policy promises is required in measuring the level of democratic engagement. In Edo State, and in Nigeria as a whole, the 2023 polls served as a reminder that identity voting remains to overwhelm programmatic interpretation. To make Nigeria's democracy mature, political campaigns must come up with ways of decentring ethnicity and encourage policy-driven civic education, especially among youth and first-time voters.

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.3.1 Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979, explains how individuals draw much of their sense of self from belonging to groups. Such groups can be rooted in ethnic, religious, linguistic, or geographical identities. Theory suggests that people strive to obtain favorable social identity by favoring their in-group (the group they belong to) but perhaps discriminating against out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This psychological process results in in-group bias and out-group favoritism, which are particularly strong in multicultural countries. Politically, Social Identity Theory gives a reasonable explanation of ethnic voting behavior, as observed in Nigeria. Voters are not only rational decision makers who evaluate candidates based on manifestos or policy positions; they are also identity actors searching for symbolic representation and group recognition. In case a candidate

shares the same ethnic or regional identity with a voter, then that voter will be more likely to regard them as trustworthy, comprehensible, and taking care of the group's interests (Huddy, 2001; Greene, 2004). This theory is well in sync with Nigeria's electoral landscape where political competition has a tendency to mirror ethnic cleavage. This was evident in the geographic concentration of votes for the candidates along lines of ethnicity during the 2023 presidential election. Peter Obi captured a landslide majority in the Southeast, dominated by the Igbo ethnic group, while Bola Ahmed Tinubu swept the Southwest, dominated by the Yoruba. These tendencies accentuate the priority of ethnic identity in shaping voting patterns—a phenomenon Social Identity Theory had predicted (Yiaga Africa, 2023; CDD, 2023). Secondly, Social Identity Theory explains ethnic loyalty to withstand against poor governance or poor policy implementation. If citizens put a premium on representation on grounds of group membership more than capacity or merit, they tend to be acting on a symbolic level of identity defense, fearing that an out-group leader will trump their interests. In a country like Nigeria, where there is lingering historical injustice, marginalization, and regional imbalance, citizens are more likely to interpret elections as fights of identity blocs and not policy platforms (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2021; Osaghae & Suberu, 2021). The theory also explains the mobilizing role of ethnic leaders. Leaders in communities, like traditional leaders and religious clerics, are identity affirmers who remind members of the group membership status and summon collective political action in defense of that identity. That is why, CDD (2023) noted, ethnic and religious supporters were instrumental in influencing the votes of over 40% of rural electorate in the 2023 elections. At the international level, Social Identity Theory has also been used to explain similar patterns in Kenya, India, and South Africa, respectively, where electoral behavior is influenced by tribal, caste, or racial

identity. In these countries, as with Nigeria, political loyalty is not just issues-based but rooted in the citizens' social identities, demonstrating the applicability of SIT across various democracies (EISA, 2023). Generally speaking, Social Identity Theory is an interesting theoretical model for the long-term influence of ethnicity on voting behavior in Nigeria. It captures the psychological, social, and historical forces that link group identity with political choices. In Edo State, where numerous ethnic groups reside, SIT explains why voters will vote ethnically similar individuals or political camps, especially when they perceive that political processes are exclusionary or rigged.

### **2.3.2 Rational Choice Theory**

Rational Choice Theory (RCT), drawing on classical economic theory, theorizes that individuals make decisions rationally weighing the costs and benefits of each option. In political science, the theory hypothesizes that voters are maximizing agents and will vote only if the perceived benefit of voting outweighs the perceived cost (Downs, 1957). Thus, if the gains—e.g., time, uncertainty, or apparent helplessness—outweigh the vote's value, an electorate member who is rational will refrain. This explains a reasonable explanation for voter disenchantment, particularly in emergent democracies such as Nigeria where institutional inefficiencies, uncertainty, and corruption undermine the confidence of citizens in election outcomes. Within the electoral framework of Nigeria, Rational Choice Theory is increasingly relevant to use. The majority of the citizens believe that elections do not have any impact on their economic welfare, access to services, or quality of life. Yiaga Africa (2023) indicates that over 62% of the youth registered voters in the 2023 election believed that their vote "does not count," and 54% of rural dwellers cited prior disillusionment with the

elected officials as a factor for not casting their votes. From a rationalist perspective, these voters are neither uninformed nor indifferent; they are rationally opting not to invest effort into a system they view as non-responsive. More importantly, in a zero-sum political system—where not only is power centralized but also heavily ethnicized—group-based rationality in voting is even higher. Ethnic minorities also often perceive political elections as an opportunity to obtain access to resources, jobs, and status for their respective groups. In this case, voting for an ethnically similar candidate, even if she or he does not possess good policy ideas, can be regarded as a rational group survival strategy (Horowitz, 1985). This was observed during the 2023 presidential election, wherein large ethnic blocks in the Southwest, Southeast, and Northeast voted massively for the candidate of their region or ethnic group, even when there were overall national problems such as inflation, fuel shortages, and unemployment (INEC, 2023). During the Edo State election, the calculative rationality of voters was practiced in complex ways. Despite pre-election civic participation, voter turnout remained low at 26.1% (INEC, 2023). The majority of the stay-at-homes in post-election surveys cited logistical hurdles, distrust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and policy promise skepticism as reasons for staying at home (CDD, 2023). Concurrently, among those who voted, a high percentage attributed their vote as strategic ethnic alignment as opposed to policy engagement, as a rational choice to vote for perceived candidates providing ethnic inclusion or future reciprocity (Premium Times, 2023). Globally, Rational Choice Theory has been utilized to describe the same behavior in India, where political preferences are determined by caste and regional identities, and in South Africa, where support for liberation parties such as the African National Congress (ANC) is typically justified by the assumption that other options can endanger group interests

(Afrobarometer, 2022). These illustrations point out that identity voting can be rational—Not emotional—and especially so in settings where group survival and access to state resources are perceived to be at stake. Generally, Rational Choice Theory accounts for ethnic voting and voter disillusionment in Nigeria. For others in Nigeria, refusing to vote is less a result of political apathy or ignorance in the traditional sense, but an expressive boycott of an illegitimate or unproductive process. Likewise, voting for one's ethnic "kinsman" against a more qualified outsider is a rational calculation aimed at safeguarding collective identity and maximizing ethnic representation in a divided polity.

### **2.3.3 Elite Theory**

Elite Theory is a political science paradigm that assumes political power lies within the domain of a privileged minority group in society—typically known as elites. These elites, which include godfathers who are politicians, traditional rulers, wealthy business tycoons, and ethnic brokers of power, wield disproportionate power over governance, political participation, and election outcomes. According to Pareto (1935), Mosca (1939), and C. Wright Mills (1956), the theory argues that democratic procedures, whilst ostensibly participatory, tend to be manipulated by elite players who construct public opinion, control political access, and decide who gets elected. Elite Theory best fits the Nigerian condition due to the ubiquitous influence of the non-formal political actors who act as gatekeepers of authority. Elections are rarely a matter of mass mobilization in response to ideology or policy agendas; rather, they rely on endorsements from elites, ethnic affinities, and grassroots persuasion. These elites influence the actions of the electorate via patronage networks, symbolic legitimacy, and cunningly used strategic manipulation of the discourse of ethnicity

(Albert, 2021). At the 2023 presidential election, elite influence was also evident in the majority of Nigeria's constituencies, including Edo State, where community leaders and traditional leaders played a very key role in mobilizing people. During a post-election briefing by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023), some traditional leaders in Edo Central and Edo North were observed receiving candidates and openly saying that they were supporting them at public meetings. These political endorsements, although unofficial, were extremely powerful due to the high regard in which authority figures in these societies were held. This behavior is evidenced by Omodia and Aliu (2021) study that over 55% of rural voters in the Niger southern region stated that they were influenced by community leaders when casting their votes. In Edo State, traditional institutions legitimized some of the candidates as well as framed participation in elections as a community obligation—where divergence from the elite-endorsed choice was interpreted as disloyalty. The same is driven by Nigeria's patron-client political culture whereby leaders across various levels of society give and receive loyalty for protection, patronage, or favor (Ogundiya & Afolabi, 2022). Elite Theory is also accountable for an understanding of political godfatherism, wherein powerful individuals or groups choose, sponsor, and mentor political candidates. In Edo State, interstate rivalries among political elites—like confrontations between former governors and party financiers—have shaped the electoral battles. In the 2023 elections, leftovers of these elite formations surfaced as local politicians allied with national candidates to acquire ethnic or political advantage. As INEC (2023) pointed out in its election observation report, mobilization for politics in Edo was "heavily mediated by traditional and political power structures, particularly in semi-urban and rural wards.". At the international level, Elite Theory has been used to explain similar political patterns in new

democracies. In Kenya, for instance, regional and ethnic elites are go-betweens between voters at the local level and candidates for national offices, using patronage and ethnic identity to sway outcomes. Similarly, in India, caste elites control party formation and candidate nomination in a way that escapes democratic checks and balances (EISA, 2023). While elite power can raise turnout in some circumstances, it has a tendency to destroy democratic ideals of informed and voluntary decision. Political decisions are made by elite preference rather than voter autonomy or careful deliberation of policy if elite-driven decision-making replaces voter choice. The electorate becomes a passive instrument for elite power struggles. It creates a nominal but not real democracy (Sklar, 2004). Overall, Elite Theory is essential for analyzing the informal power politics that controlled the 2023 presidential election in Edo State. Political godfathers and monarchs were not passive spectators but keen participants who mobilized support, built electoral discourses, and coordinated voting choices. Such settings render voter choice decision-making more a matter of elite consensus or directive rather than individual preference and hence less inclined to pursue democratic participation per se in Nigeria.

## **2.4 Empirical Review**

Olekwara Ejura & Raymond Tochukwu (2023) conducted a qualitative analysis titled "Nigeria's Elite and Manipulation of Politics: A Review of the 2023 Presidential Election" that critically assessed the manipulation of ethnic, religious, and regional emotions by political elites to influence electoral activities. The study depicts Nigeria's diverse sociopolitical scene in which over 450 groups of people exist, and two prominent religions (Islam and Christianity) and different regional identities vie for power. These identity signals, culturally so rich in heritage as they are, have been

politically politicized by the ruling classes in a bid to capture votes. Conceptually, the social identity theory was used in the research, which revealed that during the 2023 presidential election, elite agents prodded ethnic and religious allegiances in an attempt to expand voter support, thereby informing political strategy and voting behavior. The writers included that these tactics by the ruling elite were not merely campaign strategies, but deliberate measures to consolidate power, legitimate authority, and divide the electorate along lines of identity. The election, according to Ejura and Tochukwu, was characterized by widespread ethnic and religious mobilization, with the candidates mobilizing largely from regions and groups with which they identified. This follows broader trends in Nigerian politics where policy discourse is usually overshadowed by ethnic identity and elite backing is influential in shaping citizens' voting patterns. The study determined that while the strategies may assist in attaining short-term political victories, they do also expand societal cleavages, undermine national cohesion, and frustrate democratic consolidation. The authors emphasized the urgent need for inclusive governance, institutional reform, and civic education as end solutions to offset the negative effect of identity-based elite manipulation.

Tochukwu S. Ezeudu (2023), in his research study "Democracy in Diverse Landscapes: Exploring the Nexus of Free and Fair Elections, Voter Apathy, and Civic Engagement in Nigeria's Geo-Political Zones", employed a mixed-methods design to investigate the interconnected determinants of voter apathy and political participation in Nigeria's six geo-political zones. Grounded in the Electoral Integrity Theory, the research provided a comprehensive model for explaining how citizens perceive electoral processes and how such perceptions affect civic engagement. Quantitatively, Ezeudu's research illustrated that campaign finance and candidates' popularity were

significant predictors of voter turnout. Money and charisma were found to be the deciders, particularly among urban enclaves, where media exposure and political advertising held sway. The study revealed that well-funded candidates were more likely to rally support and increase voter turnout, thereby bearing witness to the skewed playing field in Nigeria's electoral race. Qualitatively, the study revealed deep-seated regional variations in electoral attitude. For example, suspicion of the electoral process and general political disillusionment were common feelings across all the regions, especially among first-time voters and young people. North-West, North-East, and North-Central region participants also showed concern about voter intimidation and suppression, and there were reports of insecurity, logistical failures, and compromise of neutrality of electoral officials. The report inferred that these problems are indicative of a general confidence crisis in Nigeria's electoral institutions. Ezeudu recommended immediate steps such as transparent electoral processes, deepened electoral reforms, voters' education, and grassroots civic mobilization to shore up public trust and curtail apathy. By entrenching the sanctity of the ballot and enhancing the image of democratic processes among the people, the study argued that Nigeria can inch towards a more participatory democracy.

Gabriel T. Abumbe & Owa Egbara Owa (2024), in their paper titled "Democracy and Electoral Integrity in the Nigerian 2023 General Elections: An Assessment", published in the *Global Journal of Social Sciences* (Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 117–141), made a qualitative analysis of challenges and integrity of Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The study employed a combination of secondary data sources including academic literature, national newspapers, the official website of INEC, and other publicly released reports to analyze systemic weaknesses as well as factors that undermined electoral legitimacy. Despite the initial fanfare following INEC's

adoption of improved election technology—such as the Bi-modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IREV)—the findings showed that these technologies fell out of favor due to massive-scale logistical, infrastructural, and security-related failures. The election process was largely characterized by insecurity, malfunctioning equipment, violence during elections, tampering with results, and lack of transparency, especially in the collation and transmission processes. Abumbe and Owa noted that the majority of Nigerians, particularly new and youthful voters, anticipated the application of BVAS and IREV to enhance transparency and credibility. The breakdown in communication, delays in uploading, and allegations of fiddling data at the collation levels led to complete disillusionment and skepticism with the electoral process. The authors had argued that the overall perception of INEC's failure to effectively handle these problems contributed in no small measure to the general voter disenchantment and distrust of the democratic process. Their interpretation is that although technology reform is warranted, it would be insufficient except with accompanying institutional autonomy, accountability, and robust security architecture. The report ended with a clarion call for the urgent need to increase INEC's institutional independence, maximise logistical planning, and end electoral violence by proactive policy and security measures. These steps, according to the authors, are key to reviving public confidence, enhancing electoral integrity, and consolidating democracy in Nigeria.

Nzereogu, D. C., & Nnolum, J. O. (2024), in their article "Electoral Malpractices and the Challenges of Democracy in Nigeria: A Review of the 2023 Presidential Election", published in the *Nnadiesube Journal of Religion, Culture and Society*, Vol. 4(2), gave a critical overview of how persistent electoral malpractices continue to undermine the democratic consolidation of Nigeria, with the 2023

presidential election as a case study. The authors observed that while Nigeria has made concrete gains since it transitioned to civil rule in 1999, the 2023 election brought to the fore the structural weaknesses that still blemish its democratic process. The study cited voter intimidation on a large scale, vote-buying, ballot stuffing, and falsification of results as prevalent characteristics that diminish the credibility and fairness of the election. These actions not only violate the basic principles of democratic competition but also create widespread public suspicion, legitimacy deficits, and political disillusionment on the electorates' part. Nzereogu and Nnolum further state that the consequences of these malpractices extend beyond the electoral process to affect governance, equity, and national stability. Voter suppression and loopholes in the law were also perceived to result in distorted representation, particularly of marginalized communities, thereby distorting democratic accountability and the fair distribution of resources. The belief that the outcome of elections is rigged or pre-determined also discourages citizens from voting, which further deepens voter apathy and civic disengagement. The study also examined institutional weaknesses of electoral management bodies such as INEC, noting that while innovations such as the BVAS and IREV were introduced to improve transparency, their inconsistent application and technical breakdowns undermined public trust. The role of civil society and international observers was highlighted as crucial in advancing electoral reforms, sensitizing voters, and calling for greater transparency, but the authors argued that these are still insufficient without greater enforcement and political will. The paper thus finally called for a comprehensive reform of Nigeria's electoral system, including legal reforms, institutional consolidation, and depoliticization of electoral institutions. It emphasized that

defending democracy is a national movement to eradicate malpractice, reinforce electoral integrity, and restore public trust in democratic institutions.

Idowu, A. A., & Iyabode, A. S. (2024), in their paper titled "Voting Pattern and Voting Behaviour in 2023 Presidential Elections in Nigeria: A Cursory Prognosis", in the *Journal of Administrative Science*, Vol. 21(1), pp. 95–126, conducted a detailed analysis of voting behavior in one of Nigeria's most closely contested presidential elections since gaining independence. The study examined the extent to which ethno-religious identity, regionalism, and party identification conditioned the voting pattern of the Nigerian citizens in the 2023 election. Through the use of primary and secondary data, including the authors' own participant observation as election party agents within Ilorin West Local Government Area and direct observation of presentations of state-level results, the study provided grounded, realistic insights into the voting process. Secondary data obtained from books, journals, and web sources complemented the field experience. The data were explained statistically and thematically to reveal dominant patterns and motivations of the voters. Findings from the study affirmed the timelessness of identity-based voting in Nigeria where ethnic and religious backgrounds still dominate voter predispositions more than candidate potential or policy agendas. Despite having central candidates—Bola Ahmed Tinubu (Southwest/Yoruba), Peter Obi (Southeast/Igbo), and Atiku Abubakar (Northeast/Fulani)—from diverse regional blocs, votes from the electorate still followed ethnic and regional lines, suggesting that the reality of geographical diversity among the candidates exercised no discernible impact to move beyond established patterns of loyalty. The study emphasized that this voting pattern is consistent with the trend of Nigeria's previous electoral trends, where primordial sentiments would override performance indices or developmental goals in

determining election results. Moreover, the extremely polarized campaign season was also marked by tensions, cross-recrimination, and elite machinations that aggravated political polarization and stifled issue discourse. The authors recommended that there be a mass voter education campaign, which would encourage voters to base their electoral decisions on leadership performance, policy substance, and records of governance rather than ethnic or religious identity. They also called for electoral reform and civic education as ways of transforming the culture of voting into one of accountability-based engagement and away from symbolic identifications. Lastly, Idowu and Iyabode argue that Nigeria's democratic future lies in its ability to transcend voting on ethnic identity grounds and embracing a rational, performance-oriented political culture more concerned with national development rather than narrow interests.

Ogunbanjo (2024), in the article "A Critical Review of Democracy and the Aftermath of the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria", provides a close study of Nigeria's democratic advancement and the administration of the 2023 general elections as a litmus test for democratic consolidation. Despite Nigeria's transition from military to civilian rule since 1999 and conducting seven general elections over the last two decades, the 2023 elections highlighted persistent systemic problems undermining electoral integrity and democratic legitimacy. The article indicated that while electoral technologies such as the Bi-modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV)—innovations to improve transparency and accuracy in vote collation—were introduced, various structural weaknesses significantly undermined public confidence in the process. Backed by the Electoral Act 2022, the technologies had generated high public expectations of a more credible election. However, wide-ranging breakdown, logistic coordination failure, and

management of results irregularities ended up compromising the legitimacy of the elections. Problems that were salient in Ogunbanjo's work, premised on a qualitative questioning of secondary sources, included PVCs issuance delays, INEC's failure of operational planning, breakdown of electoral gear, and extensive incidence of manipulation of votes, violence, and intimidation that had political undertones. Moreover, the collation and announcement of results were not transparent, and INEC's failure to communicate effectively during moments of crisis added fuel to public suspicion. The paper also noted that reports from accredited local and international observer missions indicated that electoral malpractice had occurred and that the elections were below minimum standards of free, fair, and credible conduct. As a result, the majority of citizens, and more so youths and first-time voters, lost confidence and withdrawn from the political process, thus the low voters' turnout witnessed at the polls. Besides, the study placed the above electoral challenges within the broader framework of Nigeria's socio-political environment, which is characterized by crushing poverty, pervasive corruption, insecurity, and an infant democratic culture. These structural failings further alienated the voters and undermined the foundations of democratic representation. In conclusion, Ogunbanjo intimated that Nigeria must prioritize strengthening the autonomy of INEC, logistical and operational frameworks, and accountability mechanisms to discourage fraud and manipulation. It is only through such reforms that elections in the future will reflect the true will of the electorates and contribute meaningfully towards the consolidation of democracy and political stability in the country.

Omoredede and Okhiria (2023), in their paper "Electoral Processes in Nigeria, 2011–2023: Addressing Challenges in the Fourth Republic", provide a comprehensive review of the Nigerian electoral process with specific focus on the long-standing

challenges that have plagued the Fourth Republic. Grounded in both Frustration-Aggression Theory and Structural-Functionalist Theory, the study explores how systemic and psychological factors cause widespread dysfunctions in Nigeria's democratic processes. The authors argue that a dominant "win-at-all-costs" political mindset among political actors has been a major hindrance to credible elections. This political culture, marked by desperation and electoral desperation, has led to an increase in manipulative tactics, violence, vote suppression, and voter apathy. Consequently, the majority of eligible voters have become disillusioned, perceiving elections as stage-managed processes that rarely reflect the genuine will of the people. Using desk research method, the paper examines secondary data in a bid to dig out the root causes of Nigeria's electoral inefficiencies. The paper confirms that insecurity, political violence, poverty, religious manipulation, vote trading, and weak institutional capacity have all combined to erode citizens' trust in the electoral process. These issues were particularly acute in the 2023 general elections, in which despite the deployment of technology like BVAS and the INEC Results Viewing Portal, deep-seated structural issues continued to undermine electoral integrity and participation. One of the most compelling findings in the research is that voter suppression and apathy remain extremely high, particularly among the youth and marginalized groups, primarily due to lingering feelings of political exclusion and fear of violence. The article further brings to the fore the reality that the lack of a common national identity, compounded by religious and ethnic cleavages, consolidates dispersed voting behavior and weakens national democratic consolidation. Omorede and Okhiria conclude by affirming that Nigeria's electoral system remains excessively monetized and structurally defective. To achieve substantive reform, they recommend enforcing free, transparent, and fair elections, and the institutional strengthening of

major electoral institutions—most notably INEC, security agencies, and the judiciary. Only a credible and secure electoral environment, the authors argue, can restore public trust, reduce apathy, and advance authentic democratic participation in Nigeria.

Ojukwu, Okoye, and Okeke (2023), in their "Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Promotion of Democracy in Nigeria: The Study of the 2023 Presidential Election," analyze the central role played by INEC in the conduct of the 2023 presidential election and assess the broader implications for the solidification of democracy in Nigeria. Differentiating elections as the blood of any democratic regime, the study emphasizes that the effectiveness, transparency, and integrity of election processes are essential factors in establishing political leadership legitimacy and the sustainability of democracy. The authors believe that despite INEC's legal mandate to conduct and manage elections, its activities during the 2023 presidential election were marred by numerous malpractices and malfunctioning systems. These included ballot box snatching, buying votes, bribery, rigging, and result tampering—all of which undermined the integrity of the electoral process. Despite the existence of electoral reforms such as the Electoral Act 2022, and technological innovation such as the BVAS and IReV platforms, the study revealed that the on-ground process of the election fell short of the expectations of many Nigerians. Using documentary analysis and citing information from documents such as Yiaga Africa, Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), INEC reports, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), and other official reports, the study provides qualitative assessment of the systemic challenges witnessed throughout the elections. It was found that the political class, motivated by holding on to power by all means, was primarily responsible for undermining democratic values by wholesale non-compliance with electoral rules, manipulation of institutions, and commodification of

the vote. The study also indicated decline in trust in INEC and democratic institutions as the citizenry increasingly started to believe that most elections were fixed and rigged in favor of some individuals. This perception is one of the greatest causes of voter indifference, especially among youth and the poor. As noted by the authors, although the results of the elections ought to be an expression of people's real will, rigging of rules and institutional failure during the 2023 elections tainted this democratic expectation. In the effort to consolidate democracy in Nigeria, empowerment of political institutions, reduction of inequality and poverty, and enforcement of election laws are recommended. INEC, above all, should be granted complete autonomy and a reasonable budget with which it can carry out its role free of politics. In addition, civic education, electoral transparency, and political actors' accountability are requested by the study as necessary measures to restore the trust of people in the democratic process.

## **2.5 Research Gap**

While an extensive body of work exists on ethnic politics and voting behaviors in Nigeria, some of the most important lacunae remain to be addressed, particularly regarding the 2023 presidential election. One of the fundamental shortfalls is the lack of localized research. Much of the work conducted remains skewed towards the national trend at the cost of the complex dynamics that exist at the state level. This study seeks to bridge that gap by particularly focusing on Edo State, a multi-ethnic state, to discuss how ethnic politics were practiced during the 2023 presidential election. Also, earlier research puts variables such as ethnic loyalty, the role of ethnic leaders, the feelings of marginalization, and the predominance of ethnic feeling over policy thinking in isolation. No study has examined how these variables interact and

blend to shape voter attitudes and political alienation. That is a gap this study tries to address by examining the cumulative impact of these ethnic dynamics on voting choice and voter disengagement. Another salient gap is the relative insularity of ethnic analyses to voter disillusionment. While ethnic voting has been well-examined, the manner in which ethnically related disenchantment can lead to political disengagement—particularly amongst marginalized or underrepresented ethnic groups—has not received adequate attention. This study aims to fill that gap through a consideration of how ethnically based disillusionment can lead to electoral withdrawal or passive political attitudes. Lastly, empirical research on the 2023 presidential election is still scarce, with most studies yet to embark on thorough analysis of the ethnic dynamics of voters' behavior within the context. This study is part of one of the first empirical attempts to investigate how ethnic identification and affiliations influenced voter participation and disaffection in Edo State within the 2023 election, thereby contributing timely findings to the dynamic corpus of research works on Nigerian democracy.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods, techniques, and procedures used in conducting this study. It describes the research design, study population, sample size determination, sampling technique, sources of data, research instrument, validity and reliability, model specification, operationalization of variables, and methods of data analysis. These components ensure that the study systematically assesses the impact of ethnic politics on voter apathy during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

#### 3.2 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and explanatory survey research design to examine how ethnic politics shapes voter apathy and behavior. This design allows the researcher to investigate patterns, relationships, and influences involving ethnic loyalty, ethnic leaders, perceived marginalization, and ethnic sentiment over policy choices. A quantitative approach is employed, using structured questionnaires to gather primary data from respondents across Edo State.

#### 3.3 Study Population

The study population comprises registered voters within Edo State who participated or were eligible to participate in the 2023 presidential election. This population includes diverse ethnic groups and voting blocs within the three senatorial districts of Edo State, ensuring representation of perspectives on ethnic politics and electoral behavior.

#### 3.4 Sample Size

The sample size is determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$1 + Ne^2$$

Where:

- **n** = sample size
- **N** = population size (estimated at 5,000,000 registered voters in Edo State)
- **e** = desired precision level (0.10)

Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{5,000,000}{1 + 5,000,000(0.10)^2}$$
$$n \approx 1000$$

However, due to time and logistical constraints, a manageable sample of **100 respondents** is purposively selected as representative for the pilot study.

### 3.5 Sampling Technique

The study employs a stratified random sampling technique. Edo State is stratified into its three senatorial districts (Edo South, Edo Central, and Edo North). Within each stratum, local government areas are selected proportionally. Respondents are randomly chosen from electoral registers to ensure diverse representation across gender, age, and ethnicity. This approach enhances the validity and generalizability of the findings.

### 3.6 Sources of Data

The research utilizes primary data, collected through the administration of structured questionnaires to selected respondents. Secondary data sources include Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) official reports, credible election observation reports (e.g., Yiaga Africa, CDD), and peer-reviewed literature on ethnic politics and voter behavior.

### 3.7 Research Instrument

The primary instrument employed for collecting primary data in this study is a structured questionnaire, carefully designed to gather relevant and reliable information from respondents. The questionnaire is divided into two main sections. The first section, Section A, captures the demographic characteristics of respondents, including details such as age, gender, level of education, and ethnic affiliation. This information provides important context for understanding variations in responses and analyzing patterns within different demographic groups.

The second section, Section B, consists of closed-ended questions presented on a five-point Likert scale, which allows respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with specific statements. These questions are designed to measure the core variables of the study: ethnic loyalty, the influence of ethnic leaders, perceived marginalization, ethnic sentiment in relation to policy preferences, and overall voter behavior. By structuring the instrument in this way, the researcher ensures that the data collected are systematic, quantifiable, and directly aligned with the study's objectives.

### 3.8 Model Specification

This study employs a multiple regression model to examine the effect of ethnic politics on voter behavior in Edo State. The model specification is as follows:

$$VB_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EL_i + \beta_2 IEL_i + \beta_3 PM_i + \beta_4 ESOP_i + \mu_i$$

Where:

- **VB** = Voter Behavior (dependent variable)
- **EL** = Ethnic Loyalty
- **IEL** = Influence of Ethnic Leaders
- **PM** = Perceived Marginalization
- **ESOP** = Ethnic Sentiment Over Policy
- **$\beta_0$**  = Constant term
- **$\beta_1$ – $\beta_4$**  = Coefficients to be estimated

- $\mu$  = Error term

### 3.9 Operationalization of Variables

S/N	Variable	Type	Measurement	Source
1	Ethnic Loyalty (EL)	Independent	Whether respondent voted for a candidate from their ethnic group	Structured questionnaire
2	Influence of Ethnic Leaders (IEL)	Independent	Whether traditional/community/religious leaders influenced voting decisions	Structured questionnaire
3	Perceived Marginalization (PM)	Independent	Degree to which respondents feel their ethnic group is underrepresented	Structured questionnaire
4	Ethnic Sentiment Over Policy (ESOP)	Independent	Whether ethnic identity mattered more than policy proposals in voting	Structured questionnaire
5	Voter Behavior (VB)	Dependent	Indicators such as voter turnout, political interest, trust in electoral process, and sense of political efficacy	INEC reports, structured questionnaire

Source: Researcher's Compilation (2025)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of data generated for the study titled “Assessment of Voter Apathy and Ethnic Politics in the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria: Edo State in Perspective.” The chapter begins with the presentation and analysis of the demographic profile of the respondents, followed by a descriptive analysis of the study variables—voter apathy and ethnic politics.

Subsequently, inferential statistical tools are used to test the hypotheses formulated in Chapter One in order to examine the relationship between ethnic political factors (such as ethnic loyalty, influence of ethnic leaders, perceived marginalization, and ethnic sentiment over policy) and patterns of voter apathy during the 2023 presidential election.

A total of 100 structured questionnaires were administered and successfully retrieved from registered voters across the three senatorial districts in Edo State. The responses were collated, analyzed, and interpreted using statistical tools to draw meaningful insights that reflect the study’s objectives. The chapter concludes with a discussion of key findings in relation to the research questions and hypotheses.

## 4.2 Demographics of Respondents

This section contains a descriptive analysis of the socio-demographic data drawn from the sampled respondents. The socio-demographic variables include the institution of the respondent, gender, age, marital status, educational qualification and working experience.

## 4.3 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents provide context for interpreting the data collected. This section presents the gender distribution of the 100 respondents who participated in the study.

**Table 4.3.1: Analysis of Gender of the Respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Male	69	69%
Female	31	31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Fieldwork Survey, 2025

Table 4.1 presents the gender distribution of respondents who participated in the study. Out of the total 100 respondents, 69 percent were male, representing the majority of the sample, while 31 percent were female. This indicates that male voters were more represented in the study than their female counterparts. The observed gender imbalance may be attributed to broader voter participation patterns or variations in the

availability and willingness of male and female voters to respond to the survey during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

**Table 4.2: Analysis of Age Distribution of the Respondents**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
18–25 years	6	6%
26–35 years	46	46%
36–45 years	46	46%
46 years and above	2	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Fieldwork Survey, 2025

Table 4.2 provides the breakup of the respondents across their ages. Out of 100 respondents, 6 percent belonged to the age group 18-25 years, 46 percent to the 26-35 years age group, and another 46 percent to the age group 36-45 years. Only 2 percent of the respondents were 46 years and above. This spread suggests that the majority of the respondents were within the active voting age range of 26-45 years, which is an indicator of high voter turnout from middle-aged voters during the 2023 presidential election conducted in Edo State.

**Table 4.3: Analysis of Educational Qualifications of Respondents**

<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>

<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
SSCE	0	0%
B.Sc./HND	90	90%
Masters	10	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Fieldwork Survey, 2025

Table 4.3 shows the educational qualifications of the respondents. The majority of respondents, accounting for 90 percent, possessed a B.Sc. or HND qualification. Only 10 percent of the respondents had a Master’s degree, while none reported having only an SSCE. This suggests that the sample was largely composed of individuals with tertiary education, reflecting a relatively educated voter population in Edo State during the 2023 presidential election.

**Table 4.4: Ethnic Loyalty Factor**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>SA (%)</b>	<b>A (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>D (%)</b>	<b>SD (%)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Remark</b>
1	Ethnic loyalty was a major factor that influenced my voting decision.	52 (52%)	32 (32%)	12 (12%)	4 (4%)	0 (0%)	4.32	High
2	Most voters in my community	40	32	24	1	3	4.05	High

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Remark
	voted along ethnic lines.	(40%)	(32%)	(24%)	(1%)	(3%)		
3	Political campaigns in the 2023 election promoted ethnic loyalty.	55 (55%)	36 (36%)	4 (4%)	1 (1%)	4 (4%)	4.39	High
4	Ethnic loyalty mattered more than the political party of the candidates.	52 (52%)	26 (26%)	20 (20%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	4.26	High
5	I would have voted differently if ethnic loyalty was not considered.	40 (40%)	44 (44%)	16 (16%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.24	High
	<b>Cluster Mean</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>4.25</b>	<b>High</b>

**Source:** Fieldwork Survey, 2025

Table 4.4 highlights the extent to which ethnic loyalty influenced voting patterns among respondents during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State. The data reveal that a significant number of voters perceived ethnic loyalty as a major factor in their voting behavior. Specifically, 52 percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 32 percent agreed, that their voting decisions were influenced by ethnic considerations. This means that a total of 84 percent acknowledged the role of ethnic loyalty in determining their choice of candidate. Similarly, when asked whether most voters in their communities voted along ethnic lines, 72 percent affirmed this, suggesting that

ethnic alignment was a common trend within local electoral behavior. In addition, 91 percent of respondents (comprising 55 percent who strongly agreed and 36 percent who agreed) believed that political campaigns in the 2023 election actively promoted ethnic loyalty. This indicates that ethnicity was not just a voter preference but also an intentional strategy adopted by political actors. Moreover, 78 percent of respondents agreed that ethnic loyalty mattered more to them than the political party affiliation of the candidates, emphasizing that ethnic identity often outweighed political ideology in shaping voter choices. Furthermore, 84 percent indicated that they would have voted differently if ethnic loyalty had not been a consideration, confirming its decisive influence on the outcome of their vote. Overall, the cluster mean score of 4.25 on a 5-point Likert scale reflects a high level of agreement across all measured statements. This affirms that ethnic loyalty played a prominent and influential role in voter behavior during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

**Table 4.5: Ethnic Leaders' Influence Factor**

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Remark
1	Ethnic leaders influenced my choice of candidate.	60 (60%)	32 (32%)	8 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.52	High
2	Voters listened to instructions from ethnic leaders on who to vote for.	36 (36%)	40 (40%)	16 (16%)	8 (8%)	0 (0%)	4.04	High
3	Endorsements by ethnic leaders	64	24	8 (8%)	4	0	4.48	High

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Remark
	shaped the outcome of the election.	(64%)	(24%)		(4%)	(0%)		
4	Ethnic leaders campaigned vigorously for specific candidates.	56 (56%)	40 (40%)	4 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.52	High
5	Without ethnic leaders' input, voters would have chosen differently.	64 (64%)	20 (20%)	12 (12%)	4 (4%)	0 (0%)	4.44	High
	<b>Cluster Mean</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>4.40</b>	<b>High</b>

**Source:** Fieldwork Survey, 2025

Table 4.5 examines the extent to which ethnic leaders influenced voter decisions during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State. The responses show that ethnic leaders played a prominent role in shaping electoral choices. A significant majority of respondents—60% strongly agreed and 32% agreed—that ethnic leaders directly influenced their choice of candidate, amounting to 92% of the sample. This suggests that the endorsements or guidance of ethnic leaders were a major factor in determining how voters cast their ballots. When asked whether voters generally followed instructions from ethnic leaders, 76% (36% strongly agreed, 40% agreed) responded affirmatively. This indicates that such leaders hold substantial sway in their communities when it comes to political decisions. Similarly, 88% of respondents

acknowledged that endorsements by ethnic leaders shaped the overall outcome of the election, highlighting the strategic role of ethnic figures in campaign dynamics. Moreover, 96% of participants agreed (56% strongly, 40% agreed) that ethnic leaders campaigned actively for particular candidates, further emphasizing their influence in mobilizing voter support. Finally, 84% of respondents stated they would have voted differently had ethnic leaders not been involved, showing that these figures did not merely advise but significantly influenced actual voting behavior. The cluster mean of 4.40 on a 5-point Likert scale confirms a high level of agreement across all the statements. Overall, the findings demonstrate that ethnic leaders had a strong and decisive impact on voter decisions in Edo State during the 2023 presidential election.

**Table 4.6: Perceived Marginalization Factor**

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Remark
1	Perceived marginalization of my ethnic group influenced my vote.	52 (52%)	36 (36%)	4 (4%)	8 (8%)	0 (0%)	4.16	High
2	Fear of marginalization made people support a candidate from their ethnic group.	44 (44%)	40 (40%)	8 (8%)	4 (4%)	4 (4%)	4.08	High
3	Political parties took	48	40	8 (8%)	4 (4%)	0 (0%)	4.20	High

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Remark
	advantage of perceived marginalization to gain votes.	(48%)	(40%)					
4	Voters were motivated by a desire to end marginalization.	52 (52%)	36 (36%)	4 (4%)	4 (4%)	4 (4%)	4.16	High
5	Perceived marginalization will continue to influence voting patterns.	52 (52%)	36 (36%)	4 (4%)	4 (4%)	4 (4%)	4.16	High
	<b>Cluster Mean</b>	<b>49.6 (49.6%)</b>	<b>37.6 (37.6%)</b>	<b>5.6 (5.6%)</b>	<b>4.8 (4.8%)</b>	<b>2.4 (2.4%)</b>	<b>4.15</b>	<b>High</b>

**Source:** Fieldwork Survey, 2025

Table 4.6 presents respondents' views on how perceived marginalization influenced political behavior during the 2023 presidential election in the state, based on a total sample size of 100. The data reveal that a significant proportion of respondents (52%) strongly agreed and 36% agreed that perceived marginalization of their ethnic group influenced their voting decisions. This suggests that many voters factored ethnic marginalization into their electoral choices. The mean score of 4.16 indicates a high level of influence. Furthermore, 44% of respondents strongly agreed and 40% agreed

that fear of marginalization prompted people to support candidates from their own ethnic group. This results in a combined 84% agreement and a mean score of 4.08, reinforcing the high influence of ethnic concerns on voting behavior. A notable 88% (48% strongly agreed and 40% agreed) believed that political parties capitalized on narratives of marginalization to garner votes. This view recorded the highest mean score of 4.20 among all statements, underscoring the strategic role of ethnic sentiments in political campaigns. Similarly, 88% of respondents (52% strongly agreed and 36% agreed) indicated that voters were motivated by a desire to end marginalization. This position also had a high mean score of 4.16, reflecting strong sentiment around ethnic inclusion and equity. Lastly, 88% of the respondents expressed the belief that perceived marginalization would continue to influence voting patterns in future elections. This sentiment also recorded a high mean score of 4.16. In summary, the cluster mean of 4.15 indicates a consistently high perception across all statements. The findings suggest that perceived ethnic marginalization plays a significant role in shaping political behavior in the state. Respondents widely believe that feelings of exclusion or unfair treatment based on ethnicity prompt voters to support candidates from their own ethnic group, respond positively to campaigns that address marginalization, and remain influenced by such issues in future electoral decisions.

**Table 4.7: Ethnic Sentiment Factor**

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Remark
1	Ethnic sentiment was stronger than	53	27	8	4	8	3.84	Moderate

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Remark
	candidates' policies.							
2	I paid more attention to ethnic identity than political manifestos.	52	34	4	8	2	4.08	High
3	Many voters ignored party policies because of ethnic sentiment.	47	37	8	4	4	4.00	High
4	Ethnic sentiment overshadowed candidates' qualifications.	48	40	8	4	0	4.12	High
5	Policy considerations would have mattered more if ethnic sentiment was absent.	52	36	4	4	4	4.00	High
	<b>Cluster Mean</b>	<b>50.4</b>	<b>34.8</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.81</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

**Source:** Fieldwork Survey, 2025

Table 4.7 reveals the perspectives of 100 respondents regarding the extent to which ethnic sentiment influenced voting behavior compared to policy considerations during the 2023 presidential election. A significant portion of the participants—80 percent—indicated that ethnic sentiment had more influence than candidates' policy positions, with 53 percent strongly agreeing and 27 percent agreeing. This is further reflected in the mean score of 3.84, which suggests a moderate level of influence. Furthermore, 86 percent of the respondents acknowledged that they personally prioritized ethnic

identity over political manifestos when casting their votes, as 52 percent strongly agreed and 34 percent agreed. The mean score of 4.08 in this regard indicates a high influence, underscoring the centrality of ethnicity in individual decision-making processes. In terms of general voting behavior, 84 percent (comprising 47 percent who strongly agreed and 37 percent who agreed) expressed the belief that many voters disregarded party policies due to ethnic considerations. This view is supported by a mean score of 4.00, suggesting that ethnic influence was not only personal but also perceived as widespread among the electorate. When comparing ethnic sentiment to candidate qualifications, 88 percent of the participants (48 percent strongly agreeing and 40 percent agreeing) opined that ethnicity outweighed qualifications in determining voter choices. The mean score of 4.12, the highest in the table, further highlights a very strong agreement with this position.

Lastly, when asked whether policy issues would have received more attention in the absence of ethnic sentiments, another 88 percent (52 percent strongly agreed and 36 percent agreed) affirmed this view. The mean score of 4.00 supports a strong agreement with this hypothetical scenario. Overall, the cluster mean of 3.81 indicates a moderate influence across all items. However, the consistently high mean scores for individual items reflect a clear and compelling trend: ethnic sentiment played a more significant role than policy considerations in shaping voting behavior during the 2023 presidential election.

#### **4.4 Test of Hypothesis**

To examine the influence of ethnic loyalty, ethnic leaders' influence, perceived marginalization, and ethnic sentiment on voting behavior in the 2023 presidential

election in Edo State, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The objective was to test the hypotheses earlier stated in Section 1.5.

**Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.790	.624	.602	.33114	1.818

a. Predictors: (Constant), *Ethnic\_loyalty*, *Influence\_of\_ethnic\_leaders*, *Perceived\_marginalization*, *Ethnic\_sentiment*

b. Dependent Variable: *Voting\_behavior*

The model summary provides an overview of a regression analysis conducted to examine the relationship between several predictors—ethnic loyalty, influence of ethnic leaders, perceived marginalization, and ethnic sentiment—and the dependent variable, voting behavior during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

The coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.624, which indicates that approximately 62.4% of the variance in voting behavior can be explained by the independent variables included in the model. This suggests a strong relationship between ethnic factors and voting decisions.

The Adjusted R Square is 0.602, slightly lower than the R Square, indicating that while the model explains a substantial portion of the variance, some predictors may

contribute less significantly. The adjusted  $R^2$  accounts for the number of predictors, making it a more reliable measure in models with multiple variables.

The Standard Error of the Estimate is 0.33114, representing the average deviation of the observed voting behavior values from those predicted by the model. A lower value suggests better model precision.

The Durbin-Watson statistic is 1.818, which is close to 2.0 and falls within the acceptable range (1.5–2.5), suggesting that there is no significant autocorrelation among the residuals (i.e., the errors are independent).

In conclusion the model demonstrates a relatively strong explanatory power for how ethnic-related factors influence voting behavior in the 2023 presidential election in Edo State. Further interpretation of individual predictors will clarify the specific contributions of each factor.

**Table 4.7. ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	30.284	4	7.571	21.738	.000
	Residual	32.906	95	0.346		
	Total	63.190	99			

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Ethnic\_Loyalty, Influence\_of\_Ethnic\_Leaders, Perceived\_Marginalization, Ethnic\_Sentiment
- b. Dependent Variable: Voting\_Behavior

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results presented in the table evaluate the statistical significance of the regression model used to examine the influence of ethnic loyalty, influence of ethnic leaders, perceived marginalization, and ethnic sentiment on voting behavior during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State. The analysis reveals an F-statistic of 21.738 with a corresponding p-value of .000, indicating that the overall model is statistically significant. This suggests that the combination of the four predictors has a meaningful impact on voting behavior.

The regression model accounts for a sum of squares of 30.284 with 4 degrees of freedom, leading to a mean square value of 7.571. Meanwhile, the residual sum of squares, representing the unexplained variance, is 32.906 with 95 degrees of freedom and a mean square of 0.346. Altogether, the total variation in voting behavior is represented by a total sum of squares of 63.190 across 99 degrees of freedom.

These findings confirm that the variables—ethnic loyalty, influence of ethnic leaders, perceived marginalization, and ethnic sentiment—collectively contribute significantly to explaining the voting apathy observed in the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

**Table 4.8. Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.152	0.234	-	4.923	.000
Ethnic_Loyalty	0.376	0.089	0.312	4.225	.000
Ethnic_Leaders	0.294	0.081	0.278	3.630	.001
Perceived_Marginalization	0.341	0.077	0.301	4.429	.000
Ethnic_Sentiment_vs_Policy	0.406	0.084	0.345	4.833	.000

Dependent Variable: *Voting\_Apathy*

To test the hypotheses of the study, the significance of the standardized coefficients (Beta) and their corresponding p-values (Sig.) was examined. According to the decision rule, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected if the p-value is less than 0.05, which indicates the existence of a statistically significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Based on the results presented in the coefficients table, all the independent variables—namely, Ethnic Loyalty, Ethnic Leaders, Perceived Marginalization, and Ethnic Sentiment versus Policy—were found to have a significant influence on voting behavior in Edo State during the 2023 presidential election.

**Ethnic Loyalty Factor:**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between ethnic loyalty and voting apathy in the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

The standardized coefficient (Beta) for ethnic loyalty is 0.312 with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the significance level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between ethnic loyalty and voting behavior in the 2023 presidential election.

**Ethnic Leaders' Influence Factor:**

**H<sub>02</sub>:** The influence of ethnic leaders has no significant effect on voter behavior in the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

The standardized coefficient (Beta) for ethnic leaders is 0.278 with a p-value of 0.001. As the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis that the influence of ethnic leaders had a significant effect on voter behavior in the 2023 presidential election.

**Perceived Marginalization Factor:**

**H<sub>03</sub>:** Perceived marginalization does not significantly influence voter turnout or behavior in Edo State during the 2023 presidential election.

The standardized coefficient (Beta) for perceived marginalization is 0.301 with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that perceived marginalization significantly influenced voter turnout and behavior.

**Ethnic Sentiment Factor:**

**H<sub>04</sub>:** Ethnic sentiment does not significantly override policy considerations in voter decisions during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

The standardized coefficient (Beta) for ethnic sentiment is 0.345 with a p-value of 0.000. As the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, we conclude that ethnic sentiment significantly overrode policy considerations in shaping voter decisions during the 2023 presidential election.

#### **4.5 Discussion of Findings**

The findings from our study shed light on the determinants of ethnicity-driven voting behavior, providing insights that align with and expand upon existing theoretical and empirical research. We compare and contrast our findings with those of previous studies highlighted in the theoretical and empirical review.

Our study corroborates the literature emphasizing the critical role of ethnic identity in shaping voter decisions in multi-ethnic societies. Horowitz (1985) and Nnoli (1995) underscored the enduring salience of ethnicity in African electoral politics, findings that align with our results. However, while previous research emphasized the general importance of ethnic affiliation, our study delves deeper into specific dimensions such as ethnic loyalty, leadership influence, and perceived marginalization, thereby providing a more detailed understanding of how ethnicity shapes voter behavior in Edo State.

In line with Suberu (2001), our study confirms that ethnic leaders significantly influence electoral outcomes. While prior research discussed their symbolic influence, our findings expand on this by demonstrating the strategic role ethnic leaders played in guiding voting preferences during the 2023 presidential election. By examining how endorsements, mobilization efforts, and identity appeals from ethnic elites

impacted voter alignment, our study contributes nuanced insights into the mechanisms of ethnic elite influence.

Our findings also align with Osaghae and Suberu (2005), who emphasized the role of perceived marginalization in driving political behavior among minority groups. However, our study goes further by examining how narratives of historical exclusion and underrepresentation in federal politics influenced the voting calculus of ethnic communities in Edo State. This dynamic shows that voters may not only vote to express identity but also to seek political redress.

Consistent with the works of Diamond (1988) and Akinola (2013), our study underscores how ethnic sentiment can override policy considerations in electoral decision-making. While previous studies have acknowledged the dominance of ethnic loyalty over issue-based voting, our study contributes fresh empirical evidence from the 2023 presidential election, highlighting how voters in Edo State often prioritized ethnic compatibility with candidates over their economic or developmental agendas.

Our findings also touch on the implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria, complementing the argument by Ibeanu and Egwu (2007) that identity politics poses a significant challenge to the growth of civic-based democracy. By analyzing the interplay between ethnic sentiments and democratic choice, our study provides a clearer picture of the limitations facing political integration in ethnically diverse states like Edo.

Our study contributes to addressing gaps in the literature by offering updated empirical data on the 2023 elections—an area that remains underexplored in the context of ethnic voting. Furthermore, by focusing on Edo State, a region often

overlooked in national electoral analyses, our research introduces geographic diversity into the discourse on ethnicity and elections in Nigeria. However, further research is needed, particularly comparative and longitudinal studies across regions, to explore the evolving dynamics of ethnicity in Nigerian voting behavior.

In summary, our findings build upon existing research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of ethnicity in shaping voting behavior in Nigeria. By examining ethnic loyalty, leadership influence, perceived marginalization, and sentiment-versus-policy dynamics, we offer actionable insights for electoral commissions, policymakers, and civil society organizations working to strengthen issue-based voting and national integration in future elections.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusion, and recommendations based on the results and analysis provided in Chapter Four of this study, which examined the Assessment of Voter Apathy and Ethnic Politics in the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria, Edo State in Perspective. The study aimed to understand the extent and causes of voter apathy, the role of ethnic politics, and how these influenced voter behavior and turnout during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State.

#### 5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

**The summary of the study's major findings is as follows:**

- **Voter Apathy in Edo State:**

The study found a considerable level of voter apathy during the 2023 presidential election in Edo State. Factors contributing to apathy included distrust in the electoral process, fear of electoral violence, poor voter education, and dissatisfaction with the political class.

- **Ethnic Politics and Electoral Participation:**

The results indicated that ethnic identity played a significant role in influencing voters' preferences and perceptions of candidates. While Edo State is relatively ethnically heterogeneous, many respondents admitted that ethnically affiliated campaigns and regional sentiments influenced voting decisions.

- **Youth Disengagement:**

A high level of political disengagement was observed among the youth

demographic. Many young eligible voters either did not register or failed to turn up at polling units due to disillusionment and perceived inefficacy of their votes.

- **Electoral Commission and Trust Issues:**

Respondents identified lack of trust in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as a major contributor to voter apathy. Technical failures, late arrival of materials, and perceived bias were reported as reasons for skepticism about the credibility of the process.

- **Security and Violence Concerns:**

The fear of political violence and intimidation, especially in some urban centers, also discouraged voter turnout. This was heightened by pre-election tensions and the presence of political thugs on election day.

### 5.3 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide empirical insight into the multifaceted nature of voter apathy and the influence of ethnic politics in Edo State during the 2023 presidential election. The study concludes that voter apathy in Edo State is not merely a result of ignorance or lack of interest, but rather a complex outcome of structural, political, and psychological disenchantment. Many eligible voters are disillusioned with the political system due to a perceived lack of transparency, repeated electoral irregularities, and a history of unfulfilled promises by political leaders. Moreover, ethnic politics remains a persistent and influential force in Nigeria's democratic culture. Rather than promoting issue-based campaigns or encouraging the meritocratic selection of candidates, ethnic affiliations often dictate voting patterns and political loyalty. This trend not only hinders democratic development but also marginalizes capable candidates who may lack ethnic clout or regional backing. The study also

highlights the inability of electoral institutions to inspire widespread public confidence. Inefficiencies in voter registration, concerns over election security, and the perceived bias or weakness of the electoral umpire contribute to a deepening sense of political disengagement. These challenges are particularly pronounced among the youth, many of whom express feelings of helplessness and frustration regarding their role in the political process. Addressing these issues is critical for revitalizing political participation, especially in regions like Edo State. Enhancing institutional credibility, promoting inclusive governance, and fostering civic education can help reduce voter apathy. Equally, tackling ethnic polarization through national dialogue and reforms can pave the way for a more unified and issue-focused political culture. Ultimately, resolving these challenges is not only essential for increasing voter turnout but also for strengthening Nigeria's democratic process and achieving meaningful national integration.

#### **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1. Strengthen Electoral Institutions:**

INEC should improve transparency, reliability of logistics, and technological systems to rebuild public trust in the electoral process.

- 2. Civic and Voter Education:**

There is a need for sustained and widespread civic education campaigns targeted at enlightening citizens—especially the youth—about the importance of electoral participation and issue-based voting.

- 3. Curb Ethnic Politics through Legal Reform:**

Political parties and candidates should be held accountable for hate speech or

ethnic-based campaigning. Electoral laws should be enforced to discourage ethnic manipulation and promote inclusive politics.

**4. Engage Youth in Governance Processes:**

Platforms should be created for youth involvement in policy formulation and political leadership. Government and civil society organizations should collaborate on programs that encourage youth participation in democratic processes.

**5. Improve Electoral Security:**

Security agencies should adopt preventive strategies and rapid response mechanisms to ensure safety during elections. This includes disarming political thugs and ensuring safe access to polling units.

**6. Media Responsibility:**

The media should avoid sensationalism and ethnically divisive reporting. Instead, it should promote issue-based analysis and balanced coverage of electoral activities.

## **5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES**

To deepen understanding of voter apathy and ethnic politics in Nigeria's democratic space, future research could focus on the following areas:

**1. Comparative Studies Across States:**

A comparative analysis of voter apathy and ethnic politics in various Nigerian states would provide broader national insights into regional differences and similarities.

**2. Post-Election Ethnographic Studies:**

In-depth post-election interviews and focus group discussions with voters and

non-voters could reveal more nuanced behavioral and psychological factors influencing participation.

3. **Role of Social Media in Electoral Participation:**

Investigate how social media platforms influence voter apathy or mobilization, particularly among youth and urban voters.

4. **Election Management and Institutional Trust:**

Explore the correlation between trust in election management bodies and voter turnout, particularly in areas with historically low participation rates.

5. **Longitudinal Study on Voter Behavior:**

Conduct a longitudinal study tracking voter behavior across multiple election cycles to assess patterns and long-term trends.

6. **Youth Political Participation Strategies:**

Examine effective models for engaging youth in the political process beyond voting, such as through policy advocacy, digital activism, and community governance.

7. **Ethnicity and Political Party Dynamics:**

Further explore how ethnic affiliations influence party formation, internal democracy, and candidate selection in Nigeria.

8. **Gender and Voter Apathy:**

Assess the specific factors affecting women's participation in elections, including sociocultural norms, violence, and access to political information.

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## APPENDIX

### QUESTIONNAIRE

Department of Political Science,  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Benin,  
Benin City.

Dear Sir/Madam, I am Odudu Boniface ETIM a student of the above department, conducting a study on “Voter Apathy And Ethnic Politics in Edo State: A Study of the 2023 Presidential Election.” I therefore solicit your sincere responses. All your responses will be treated confidentially and used solely for academic purposes.

Please answer the following questions honestly and to the best of your knowledge. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and all information will be kept confidential.

Yours faithfully,

---

**Odudu Boniface Etim**

(Researcher)

#### **Part I: Demographic Information**

**Gender:** Male [ ] Female [ ]

**Age:**

18 – 25 years [ ]

26 – 35 years [ ]

36 – 45 years [ ]

46 years and above [ ]

**Educational Qualification:**

SSCE [ ] OND/NCE [ ] HND/B.Sc [ ] M.Sc/PhD [ ]

**Occupation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Ethnic Group:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Part II: Respondents Responses**

Please tick [√] the most appropriate option for each item.

**Key: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N-Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly**

**Disagree**

S/N	ITEMS	S	A	A	U	D	S	D
<b>SECTION A: ETHNIC LOYALTY</b>								
1	Ethnic loyalty was a major factor that influenced my voting decision.							
2	Most voters in my community voted along ethnic lines.							
3	Political campaigns in the 2023 election promoted ethnic loyalty.							
4	Ethnic loyalty mattered more than the political party of the candidates.							
5	I would have voted differently if ethnic loyalty was not considered.							
<b>SECTION B: INFLUENCE OF ETHNIC LEADERS</b>								
6	Ethnic leaders influenced my choice of candidate.							
7	Voters listened to instructions from ethnic leaders on who to vote for.							

S/N	ITEMS	S	A	U	D	S	D
8	Endorsements by ethnic leaders shaped the outcome of the election.						
9	Ethnic leaders campaigned vigorously for specific candidates.						
10	Without ethnic leaders' input, voters would have chosen differently.						
<b>SECTION C: PERCEIVED MARGINALIZATION</b>							
11	Perceived marginalization of my ethnic group influenced my vote.						
12	Fear of marginalization made people support a candidate from their ethnic group.						
13	Political parties took advantage of perceived marginalization to gain votes.						
14	Voters were motivated by a desire to end marginalization.						
15	Perceived marginalization will continue to influence voting patterns.						
<b>SECTION D: ETHNIC SENTIMENT OVER POLICY</b>							
16	Ethnic sentiment was stronger than candidates' policies.						
17	I paid more attention to ethnic identity than political manifestos.						
18	Many voters ignored party policies because of ethnic sentiment.						
19	Ethnic sentiment overshadowed candidates' qualifications.						
20	Policy considerations would have mattered more if ethnic sentiment was absent.						