Presidential Polling in Nigeria in 2023:

A SURVIVAL GUIDE

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What is opinion polling?

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, opinion polling, (often simply referred to as 'polling') is:

"...an occasion when people are asked questions to discover what they think about a subject..."

The idea of a public survey to predict election results and measure opinion is old, but the methods used have evolved over time. Before democracy became widespread, there was no widespread scientific way for rulers to gauge public opinion. However, after the French and American revolutions, when early forms of democracy began to appear, leaders, were more interested in knowing what citizens were thinking driven by the desire for election success[1].

The first instance of what we now call an opinion poll is generally considered to have been held in July 1824. The Harrisburg Pennsylvanian, a local newspaper conducted a survey in Delaware to see who voters were more likely to pick between USA presidential candidates Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams.

In the almost 200 years since then, opinion polling and elections have become commonplace in developed democracies. In the beginning, it was unscientific, until 1932 when the Gallup method was invented by George Gallup. The method involves sampling a randomly selected, statistically average group of people. Gallup used his method to correctly predict Franklin Roosevelt's victory over Alf Landon; today, this method is the father of all modern scientific opinion polling[1].

The traditional barrier to polling in Nigeria has been the relatively high as polls needed to be carried out in person. However, with GSM penetration at 195.4 million subscribers - several players now operate in the Nigerian polling space with more established firms becoming members of the Nigerian Market Research Association (NiMRA).

[1] https://www.moadoph.gov.au/blog/a-brief-history-of-opinion-polls/

Presidential polling in Nigeria: The Basics

In theory, the firm carrying out a survey does not need experience of the locality being surveyed, but in practice – the **advantage gained from having local knowledge can be priceless** (anecdotal and otherwise). Our research team will usually give more weight to a local firm (with a reputation) than an internationally conducted survey for this reason. Specifically, any approach that does not take into consideration the history of the presidential political scene is likely to be flawed.

Historically Nigerians vote for the President along 3 major voting blocs which we have designated: The Rockies, The Northern Alliance and The Bible Belt:
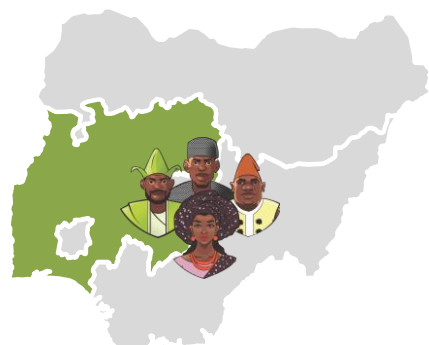
The Rockies
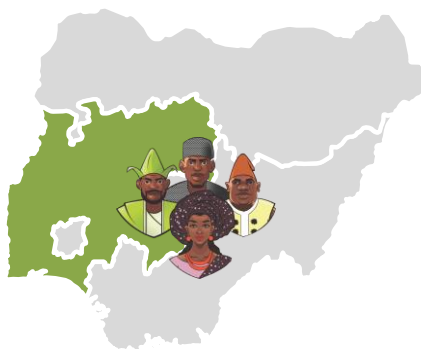
The Northern Alliance

The Bible Belt

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The Rockies

This region comprises of Kaduna, Niger, Kogi, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Kwara, Ekiti are identified as swing states. *They have been won by up to 4 different parties* since 1999 [PDP, AD, APC, ACN, etc.,] the most in Nigeria.
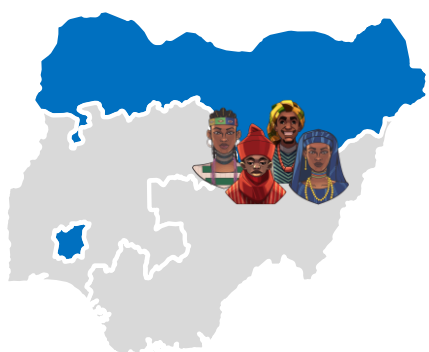
6.6 MILLION VOTES | **27% TURNOUT** | **24m REGISTERED VOTERS**

The Northern Alliance

This region comprises Gombe, Sokoto, Jigawa, Zamfara, Kano, Kebbi, Bauchi, Katsina, Yobe, Borno and Osun states
It is considered the home of Islam in Nigeria with a majority Hausa/Fulani population.
They traditionally vote against PDP no matter the candidate. It includes the entire northern border states of Nigeria

10.7 MILLION VOTES | **41% TURNOUT** | **25m REGISTERED VOTERS**

The Bible Belt

This region comprises FCT, Edo, Delta, Rivers, Cross-river, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Enugu, Imo, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Plateau, and Taraba states
It is home to more Christians than any other part of the country. Mainly south-south and south-eastern geopolitical zone with some north-central representation.
It is considered the loyalist' bloc; 14 states here have NEVER been won by any other party except PDP

9.6 MILLION VOTES | **28% TURNOUT** | **34.5m REGISTERED VOTERS**

With the historical context in place, let us focus on three questions that need to be considered for a reliable political opinion poll in Nigeria:

- *How many people should be contacted?*

- *Exactly who should be contacted?*

- *What channel should I use to contact them?*

How many people should be contacted?

In polling, the '***population'*** refers to the entire group you are trying to get the opinion of. Let us pretend we are surveying students in a secondary school (let's call it School A). **School A** has 100 boys, 50 girls and 15 teachers – since we are only contacting students our *population* is 150 (girls + boys).

Loosely, polling says we only need to contact a percentage of the *population* to predict the opinion of the entire population. However, since our *population* has more boys than girls, we need to contact more boys than girls, let's say we contact 10 boys and 5 girls. In polling, we say these 15 individuals make up the '***sample'***.

Nigeria has approximately 200 million people, so it's easy to think this is the

'*population'* and the *sample* should be based on this. However, for any national election, the *population* is only 96.2m as these are the only people registered to vote (as of the last publication by INEC).

It's a common mistake made by political pollsters but easily corrected by sourcing accurate registered voter figures from INEC.

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Exactly who should be contacted?

Still using our **School A** analogy, let's say that 70 of the 100 boys and 40 of the girls are in Senior Secondary School (SSS) with the rest in Junior Secondary School (JSS). Since most of the '*population'* is in SSS, it is logical that our '*sample'* (of 10 boys and 5 girls) needs to get more contacts from SSS students than JSS. In polling, we call (loosely) this '***stratification***'.

What is the implication for Nigeria's approximately 96.2m voters? It means we must talk to more people from higher voting population areas than from low population areas. In terms of blocks – this means a serious presidential poll will speak to more people in the Northern Alliance (10.7m votes) rather than the Rockies (6.6m votes), or, to use ethnicity, you will speak to more Hausa people than Yorubas – generally, (in practice, a reliable survey will treat each state's registered voters as an individual '*population*').

What channel should be used to contact them?

The channel of communication is a place where local knowledge becomes really important. A good example of this is internet-based surveys. These are polls where respondents need to access the internet (e.g., via a smartphone) to respond to the opinion poll. The economic and infrastructural challenges across Nigeria create significant barriers to internet access. Increased internet access tends to occur in cities and relatively highly congested areas among the relatively more affluent of society. In highly impoverished areas, even an SMS-based poll is unlikely to be successful in retrieving the required number of responses.

Using our analogy, if School A is situated in a relatively impoverished area, it makes sense to do the survey in person. Otherwise, the results may be skewed in favour of those few students who are able to access the internet.

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Deconstructing the Premise Poll [as seen on CNN & Bloomberg]

VIISAUS is a non-partisan company run by people who deeply believe in a better Nigeria and are excited about a 2023 election that gives us a candidate capable of the kind of leadership Nigeria deserves.

On 28th September 2022 CNN and Bloomberg reported on a presidential poll conducted by Premise https://www.premise.com/ which reported among other things that:

- 72% of decided voters name Peter Obi as their preferred choice for president, followed by Bola Tinubu (16%) and Atiku Abubakar (9%). Obi also leads among undecided voters (45%).
- That the Peter Obi candidacy commands considerable nationwide support across all ages and genders
- Asks the question (provocatively?) *"what could happen in Nigeria if the "people's choice" doesn't enter office in Abuja?"*

The results are exciting, and the international interest in our politics is even more so, however, we believe the very best polling standards should be adhered to when sharing information that will shape Nigerian politics.

VIISAUS took a closer look at the methodology used to come up with the results along the lines of the three questions we addressed in the previous sections:

How many people did the Premise poll contact?

The Premise poll contacted 3,967 people based on a population that was projected from the 2006 census. The fact that it was based on the entire population as opposed to the INEC registered voters is not desirable, this is because an area with a high population is not necessarily an area with high voting numbers.

Lagos is a good example – with a projected population of over 21 million people, a total of 7.15 million registered voters but only 1.02m voters in 2019 - the Premise poll using population alone to guide how many people to speak to in Lagos, means they almost certainly contacted too many people, many of whom will not vote as there is also no evidence that the respondents were validated against INEC records to prove they are registered or have a PVC.

How reliable is a poll that speaks to people who may not even have a PVC? Or are not registered to vote?

Curiously – we also could not find anywhere the poll provided confidence interval or error margin figures.

Exactly who did the Premise Poll Contact?

Historically, Nigeria tends to vote heavily along ethnic lines, a quick look at the ethnic mix of the Nigeria, the three major tribes make up the population roughly as:

- **Yoruba – 21%**
- **Hausa - 29%**
- **Ibo – 18%**

We expect an unbiased poll to take this into consideration and contact voters in roughly similar proportions. However, the Premise poll ethnic mix looks more like this:

- **Ibo – 27%**
- **Yoruba – 29%**
- **Hausa – 12%**

How accurate is a poll that makes the Hausa element of voters LESS THAN HALF of the Ibo element? Less than half of the Yoruba element?

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What channel did the Premise poll use to contact them?

Premise mentions that the people they contacted for the Poll were *Nigerian Contributors*; our research shows that these are Nigerians with a pre-existing relationship with Premise, set up to give an opinion when contacted. Examining the sign-up process of a Contributor reveals that you are required to have access to the internet to participate. This immediately excludes the 58% of the population who are said to currently lack access to the internet in Nigeria...

How accurate is a national poll if it ignores over half the country?

Perhaps if the half Premise contacted are the most active voters – maybe you could make an argument. However - the part that votes the most (the Northern Alliance) also has the LOWEST access to the internet. Note that even those who do have access are *unlikely to pay for the data required* to participate in an online poll, commercially – it just doesn't make sense, yet this is a fact that a local pollster would know automatically.

How reliable is a poll that speaks to only half of the country - the half that hardly even vote?

Presumably, Premise Contributors use a smartphone app to communicate (very similar to the YouGov model in the UK[3]). The pre-existing relationship means they have heard about Premise and signed up for their service.

How many Nigerians who are going to vote have heard of Premise and signed up for their service?

Readers should note that we do not rule out the possibility of the outcome being correct, however, as globally recognized brands take more of an interest in our national politics, we all need to hold each other to the highest standards to ensure the Nigerian people are appropriately guided.

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About **VIISAUS**

We are passionate about revolutionizing Nigeria. We leverage technology, data, and insights to explain the intricate balance of growth required to advance Nigeria and make it a better place to live. Our research consulting services go beyond the traditional market to deliver strategic advice, grounded on powerful insights that our clients can act on. We connect data to unlock richer insights and use a strategic framework to answer your most critical questions, adding real value to your organization or project no matter the industry/sector.

VIISAUSIANS believe Nigeria can be re-engineered to become more relevant within global contexts and concentrate our skills and efforts in different teams to achieve that dream.

Established in 2016, we are a consulting partnership with practice desks within the **Research, Technology, Political Consulting,** and lobbying functional areas. Our culture and values speak to placing our vision as a priority. We value hard work, teamwork, and being passionate about what we do while having fun in the process!

We are a company of *"ordinary people"* with *"extraordinary minds"* committed to sustainable development.
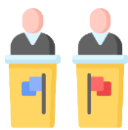
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