



Article

The Intriguing Case of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

Dr. Anietie E. Ekang¹, Dr. Nelson A. Bassey²

1. Department of Political Science, Akwa Ibom State College of Education, Afaha Nsit, Nigeria
 2. Department of Political Science and Public Administration University of Uyo, Nigeria
- * Correspondence: ayubongekang@mail.com, nbassey91@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper delves into the complex landscape of the 2023 Nigerian general elections, mainly focusing on the contentious presidential election of February 25th and the aftermath. The study scrutinizes the discrepancies in the election results, examining varied opinions among electorates, citizens, and observer missions after the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) affirmation of Bola Tinubu's victory. It investigates the influence of non-monetary factors such as religion, ethnicity, and the desire for change amid a scarcity of cash due to currency changes. It also assesses the impact of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) on shaping the electoral dynamics. The elections witnessed a shift in the prevailing dynamics as non-material influences overtook monetary incentives, redefining the voting landscape. Religion, ethnicity, and the urge for change emerged as dominant determinants, contributing to a diversified 10th National Assembly and a closely contested presidential outcome. Despite INEC's validation, differing perspectives persist, prompting a deeper exploration of the electoral process. The analysis highlights the multifaceted nature of the electoral scenario, revealing a divergence in perceptions and a quest for clarity amidst the election's aftermath. It underscores the significance of non-material influences in shaping electoral outcomes, urging a reevaluation of prevailing assumptions. This study advocates for an in-depth review of electoral processes to address discrepancies and foster transparency. It calls for further research to comprehend the intricate interplay of factors influencing electoral dynamics for future democratic enhancement.

Keywords: Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), Democratic Process, Electoral Transparency, Ethnicity, Nigeria, 2023, Non-monetary Influences, Presidential Elections, Religion

Citation: Ekang, A. E. & Bassey, N. A. The Intriguing Case of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections. American Journal of Social and Humanitarian Research 2026, 7(5), 80-86

Received: 10th Feb 2026

Revised: 21st Mar 2026

Accepted: 18th Apr 2026

Published: 11th May 2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

1. Introduction

General elections and particularly presidential elections seem to be the most popular event of a democratic nation. Citizens, friends of a country and the international community usually stay glued to presidential electioneering, ballot cast, tabulation and declaration of results. In Nigeria, seven presidential elections have been organized successfully since the return to democratic rule in 1999. Each round of elections provide citizens the opportunity to review the incumbent political office holders and reward them with re-election if they are due or throw them out if their representation is found fault with.

The 2023 general elections had come and gone. Political parties and their candidates have won and lost. But the conduct of the disputed elections has left much to be desired, especially the presidential elections of 25th February, 2023. Nigeria's election umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced Mr. Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) winner having received 8,794,726 votes (36.61%) of the total valid votes cast at the polls. Interestingly, both the second placed (Mr. Atitku

Abubakar of People's Democratic Party, PDP with 6,984,520 votes) and the third placed (Mr. Peter Obi of Labour Party, LP with 6,101,533 votes) challenged the result at the Presidential Tribunal Court and at the Supreme Court. Both courts have affirmed the result announced by INEC.

Historically, Bola Tinubu's victory margin is the least in Nigeria since 1999 which demonstrates a keenly contested poll. As noted by Ndujihe [1], in 1999 Obasanjo got 18,738,154 votes (62.78%); in 2003 Obasanjo got 24,456,140 (61.94 %); in 2007 Umaru Musa Yar' Adua of the PDP won with 24,638,063 votes (69.60); in 2011 Jonathan got 22,495,187 (58.87); in 2015 Buhari of the APC won with 15,424,921 or 53.96%; in 2019 Buhari garnered 15,191,847 votes (55.60%). So, the 36.61% of votes Tinubu got at the polls falls far short from the traditional over 50% of votes received by winners of presidential polls since 1999. Bola Tinubu's victory and the court pronouncements notwithstanding, the electorates, citizens and observer missions have opinions different from INEC's on the presidential elections results. Why is that the case? Before attempting an answer, it should be stated that the elections have opened the eyes of Nigerians to a new possibility. During the presidential and national assembly elections, there was acute shortage of cash occasioned by the sudden withdrawal of old Naira notes and the introduction of new designed N 200; N 500 and N 1000 notes. Politicians did not have enough cash to buy votes as they would have loved to. Mostly, electorate did not expect cash and did not receive same save for isolated cases. So, the February 25th, 2023 elections were conducted amidst cash crunch. Electorates voted largely without the influence of money.

Religion, ethnicity and a desire to break away from the "old order" were the dominant influencers of votes, not money, resulting in a rainbow 10th National Assembly at inception and a close presidential race.

Also, the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) played a key role in shaping the elections despite the contestations that followed announcement of especially the presidential results. It surprised many electorates and observers that a largely unpopular candidate and political party won the polls.

2. Materials and Method

Objectives of the Study

Objectives of this paper is to x-ray the contentious presidential elections of February 25th, 2023; investigates the influence of non-monetary factors such as religion, ethnicity and the impact of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) on shaping the electoral dynamics.

INEC and the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)

As noted by INEC's Manual for Election Officials 2023, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) "is a system that allows for voter authentication using fingerprint and facial recognition technology. The BVAS comprises software and hardware components. It can also be used to scan and electronically transmit PU/RA/LGA/State election results to the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal [2]. Its objective is to allow the election commission to ascertain that only qualified citizens participate in elections in Nigeria.

3. Result and Discussion

Functions of the BVAS

- a. BVAS is used during accreditation, to verify a voter's PVC by entering the last six digits of the VIN, or Scanning the Barcode on the PVC or using the last name of the voter or entering the last name of the voter, or scanning the QR code on the voter register.
- b. Authenticates the bearer of the Card as the legitimate owner of the PVC by either fingerprint or facial matching.
- c. Scan and upload Polling Unit (PU) Result sheet which will be visible on the IReV portal.

d. It stores number of accredited voters (INEC, 2023).

Elections results have been controversial in Nigeria. Candidates often reject elections results and head straight to the court. INEC seems to have found out how best to solve the problem of elections irregularities. According to INEC [3]:

“One of the problems noticed in the electoral process is the irregularities that take place between the Polling Units (PUs) after the announcement of results and the point of result collation. Sometimes results are hijacked, exchanged, or even destroyed at the PU, or on the way to the Collation Centers. It becomes necessary to apply technology to transmit the data from the Polling Units such that the results are collated up to the point of result declaration. The real-time publishing of polling unit-level results on IReV Portal and transmission of results using the BVAS demonstrates INEC’s commitment to transparency in results management. This commitment is backed by Sections 47(2), 60(1, 2 & 5), 64(4a & 4b) and 64(5) of the Electoral Act 2022, which confers INEC with the power to transmit election results electronically. The system minimizes human errors and delays in results collation and improves the accuracy, transparency, and credibility of the results collation process”.

How did INEC perform with regards to the uploading of polling units results during the presidential elections? Alike [4] writing on the theme “INEC’s Dramatic U-turn on Electronic Transmission of Election Results”, reports that INEC failed to upload results from polling units in respect of presidential elections to the IRev portal it created, but uploaded seamlessly results of National Assembly elections conducted simultaneously.

Also, Inyang [5] reports that INEC National Commissioner, Festus Okoye, said, “yes, we promised that results would be uploaded in real time to our result viewing portal, but there were challenges. We explained to Nigerians that these glitches happened, we didn’t anticipate that we’re going to have these challenges. Whatever challenges we recorded, we have made very serious efforts to rectify them so that during the governorship and state assembly elections, we won’t record the same issues going forward”.

True, INEC made tremendous improvement with the conduct of the governorship and the state houses of assembly elections. Nonetheless, by angrily asking aggrieved candidates to go to court and declaring that electronic transmission of the results was not mandatory after all its promises and assurances, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu and his INEC may have unwittingly told Nigerians that it was not obligated to abide by its own words or fulfill its promises. This claim, even though it passed the test of scrutiny at the courts, have eroded whatever was left of the commission’s credibility and the confidence of Nigerians in the country’s electoral system. What is more, observer missions both local and international have raised doubt about the elections. For instance, Yiaga Africa’s report on the 2023 general elections notes:

The delay in uploading the polling unit-level results cast doubts on the credibility of the results management process resulting in broken public trust in electoral technology. Yiaga Africa notes that the delayed upload of the results on the IReV is a flagrant disregard of INEC’s Regulations and Guidelines, and it failed to meet citizens’ expectations. Once again, the 2023 Presidential and National Assembly elections were a missed opportunity. Factors like serious logistical and technological shortcomings, non-compliance with electoral guidelines, lack of transparency... undermine public confidence in INEC and the overall outcome of the elections. Yiaga Africa notes that the integrity of electoral outcomes are influenced by processes and procedures [5].

Also, the EU report collaborate Yiaga’s report noting:

Shortcomings in results process management were one of the core issues after the 25 February elections. By the time of the declaration of the presidential results, more than a quarter of the presidential result forms were still missing on the IReV portal without a clear public justification. Many of the uploaded results were unreadable or otherwise inconsistent. The collated results for specific LGAs, States, and Country were not publicly accessible long after the announcement of results including information about cancelled polling units, so contributing to the lack of transparency in the process [6].

Further, state broadcaster, Voice of Nigeria (VON) in its review of the 2023 general elections caution INEC thus:

INEC needs to improve on its planning process to avoid the challenges it encountered on its inability to transmit the presidential election results electronically and create strong barriers against vote buying and selling. By so doing, the electorates would have more confidence in the commission. The commission must avoid any act that could create doubt in the mind of voters that their votes will not count. Also, the personnel used during the elections should be only those who have been tested, trusted and persons with integrity to engender believe in the system.

How BVAS Helped the 2023 Elections

The 2023 presidential elections results is a testament to the power of technology is assisting credible polls. Take a close look at table 1.1:

Table 1.1 2015-2023 Presidential Elections Turnout

Political party	2023 Registered Voters 93,469,008(26.71%)	2019 Registered Voters 82,344,107 (34.75%)	2015 Registered Voters 68,833,476 (43.65%)
APC	8,794,726	15,191,847	15,424,921 (53.96%)
PDP	6,984,520	11,262,978	12,853,162 (44.96%)
APGA		66,851	Adopted PDP candidate
LP	6,101,533,533		

It shows a steady contrast. Whereas registered voters have increased from 63.8m to 93.4m, voters turnout has declined from 43.65% to 26.71% in three presidential elections cycles. Thanks to the power of BVAS. It suggests that the jumbo votes of the past have been checked. On this, INEC is commended and should be sustained. It equally means that if the results from polling units are uploaded in real time, collation and announcement of results will be less tensed as citizens would see where the balance is tilting.

In the National assembly, number of political parties have increased in what observers term the rainbow parliament because each political party fly a different colour.

Table 1.2 Political Parties in the National Assembly 2015-2023

Political party	2023	2019	2015
APC	221	293	272
PDP	138	159	188
YP	2	1	
NNPP	20	4	
APGA	5	4	5
SDP	4	2	1
ADC	2	1	
PRP		3	
LP	8 34		1
Accord			1

Adapted from IPU (2023)

From table 1.2., number of political parties in the national assembly have increased as well as opposition members. Besides the national assembly, different political parties have emerged in various State Assemblies. Akwa Ibom state for instance has lost the traditional PDP dominance to two Young Progressives party members. In Bayelsa state, PDP won 17 Seats, APC 4 seats and APGA 2 seats. For the Abia assembly, PDP won 11 seats, LP 10

seats, YPP 2 seats and APC 1 seat. Nasarawa state assembly has 11 APC seats, 8 PDP seats, 2 SDP seats and 2 NNPP seats. In the Plateau assembly PDP won 14 seats, APC 7 seats and YPP 1 seat.

One can appreciate the fact that many houses of assembly have mixed political parties in 2023 as opposed to the previous elections season. This is attributed partly to the BVAS that limited votes to accredited voters in most instances. Prior to the elections, INEC, civil society organizations and other stakeholders vigorously sensitized the electorate on the need to comply fully with the guidelines for the 2023 general elections. Electorate knew and believed that votes will count and they counted in most instances save for the reservations expressed strongly about INEC's inability or refusal to upload presidential elections result into the IRev portal in real-time.

Nigeria's Electorates in Context

Electorates are otherwise called voters. Voting has a pattern. Voting pattern means partisan preferences or choices of selected voter groups or individuals [7]. These voters can be segmented into: The uninformed, fickle, sensitive to irrelevant events, stubborn, tribal and hyper-partisan [8]. In view of the perceived attitude of electorates, some scholars argue that democracy doesn't function as it should, and some have gone so far as to argue that democracy should be shelved. Nonetheless, some studies of elections and policy outcomes equally note that electoral selection and incentives work reasonably well. One will not make any direct assumptions about voter preferences, beliefs, or cognition level. Instead, it is best to note the distinctions by Ashworth and Fowler [9] specifying behavioral types of voters as follows:

- a. Pure retrospective voters vote for the incumbent if the governance outcome is good, and vote for the challenger if the governance outcome is bad.
- b. Rigid incumbent partisans vote for the incumbent no matter what.
- c. Rigid challenger partisans vote for the challenger no matter what.
- d. Turnout-sensitive incumbent partisans vote for the incumbent if the governance outcome is good, and abstain if the governance outcome is bad.
- e. Turnout-sensitive challenger partisans abstain if the governance outcome is good, and vote for the challenger if the governance outcome is bad.

Some theoretical and empirical determinants of participation in elections cut across demographic factors such as race, age, sex and marital status [10]. Socio-economic factors such as income, education and occupational status equally play a role [11]. Political efficacy, such as civic engagement and political trust do influence political participation [12].

In Nigeria, electorates tend to be driven by religion, money and ethnicity.

Religion: To be sure, religion generates so much passion, polarize the nation and pitch Christians against Muslims. In this wise, Yemisi [13] opines that religion has lost its spiritual authority in the society and becomes a tool in the hands of unscrupulous individuals to further their interests. Religion has assumed the role of creating an identity for Nigerian politics which facilitates conflict to militate against the corporate existence and stability of the state. Little wonder much noise was made about the same faith ticket of President Bola Tinubu and Vice President Kashim Shettima. Some Nigerians think that if President Tinubu ran with a Christian vice presidential candidate, he may not have been elected. The question should be asked, does religion determine the success of political leaderships? Over the years, Nigeria has had both Christian and Muslim leaders. Olusegun Obasanjo and Goodluck Jonathan were Christians. Musa Yar a'dua and Muhamadu Buhari were Muslims. All these leaderships had their successes and failures. In plane language, none lifted Nigeria out of the woods. Again, in the 2023 general elections, of the three front runners, two (Atiku Abubakar and Bola Tinubu) are Muslims while Peter Obi is a Christian. All got more votes from their religious and ethnic base.

Money: Money did not play a key role in the 2023 presidential elections as it may have done in the past. For one thing, the Buhari Administration's cashless and redesign of the Naira policies made cash largely unavailable to politicians to throw around.

Ethnicity: The Peter Obi votes spread surprised many. Okoye [14] writing in Business Day notes that Obi's rhetoric on the economy, his proposed policies on how to administer

Nigeria if he wins the presidential election, and his possession of leadership qualities and probity won him to the sides of the youthful Nigerians. So, millions of young people in Nigeria, who come from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds perceive Mr. Peter Obi as the political Messiah and revolutionary, who will right the wrongs in our body politic, entrench national unity in our country, and set it on the path of national development. As former Governor of Anambra state where he demonstrated financial discipline and accountability, he was expected to bring that record to national politics. His popularity shook the foundation of patronage elections and announced the arrival of the youth in national political equation moving forward.

Despite the campaigns and popularity of the frontline candidates, the turnout was very poor – only 26.71% registered voters voted during the presidential elections. One wonders why turnout is declining each elections season. Nwankwo and Okafor [15] say that lack of trust in the government and electoral institutions sway rational individual with high socio-economic status to abstain from elections. On their part, Ngara and Udefuna [16] found out that the perception that votes do not count scored highest (35.7%) among factors responsible for low turnout at elections in Nigeria. Moreso, Agu et al [17] argued that the failure of INEC to function as an independent, competent, autonomous, and impartial arbiter of the electoral process is perhaps the most important determinant of poor turnout in elections. Whereas elections were peaceful in many polling units across Nigeria, it was reported that several thugs were hired to disrupt elections in many polling stations especially in Lagos and Rivers [18][19]. These two states were strategic for the APC, yet Labour party managed to win Lagos the home state of the Bola Tinubu. Many Nigerians seem to be convinced that the results did not reflect the true expression of the electorates. No one should be counseled for holding this opinion, after all INEC kept the results viewing portal of the presidential elections a secret.

Findings of the Study

It was found out in this study that:

- a. Stakeholders of the 2023 general elections had different views about the outcome of especially the presidential polls.
- b. Introduction of BVAS helped accreditation and voting process at the elections.
- c. Track record of a candidate not ethnicity and money is beginning to gain traction amongst electorates.

4. Conclusion

The 2023 general elections once again showed that Nigeria electorates are passionate about the power of votes to change the contour of patronage politics. It equally announced the ability to calvinize support outside traditional influencers (religion, money and ethnicity) in favour of track record. Interestingly, INEC missed the chance to redeem its battered image by conducting controversial elections. INEC's refusal or inability to transmit presidential elections results in real time as it did in Anambra, Edo and Osun off season governorship and national assembly elections conducted simultaneously with the presidential polls, brought back painful memories of rigged elections of the past. Electorates hold INEC accountable for the missed opportunity to reset Nigeria and its poor communication during the 2023 presidential elections. What can INEC do moving forward and especially as Nigeria approaches the 2027 general elections?

- a. INEC has the responsibility to audit itself to identify who and what caused the so-called technical glitches of the 2023 general elections and appropriately correct it.
- b. Nigerians should remain vigilant and continue to demand and insist on a just electoral process.
- c. Electorates have demonstrated that non-materials like track record and desire for genuine change can shape voting pattern, they should consolidate and even deepen that resolve as Nigeria matches toward the 2027 general elections.

REFERENCES

- [1] S. U. Agu, V. O. S. Okeke, and O. N. Idike, "Voters apathy and revival of genuine political participation in Nigeria," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 439–448, 2013.
- [2] S. Ashworth and A. Fowler, "Electorates vs voters," 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://home.uchicago.edu/~sashwort/electorates.pdf>. [Accessed: May 30, 2023].
- [3] Manual for Election Officials. Abuja, Nigeria: Electoral Institute of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), 2023.
- [4] E. Alike, "INEC's dramatic U-turn on electronic transmission of election results," *ThisDay Newspaper*, Apr. 16, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/04/16/inecs-dramatic-u-turn-on-electronic-transmission-of-election-results>.
- [5] M. Hooghe and R. Dassonneville, "Voters and candidates of the future: The intention of electoral participation among adolescents in 22 European countries," *Young*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 1–28, 2013.
- [6] D. A. Falade, "Political participation in Nigerian democracy: A study of selected local government areas in Ondo State, Nigeria," *Global Journal of Human-Social Science Research*, vol. 14, no. 8, pp. 16–23, 2015.
- [7] I. Inyang, "2023 presidential election: Why results were not uploaded in real-time – INEC," 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://dailypost.ng/2023/03/13/2023-presidential-election-why-results>.
- [8] O. Mbah, "PDP wins 17 seats, APC 4, APGA 2 in Bayelsa," *Leadership Newspaper*, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://leadership.ng/pdp-wins-17-seats-apc-4-apga-2-in-bayelsa>.
- [9] S. Merrill and B. Grofman, *A Unified Theory of Voting: Directional and Proximity Spatial Models*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999.
- [10] C. F. Nwankwo and U. P. Okafor, "Voting in Nigeria: Determinants of turnout in the 2015 presidential election," *De Gruyter*, vol. 1, pp. 1–12, 2018.
- [11] C. O. Ngara and P. N. Udefuna, "Democracy without the people: Interrogating low voter turnout in Nigeria's 2019 general elections," *NILDS Journal of Democratic Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 44–68, 2020.
- [12] R. Ngwang, "Youth political participation in Africa: Lessons from the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections," *Nkafu Policy Institute*, pp. 1–11, 2023.
- [13] IPU, "National Assembly elections 2015–2023," 2023. [Online]. Available: http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2363_E.html. [Accessed: May 19, 2023].
- [14] I. O. Yemisi, "Religion and identity politics in Nigeria," *New Trends in Social and Liberal Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 1–17, 2020.
- [15] C. U. Okoye, "Peter Obi and the 2023 presidential election," *Business Day*, 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/peter-obi-and-the-2023-presidential-election>.
- [16] Voice of Nigeria, "Overview of the 2023 general election in Nigeria," 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://von.gov.ng/overview-of-the-2023-general-election-in-nigera>.
- [17] H. L. Walker, "Extending the effects of the carceral state: Proximal contact, political participation, and race," *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 4, pp. 809–822, 2014.
- [18] M. Isah, "YIAGA Africa report on 2023 presidential elections," 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://prnigeria.com/2023/03/01/yiaga-africa-repor>. [Accessed: Jul. 11, 2023].
- [19] EUEOM, *Nigeria 2023 General Elections Final Report*, 2023.