

The Role of Identity Politics in the 2023 General Election in Nigeria: An Overview

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Abstract : This paper examines the influence of identity politics on the development of electoral democracy in Nigeria. The paper was anchored on a theory of African democracy adopted the qualitative methodology and deployed data from secondary sources to evaluate the 2023 presidential election, and found that ethnicity, religion, and regional sentiments played a major role in the election. The practical implications of this paper are that while Nigeria's democracy is tending towards consolidation, if the unexpected does not happen, e.g., military takeover, religious and ethnic identities can mar the country's development as competent candidates that have good policies will be voted out based on religious and ethnic sentiments. Thus, there is a need to de-emphasize religion and ethnicity in the Nigerian polity. Candidates and parties that campaign based on racial or religious narratives should be barred from contesting elective positions. The paper concluded that identity politics is inimical to Nigeria's democratization process as well as efforts aimed at uniting and integrating the country; it, therefore, recommended that to establish a sound electoral democracy and a strong united country, the menace of ethnic, religious, and regional cleavages should be addressed. To achieve this, efforts should be intensified towards providing a set of principles for nation-building which should be included in the constitution. In addition, the paper urges the media to support the formation of an inclusive government, cutting across tribes and religions in the country to reduce the negative impact of ethnicity and religion in the country.

Keywords : cleavages, democracy, ethnicity, election, identity politics, religion

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