

# **Ethnoreligious Politicking In Nigeria: Analysis And Advocacy Towards Ideological Reforms.**

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## **Abstract.**

*This paper delves into the significance of ethnoreligious politicking within the Nigerian political landscape. It explores how political actors shun merit, competence, and issue-based politics, in favor of tribal sentiments and spiritualized political discourse. With a population north of 200 million and some of the most brilliant people in the world native to Nigeria, observers wonder how these sentiments reign supreme in Nigeria.*

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## **I. Introduction.**

Patir et al. (2021) describe tribal politics as "Employing us against them" terminology and portraying oneself as the group's defender against outsiders. The key feature of tribal politics is the existence of individuals whose political behavior is primarily driven by loyalty to their group. They vote for the tribe regardless of economic policy. Some of these voters might be willing to "swallow" economic policies or candidates they otherwise dislike to support their group against the out-group. Others might adjust their attitudes and policy preferences to match those of their tribe's candidate. Similarly, religion has enjoyed equal dominance in Nigeria's political landscape, shaping party formation, leadership structures, National governance, and influencing political calculations. These are sentiments that informed Adebani (2022) opinion that a political balance honored in the Fourth Republic, a Christian-Muslim (or the reverse) ticket is the only "proper" and "just" platform for winning elections by any major party. In theory, this seemingly balanced approach is threatened by religious supremacists and political 'strategists'. Lending credence to Adebani's opinion, it is noteworthy that Nigeria's Fourth Republic has proven that Northern Muslims are indispensable and essential in clinching the key to Aso Rock.

## **Manifestation of Ethnoreligious Politicking in Nigeria**

Post-independence, ethnicity and religious sentiments characterized the political scene, shaping party formation and leadership structures respectively. The Action Group, National Council of Nigerian Citizens and Northern People's Congress all lacked diversity in the foundation, with a firm political belief rooted in voters' tribal and religious affiliation to win elections. The country recorded little to zero political activity in the second and third Republics due to Military interregnum. However, elections in the Fourth Republic witnessed subtle ethnoreligious rhetorics as a campaign tool until 2011. (Adeyanju, n.d.) found that the 2011 general elections in Nigeria gave a clearer view. The outcome of the presidential election shows a pattern of vote that was deeply ethnic and religion-oriented. Both candidates had more than 95% of the votes cast in their regions. This trend is one of the early warning signs of a political crisis and must be addressed in time. Despite this ugly trend, politicians exploited the ethnoreligious tendencies of Nigerians for political gains in subsequent elections and the 2023 Elections was no exception. To maintain a seemingly winning formula, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a Southern Muslim candidate of the ruling party blatantly violated the political balance honored since 1999 by opting for a Northern Muslim running mate instead of a Northern Christian as the agreement dictates. While Nigerians were divisive on the same faith ticket, Labour Party's Presidential candidate, Mr. Peter Obi was allegedly caught on tape affirming to a popular religious leader that this election indeed is a "religious war". In another religious gathering, Mr. Obi was recorded admonishing the group to "take back your country." Although, there was evidence of issue-based campaigns, economic and national security plans but these efforts proved abortive as they seemed alien to Nigerians. In response, political actors and their loyalists rather resorted to political incivility, defamation, and cyberbullying the few opposition members who refused to be drawn into tribal politics. Caught at the center of politics are the religious leaders who wield a strong influence on voter behavior and manipulation through biblical quotes. Spiritualized Politics, Ayantayo (2009) says it "connotes the act of taking into the spiritual or supernatural realm, thereby creating an impression that success in an election is independent of wisdom, foresightedness, logical plan, widespread political tour, and people-oriented political manifestoes but by divine intervention, manipulation, and inducement." To cap it off, fundamental rights are

religiously forbidden as long the incumbent and his loyalists share party, ethnic, and religious affiliation. Buhari's 8-year term attests to this.

## **II. Advocacy and Recommendation**

Having established that ethno-religious influence remains rife in the Nigerian political sphere, it is imperative to propose reforms toward political development. It behooves the legislature to criminalize political discourse with ethnic and religious undertones. Party members and their surrogates should desist from stirring the ethnic and religious pots for political advantages. Independent National Electoral Body (INEC), at all levels, should encourage candidates to engage in issue-based campaigns. Political vices arising from ethnoreligious politicking should be prohibited and offenders prosecuted accordingly. Ideological reforms rooted in formal education to purge Nigerians of tribal and religious tendencies. A concerted effort by NGOs and Govt agencies to sensitize and educate voters, opinion leaders, and relevant political actors regarding the dangers of ethnoreligious sentiments in civic Engagement. People-centered manifestoes and national interest communication must be at the center of candidates' political and media tours. Religious institutions should remain the cement of social cohesion and a support system in grievous times and not a political force Abolishing the State and Local Govt of origin questions on all official documents

## **III. Conclusion**

This paper found that ethnoreligious politicking is an existential threat to national unity since independence. It exists only for pure political gains and continuous deprivation of democratic dividends

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