Presidential elections in Nigeria: A pattern to the voting

2022 REPORT

Emergence of voting blocs: Northern Alliance, Bible Belt and Rockies

• LOLADE AKINMURELE, OLAMIDE OLOGUNAGBE, DAMILOLA ODIFAH

The voting patterns in Nigeria's presidential elections since 1999 have culminated in the creation of three voting blocs, according to a first-of-its-kind analysis of INEC data by consulting firm, Viisaus.

Northern Alliance

It wasn't until the 2003 election that the Northern Alliance was born. The Northern Alliance comprises 11 states mainly situated in northern Nigeria with the exception of one south western state. The bloc has the country's most active voters measured by voter turnout. Nearly 5 in 10 people in these states vote, with an average voter turnout of 41 percent. That's higher than the 28 percent turnout for the Bible Belt and 27 percent for the Rockies.

The Northern Alliance includes states such as Gombe, Sokoto, Jigawa, Zamfara, Kano, Kebbi, Bauchi, Katsina, Yobe, Borno and Osun. Together they accounted for 25.4 million voters in the 2019 election.

"This group of people are not that homogeneous. However, when it comes to politics, they are uniquely united. This unity that was formed here in 2003 has never broken since then," Jiro Ejobe, managing partner at Viisaus, said in an interview with BusinessDay.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP), Nigeria's most dominant political party since 1999, has not won any of these states in 19 years. The last time being in 2003 when the party won in only Osun state but would still lose in the remaining 10 states that form the Northern Alliance.

"Osun voted for the PDP in 2003, and that's the only time they've ever voted for the PDP. Just once. So this is the reason why we've grouped them with the Northern Alliance. Not so much that they are aligned with the North, but what keeps the Northern Alliance together is their unity versus the PDP and Osun has that in common with them since 2011," Ejobe said.

NORTHERN ALLIANCE

Mainly Northern, the only exception being Osun State. They typically NEVER vote PDP for president.

THE ROCKIES

Mainly South-Western & western North-Central states. The most UNPREDICTABLE voters, switch party more than any other bloc.

THE BIBLE BELT

Mainly South-East, South-South & eastern Northern-Central. They typically ALWAYS vote PDP for president.

Bible Belt

The Bible Belt is a bloc of 17 states drawn from the South East, South South and eastern North-Central.

They have the highest number of voters. At the 2019 election for instance, they had 34.5 million registered voters. Low voter turnout however mutes the potency of this powerful bloc. In 2019, voter turnout came to only 28 percent, the second lowest among the voting blocs.

They have always voted for a PDP candidate as president. The Bible Belt states have never been lost by PDP in 24 years.

The states include FCT, Edo, Delta, Rivers, Cross-river, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Enugu, Imo, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Plateau and Taraba.

Adamawa, Benue and Nasarawa are also in this bloc even though they voted against PDP once in five elections.

Rockies

The Rockies, Nigeria's most unpredictable voters, emerged in 2015 when APC was born. The bloc comprises nine states whose voting patterns have been discovered to be uneven and uncertain.

They include Kaduna, Niger, Kogi, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Kwara and Ekiti and are considered swing states. They have the largest mix of Christian and Muslim communities and have been won by up to 4 political parties since 1999, the most in Nigeria.

They are viewed as the tie breakers and historical data suggest that whoever they align with goes on to win the election.

They however have the lowest voter turnout of the three blocs with 27 percent of a total of 24 million registered voters coming out to vote at the last election.

How each bloc has voted since 1999

- LOLADE AKINMURELE, OLAMIDE OLOGUNAGBE, DAMILOLA ODIFAH

With hindsight, the Bible Belt states' loyalty to PDP first emerged in the 1999 presidential elections, with all 17 states that form the bloc voting for the PDP's Olusegun Obasanjo.

The Northern Alliance was also largely won by the PDP with the exception of Sokoto, Zamfara, Yobe and Osun states which were won by Olu Falae, who was running on a joint Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All People's Party (APP) ticket.

The Rockies states were split between both parties but it was AD/APP that won in terms of total votes by a margin of 1 million.

Former president Obasanjo would eventually win the election with 18.7 million votes as against the 11.1 million votes garnered by Falae.

Ejobe told BusinessDay that the 1999 election data analysis is interesting because even though it looked like it was a PDP white-wash that year, it was purely a representation of certain trends that have already started to occur, some of which may never change.

The voting patterns were slightly altered in 2003. The Northern Alliance at this time had begun to take shape and voted for All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) whose candidate was President Muhammadu Buhari. In the previous election, the Northern Alliance had largely voted for the PDP and the 2003 election would mark the start of the PDP's failure to win the bloc over.

The Bible Belt and Rockies went to the PDP, helping Obasanjo to a second term with 24.4 million votes, outperforming Buhari who came second with 12.7 million votes.

The 2007 election data was not broken down into state voting patterns and as such was excluded in the report presentation by Viisaus.

The 2011 election painted a picture of the established and growing Northern Alliance bloc. Again, the Northern Alliance, with the exception of Osun state, would vote for President Buhari who was representing the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) this time. It would however be the PDP's Goodluck Jonathan, who captured the Bible Belt (which by now were established loyalists of the PDP) and the Rockies, that would emerge

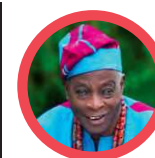## 1999 Presidential Election Result (Million)
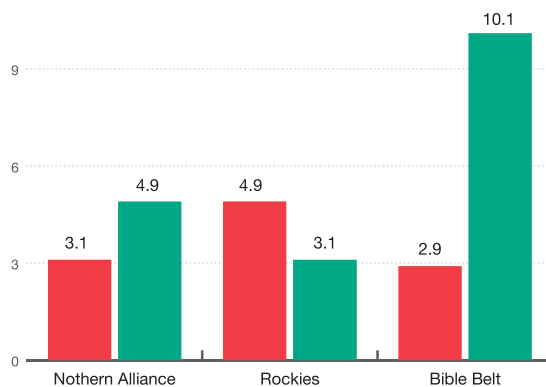
Winner
18,738,154 votes
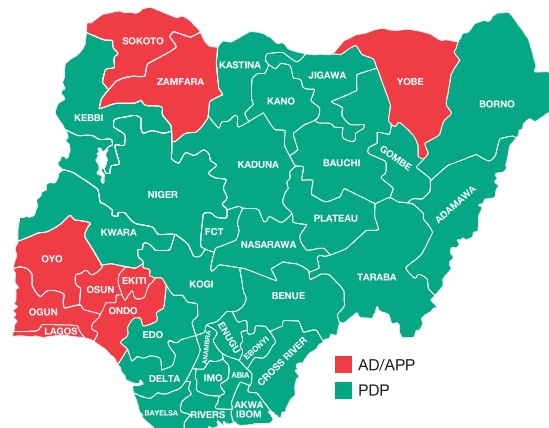Olusegun Obasanjo

2nd
11,110,287 votes
Olu Falae

Nothern Alliance states: Gombe, Sokoto, Jigawa, Zamfara, Kano, Kebbi, Bauchi, Kastina, Yobe, Borno, and Osun
Rockies states: Kaduna, Kogi, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Kwara, Ekiti and Niger
Bible Belt states: FCT, Edo, Delta, Rivers, Cross-River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Enugu, Imo, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Plateau, Taraba, Adamawa, Benue, Nassarawa
Sources: INEC and VIISAUS. Created by Aderemi Ayeni

2003 Presidential Election Result (Million)

Legend: ANPP (red), PDP (green)

	Nothern Alliance	Rockies	Bible Belt
ANPP	8	1.9	2.3
PDP	3.6	6.9	13.2

Nothern Alliance states: Gombe, Sokoto, Jigawa, Zamfara, Kano, Kebbi, Bauchi, Kastina, Yobe, Borno, and Osun
Rockies states: Kaduna, Kogi, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Kwara, Ekiti and Niger
Bible Belt states: FCT, Edo, Delta, Rivers, Cross-River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Enugu, Imo, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Plateau, Taraba, Adamawa, Benue, Nassarawa
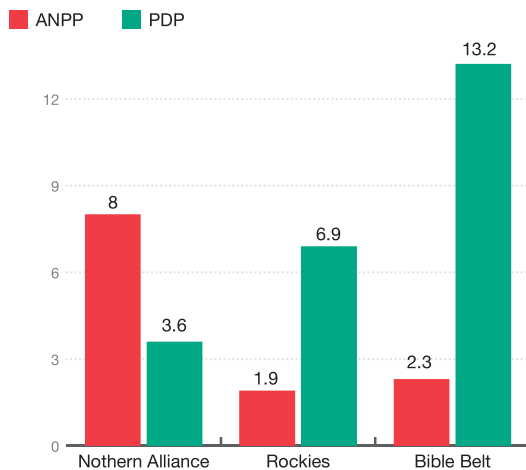Sources: INEC and VIISAUS. Created by Aderemi Ayeni

Winner
24,456,140 votes
Olusegun Obasanjo

2nd
12,710,022 votes
Muhammadu Buhari

winner with an estimated 22.5 million votes, almost double of Buhari's 12.2 million votes.

The 2015 election saw a repeat of the trend where the Northern Alliance voted for Buhari. The loyalty of the Bible Belt states to the PDP waxed stronger with victory for the PDP's Jonathan yet again. The Rockies can be said to have been formed here as the West broke free from the Bible Belt and voted for a different party.

This time, the Rockies voted in unison with the Northern Alliance, and made history in the process. For the first time, an incumbent president was defeated with President Buhari emerging winner at the fourth time of asking.

The Rockies proved to be the game changers for Buhari who had always won the Northern Alliance since he first contested in 2003.

The 2019 election was more of the same with the 2015 election save for few but instrumental changes, one of which was the drastic drop in voter turnout in the Bible belt states.

Each state that forms the Northern Alliance voted against the PDP for the fifth election running but favoured the APC's President Muhammadu Buhari. That's in keeping with the trend since 1999 which shows that the Northern Alliance has always voted against the PDP and another trend which shows the bloc has voted for Buhari since 2003.

The Bible Belt voted for Atiku Abubakar's People's Democratic Party (PDP), similar to 2015 when they also voted for the PDP's Goodluck Jonathan who

2011 Presidential Election Result (Million)
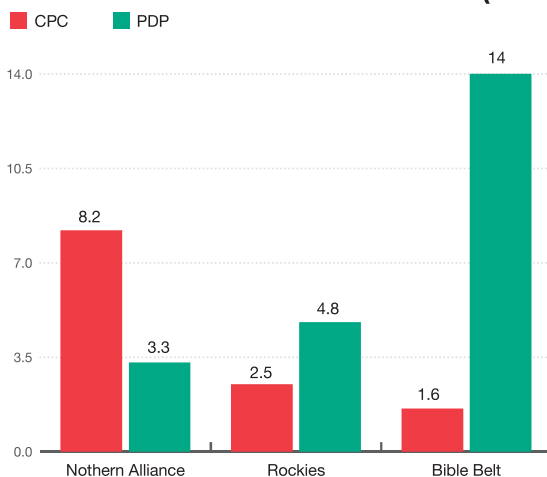
Legend: CPC (red), PDP (green)

	Nothern Alliance	Rockies	Bible Belt
CPC	8.2	2.5	1.6
PDP	3.3	4.8	14

Nothern Alliance states: Gombe, Sokoto, Jigawa, Zamfara, Kano, Kebbi, Bauchi, Kastina, Yobe, Borno, and Osun
Rockies states: Kaduna, Kogi, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Kwara, Ekiti and Niger
Bible Belt states: FCT, Edo, Delta, Rivers, Cross-River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Enugu, Imo, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Plateau, Taraba, Adamawa, Benue, Nassarawa
Sources: INEC and VIISAUS. Created by Aderemi Ayeni

Legend: CPC (red), PDP (green), ACN (light green)
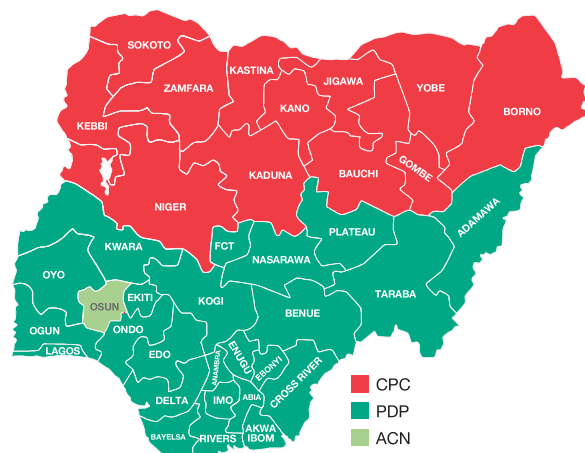
Winner
22,495,187 votes
Goodluck Jonathan

2nd
12,214,853 votes
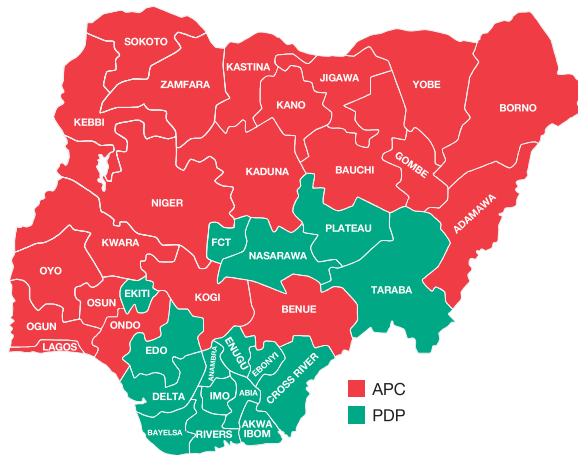Muhammadu Buhari

2015 Presidential Election Result (Million)

Nothern Alliance states: Gombe, Sokoto, Jigawa, Zamfara, Kano, Kebbi, Bauchi, Kastina, Yobe, Borno, and Osun
Rockies states: Kaduna, Kogi, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Kwara, Ekiti and Niger
Bible Belt states: FCT, Edo, Delta, Rivers, Cross-River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Enugu, Imo, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Plateau, Taraba, Adamawa, Benue, Nassarawa
Sources: INEC and VIISAUS. Created by Aderemi Ayeni

Winner
15,424,921 votes
Muhammadu Buhari

2nd
12,853,162 votes
Goodluck Jonathan
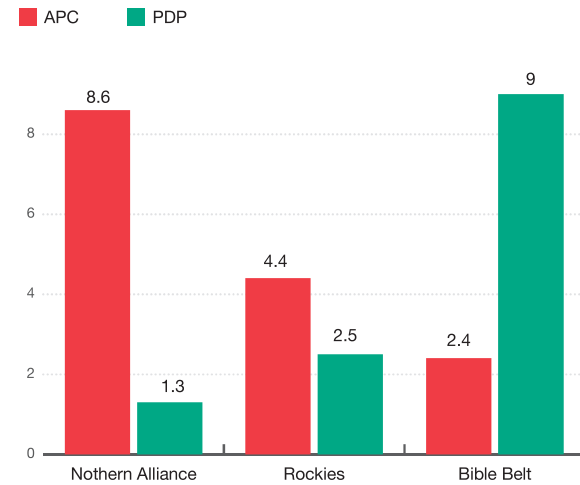
was seeking a second term against Buhari but would eventually lose out.

Seven out of the nine states that form the Rockies were won by APC in 2019, while the PDP won in Ondo and Oyo. The year before that, in 2015, eight out of nine voted for APC with the exception of Ekiti state.
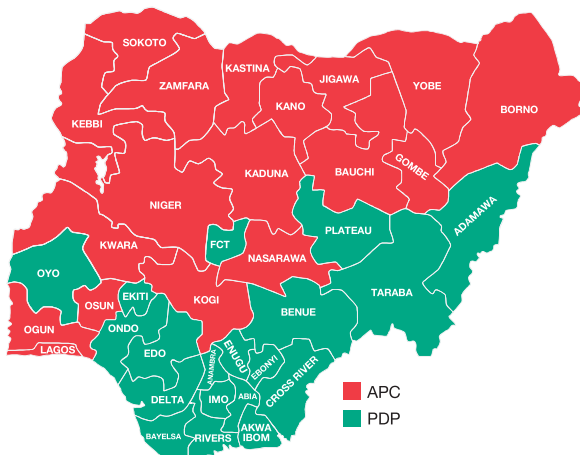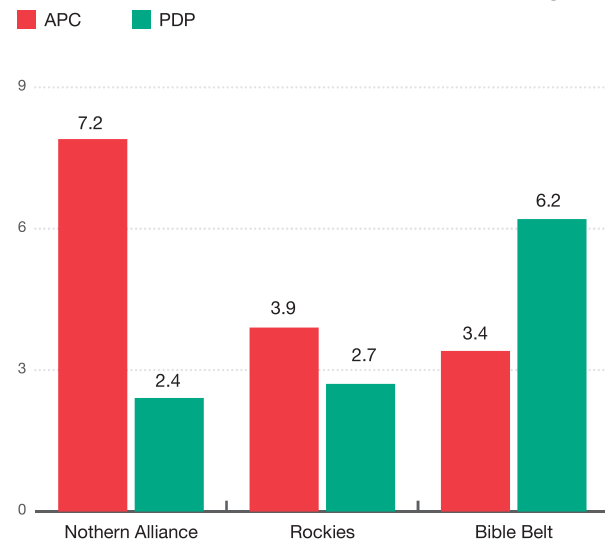
2019 Presidential Election Result (Million)

Nothern Alliance states: Gombe, Sokoto, Jigawa, Zamfara, Kano, Kebbi, Bauchi, Kastina, Yobe, Borno, and Osun
Rockies states: Kaduna, Kogi, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Kwara, Ekiti and Niger
Bible Belt states: FCT, Edo, Delta, Rivers, Cross-River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Enugu, Imo, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Plateau, Taraba, Adamawa, Benue, Nassarawa
Sources: INEC and VIISAUS. Created by Aderemi Ayeni

Winner
15,191,847 votes
Muhammadu Buhari

2nd
11,262,978 votes
Atiku Abubakar

The curious case of Nigeria's lowest voter turnout since 1999

● LOLADE AKINMURELE, OLAMIDE OLOGUNAGBE, DAMILOLA ODIFAH

The voter turnout at Nigeria's last presidential election (2019) slumped to a record-low of 34.75 percent, according to INEC data.

That's the lowest since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999. As a percentage of eligible voters, the number is far worse at an abysmal 26.87 percent.

The trend of declining voter turnout began in 2007 before bottoming at the last election.

In the 1999 election, the voter turnout was 52.3 percent, which meant 1 in every 2 Nigerians who registered to vote eventually voted.

In 2003, the voter turnout jumped to 69.1 percent before slowing every year since then to 57.49 percent in 2007, 53.68 percent in 2011 and 43.65 percent in 2015.

The voter turnout in 2019 mysteriously declined despite a 22 percent increase in registered voters to 82 million from 67 million in 2015.

Of the three voting blocs, the Bible Belt states, the PDP stronghold, suffered the biggest drop of all the blocs.

Voter turnout in the Bible Belt states fell 15.7 percent between 2015 and 2019, nearly three times faster than anywhere else.

Bible belt states like Rivers (-47.9 percent), Akwa-Ibom (-34.9 percent), Delta (-33.4 percent), Bayelsa (-26.3 percent) and Enugu (-20.4 percent) suffered the worst contractions in voter turnout in the country.

The decline in voter turnout was much milder for the Northern Alli-

ance which saw a decline of 5.2 percent, the lowest of the three voting blocs despite widespread insecurity.

Only one of the Northern Alliance states, Zamfara, saw a double-digit decline (18.4 percent) in voter turnout.

Ironically, the only state where voter turnout increased in the country was in the Boko Haram-ravaged Borno which saw an 11 percent growth compared to 2015.

The Rockies also suffered a decline in voter turnout with a drop of 6.8 percent. Only Ogun and Oyo had a double-digit decline in voter turnout among the Rockies states with -11.1 percent and -12.6 percent respectively.

Voter turnout (%)

Year	Value
1999	52.3
2003	52.3
2011	52.7
2015	43.7
2019	34.8
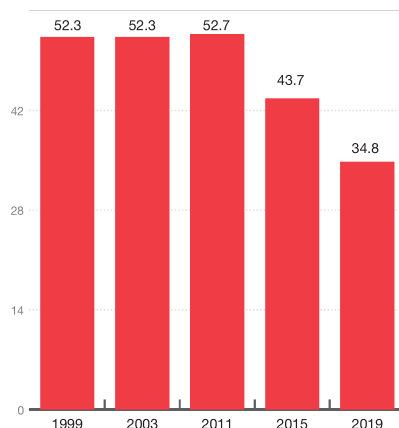
Source: Independent National Electoral Commission(INEC)
Created by Aderemi Ayeni

Registered Voters (Million)

Year	Value
1999	57.9
2003	60.8
2011	73.5
2015	67.4
2019	82.3
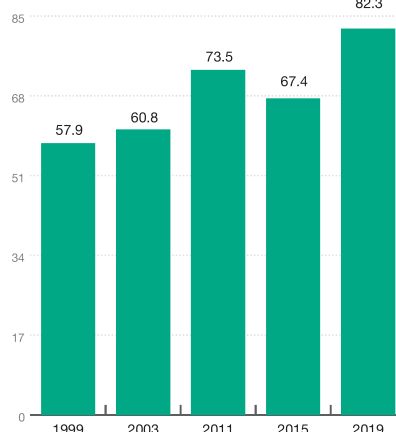
Source: Independent National Electoral Commission(INEC)
Created by Aderemi Ayeni

Total Votes (Million)

Year	Value
1999	30.28
2003	42.02
2011	39.47
2015	29.43
2019	28.61
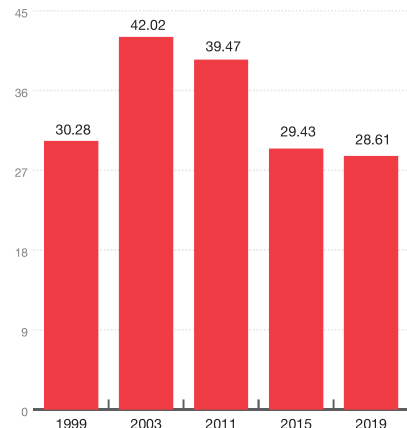
Source: Independent National Electoral Commission(INEC)
Created by Aderemi Ayeni

Low voter turnout blunts Nigeria's largest voting bloc

• LOLADE AKINMURELE, OLAMIDE OLOGUNAGBE, DAMILOLA ODIFAH

Low voter turnout reduced Nigeria's largest voting bloc and PDP stronghold, the Bible Belt, to the least effective bloc at the 2019 election.

Despite having the highest number of registered voters at 34.5 million, the Bible Belt's actual votes came to 9.6 million due to a low voter turnout of 28 percent.

The low turnout in the Bible Belt paved the way for the Northern Alliance, which had less registered voters (25 million) but higher turnout of 41 percent to overtake the Bible Belt in terms of number of votes for the first time since 1999.

The Northern Alliance states accounted for 10.3 million votes, slightly over a million votes more than the Bible Belt states.

The Rockies, with 6.6 million votes and 24 million registered voters, also paid the price of low voter turnout which at 27 percent was the lowest of all three voting blocs.

"The Bible belt, even with its low turnout always put out

THE BIBLE BELT

9.6m
VOTES

28%
TURNOUT

34.5m
VOTERS

-15.7%
DROP IN TURNOUT (AVERAGE)

Dropping at almost three times the speed of anywhere elase.

10 states had double digit turnout drop, and the **5 worst states** are Bible Belt.
Rivers: **47,9%**, Akwa Ibom: **-34.9%**, Delta: **33.4%**, Bayelsa: **26.3%**, Enugu: **-20.4%**

more votes than the Northern Alliance. But it's been getting closer and closer until 2019 when it actually turned the other way," Ejobe said.

"If the turnout in the Bible Belt was anything like that of the Northern Alliance, PDP would win every election in Nigeria every single time, and we would become a one-party State," Ejobe added.

That's without factoring the minimum requirement for a candidate to win two-thirds of votes in every state to become president.

"But both major parties achieved that every single time with ease, but this turnout would simply kill and destroy every single other. Nobody would have any say," Jiro said.

-5.2%
DROP IN TURNOUT (AVERAGE)

The only state in the country that grew in turnout was Borno 11%

Only one state in the Northern Alliance had double digit turnout drop - Zamfara: **18.4%**
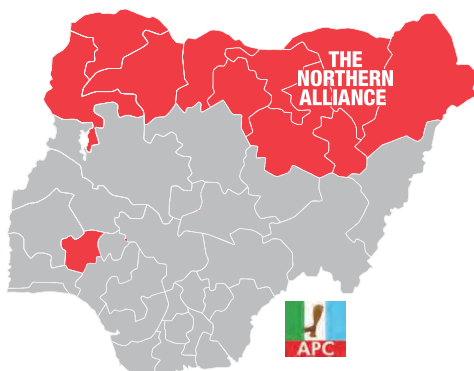
-6.8%
DROP IN TURNOUT (AVERAGE)

The Rockies only had Ogun: -11.1% and Oyo: -12.6% with double digit drops in turnout

'We do not see voting patterns changing in 2023'

Ahead of Nigeria's presidential elections in 2023, voting patterns identified after analysing trends since 1999 will last for at least another election year, according to Jiro Ejobe, Tijani Nwadei and Ikponmwosa Aikhionbare of Viisaus, the political consulting firm behind a first-of-its-kind report on voting patterns in Nigeria. In this interview with Business Day, the principals of Viisaus shared several insights from their research.

What are the top trends you would say you noticed from your analysis of the election data from 1999?

JIRO: If I could use a word to answer this - I would say *growth*. In 1999, there were only pockets of resistance to the ruling Party, but since then, the regions have started defining themselves politically. I know we've had individual gladiator strides across our Nigerian political universe, influencing groups of people here and there, but these people come and go. It seems as if our political character, while influenced by these gladiators, has formed an identity independent of them. This identity seems to fall along the lines of religion and tribe/culture. In some ways you could say our political thinking has deepened into 3 groups – loosely associated with how Nigeria is separated into 3 by rivers Niger and Benue. It appears to be a departure from the typical North/South political divide (from two Blocs to three) - it means more groups having representation and influence in how the nation is run - that is growth. These groups may yet change, depending on how things progress further in the future, but we do not see this changing in 2023.

IKPONMWOSA "IK" AIKHIONBARE
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TIJANI "TJ" NWADEI
Partner, Political Consulting
VIISAUS

JIRO EJOBE
Managing Partner
VIISAUS

I should add that within pockets of the nation we have observed that elections are much more accurate - some of the macro numbers are more consistent with what we expect when checked against our models. So yes, we are growing and moving in the right direction – are we there yet? No, we're still a long way off, but it is a gradual process, as we get better at picking our leaders, things will improve, slow but steady.

TJ: At the presidential level, there is a strong sense of regional voter herd behaviour. As a people, we underestimate the effect of certain commonalities – language, religion, tribe (in a lot of cases) and contiguity of States.

The outcome after so many years of voting is that people in certain regions who are affected by similar socio-economic factors begin to respond alike to political interventions, representation and inclusion. More interesting is that as opposed to binary ideology, Nigeria seems to have created political identities along 3 groups - loosely associated with how Nigeria is separated into 3 by rivers Niger and Benue. These groups, we have called blocs and named them.

Why do you think there is a difference in mindset in the north and south whereby while the south believes their votes don't count, the north believe otherwise?

JIRO & TJ: This was an interesting anomaly that we found in the data during our Presidential election research for our **UNCOMMON-SENSE Voter Education Series** (please note our research did not take the 2007 election into account heavily as we could not source publicly available, verified and detailed results). We were trying to find out

> As a people, we underestimate the effect of certain commonalities – language, religion, tribe (in a lot of cases) and contiguity of States.

why people would not vote. For the record – highest reason is **inconvenience**, however the figures reported *that twice* as many people in the northern regions felt as though their votes will count when compared to the southern regions. We would love to give you data that points to a concrete reason why that's the case – but unfortunately, we do not have any.

However, one of our theories lies in

how we as Nigerians 'see government' and evaluate its performance. Our data shows that over the years our compatriots in the south tend to hold a dimmer view of government as a whole (regardless of the tribe or religion of the person in power). Whereas the further North you go, our compatriots gradually seem to have a better view of government performance. Neither is right nor wrong – it is a classic case of is the glass half empty or half full?. Thus, if you like what the government is doing – perhaps you are more likely to want to get involved in maintaining the status quo!

You identified three blocks in your analysis of voting patterns. The Rockies, Bible Belt and Northern Alliance, what does the data say about the best combination of the three for a presidential election?

JIRO & TJ: The 3-bloc voting pattern forms the basis of a great deal of the political insights we provide our clients and customers. It would be wrong not to mention Ikponmwosa "IK" Aikhionbare, our senior political consultant who made the discovery in the first place. Firstly, please note that VIISAUS 100% owned by the partners and is a non-partisan consulting firm.

Keeping that in mind, IK identified PDP as the only political constant from 1999 (as no opposition party in Nigeria lasted two election cycles – until now that PDP is about to), he then discovered a distinct pattern in the behaviour of how states voted for and against PDP. We realized that while opposition may change name, form and reform,it is essentially the same people and a pattern emerged. We no longer needed two traditional parties (Democrats vs Republicans, Conservatives vs Labour, etc…) to work and this transformed our approach to analysing our political data.

With regards to the three blocs - **The Rockies, the Bible Belt and the Northern Alliance** - what it basically says is that using historical information, we can predict to a relatively high level of confidence how Nigeria breaks into 3 groups of States during each presidential election.

Now the Bible Belt is (loosely) the region east of the Niger and south of the Benue. Consisting of states in mainly the South-East, South-South & eastern part of the North-Central geopolitical zones. The region is generally considered to have the lowest occurrence of people who practice the religion of Islam in the country, and has the highest concentration of Christians (hence the name Bible Belt which is used in other countries to describe similar regions). It has a pro-PDP stance (14 states here have never been won by any other party in 24 years). It is the bloc with the most registered voters – over **34m** (this means that there are more people over the age of 18 here than every man, woman and child in Ghana).

The Northern Alliance have an anti-PDP stance (11 states here have not been won by the PDP in 19 years). They have about 10 million less registered voters than the Bible Belt – but because they have such a high percentage of turnout, this bloc had **the highest turnout in Nigeria**. There are only 3 states in Nigeria that have never been won by the PDP in a presidential election and they are all in this bloc – Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara.

The Rockies are mainly states in the South-Western & western part of the North-Central geopolitical zones. This is where Islam and Christian populations have historically mixed and cohabited in large numbers. They are loosely west & south of the Niger and have a swing stance - which means that they cannot typically be predicted. This unique behaviour associated with the Rockies that sees them swing one way or the other also means that, even though they have the lowest vote total, they always decide the election outcome.Let me explain - the PDP votes in the Bible Belt averaged around 9.7m in 2019, the APC votes in the Northern Alliance about 10.7 million. With a difference that close, they tend to cancel each other out. It means you just need to add 2 or 3 million votes to either and you have won – and the Rockies has 6.6million swing votes to play with!

With blocs defined, one can then see how all except one Presidential ticket has reflected these blocks and their

behaviour. If APC want to win – they have to continue to field a Rockies native on their ticket to woo votes from them to join the Northern Alliance. Same for PDP and the Bible Belt. Because of this, without a Rockies native on the ticket, you are almost guaranteed to lose. This contributed to why Buhari could not win in 2003 – he had a Bible Belt native as his running mate (Chuba Okadigbo), but the Bible Belt will NOT vote for anyone except the PDP. When he put a Rockies native on (Osinbajo), he was successful. Even with Jonathan, his running mate was a Rockies native (Sambo). There is always a representative of two winning blocks on the winning presidential ticket, and one of those is always Rockies native.

There were about two million fewer votes in 2019 compared to 2015, where does your analysis show these votes were lost (in terms of the voting blocs) and can you guess any reasons for the fall?

JIRO, TJ & IK: To try to answer the question of the 2 million drop is to ask the bigger question of voting trends between 2015 and 2019. This is where the power of looking at Nigeria in three separate blocs really comes into play – it highlights how the depression impacted specific Parties and geopolitical groups.

Firstly lets state the facts: (1) the number of registered voters grew by 25% from 2015 to 2019 so the lower turnout was a surprise, (2) turnout is actual voters as a percentage of registered voters – i.e. if Lagos has 10m registered voters but only 5m (half) vote on election day – then Lagos has a turnout of 50% (3) turnout across the globe is dropping and its typical to see drops below and up to 10% among Nigerian states between 2015 and 2019 (4) it is normal to expect that the 2 million drop in votes was distributed across states all over the country

However, the drop in voter turnout was NOT uniform. So, if you look closely at the results, you'll find that on average, the Rockies states dropped about 7%, the Northern Alliance

dropped about 6%, but then the Bible Belt states averaged around 15-16%, almost three times more than anywhere else in the country! Of course, that immediately piqued our interest, and we had a closer look at it. We realized that three states specifically drove this drop in turnout, the first was Rivers state polling from ~1.5m votes in 2015 to ~625,000 in 2019), then Akwa Ibom (from ~1.01m votes to ~571,000 votes), and Delta (dropping from ~1.2m votes to ~815,360 votes). That's a difference of approximately 1.6million votes with the remaining 400k loss drop spread more evenly across the country. Furthermore, the contribution of these states to the total national turnout dropped from 41% in 2015 to 36% in 2019.

But it does not just stop there, that 15+% drop in the Bible Belt turnout means **the bottom five states** with the lowest turnout in 2019 all occur in the Bible Belt, i.e., they are all hardcore opposition states. Now that may make you ask the question; is that the reason APC won? An unnatural drop of votes in opposition territory? It is worth pointing out that our data *said APC would still have won,* just by a lesser margin.

That votes depression is the reason for a lot of very strange things happening. Usually, the growth in votes in a State like Rivers means it regularly contributes the most votes to the PDP presidential candidate – but in 2019, (because of the drop in these PDP front runner states) – the state to contribute the most was actually Kaduna with only 649,612 votes. When a turnout drop like that occurs it is normal to see power change hands, yet all these states were still won by PDP, just by much smaller margins. If you looked at the map of 2015 and 2019 regarding who won which states, you would not see much difference, but the lower win margins meant a lower PDP vote count total and this contributed majorly to their loss.

There is a lot more that was affected – you can look up our social media handles for more info – look for 'UNCOMMONSENSE' or for the real political junkies, send an email to subscriptions@viisaus.com to get info on how to subscribe to our data portal

and get live data on who is looking most likely to win (presidential & gubernatorial and more…), what will life be like if they do, campaign watch, tracking polls, etc…

What would you say are the biggest eye openers that your research has shown you about how the 2023 election is likely to shape out?

JIRO & TJ: The biggest eye opener has got to be the predictability, the fact that there are up to 14 states that have never been won by any party except PDP since 1999. The fact that it does not matter the tribe, or region the candidate is from, anyone who is on the ballot for PDP, is guaranteed wins there and it does not look like that is going to change soon. We are expecting those states to stay exactly how they have always been; numbers might change but the victories and/or losses are guaranteed.
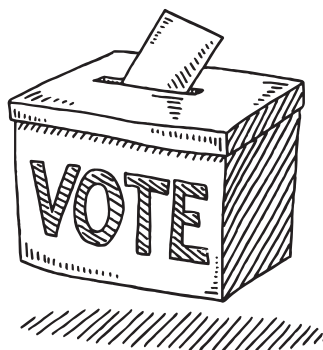
For the Northern Alliance it was illuminating to stop seeing them as a Buhari pressure group and more as an opposition to PDP. We do not expect that to change a lot.

When you can actually take groups of people and do individual statistics on them, that is when you get to see really interesting things. That is how you know that for the Nigerin Presidential election, you cannot just focus on individual states or North vs South; impact and outcomes are targeted at Blocs.

Our eyes have already been opened, but we feel sorry for the business community. In many ways, the busi-

ness community is blind to a lot of this and that is why we are so excited that BusinessDay is doing this. The business community need to engage more with the actual politics rather than gamble on the winner turning them into a victim or victor. We are glad to say for the first time in this election we have a few larger private sector players as clients. These are people and teams who are forward thinking enough to procure our 'Political Risk' package. All major corporates and HNIs with exposure to the public sector should really be doing something like this right now. One of the key things that we do is predictive statistics /predictive analysis, and we have made over 5 predictions in the country. We have been correct in each and every one, and we have them all on our social media pages; we just predicted APGA for Anambra on LinkedIn and are getting ready for Ekiti and Osun.

People should also be interested in what happens after a candidate wins. Did you know that Obasanjo introduced the highest number of naira notes? As a military ruler, he introduced the ₦1, ₦5, ₦10 and ₦20 naira notes. When he returned as a civilian president, he introduced the ₦100, ₦200, ₦500 and ₦1000 bank notes in December 1999, November 2000, April 2001 and October 2005. There is a lot one can infer simply by studying the past. It's not magic and this type of analysis happens in a lot of other countries; we hope our work can help professionalize the political space in Nigeria.

Do you think the youths who championed the #EndSARS protests will be a voting block to look out for in 2023?

JIRO & TJ: We get questions about #EndSars a lot. If People are expecting some sort of huge youth led voting revival/revolution as a result of #EndSars, the data says they are going to be disappointed. In our professional opinion, we like to look at the EndSars social movement/protest as a birth pang. The mothers may know what we mean if we say Braxton Hicks. It is just like contractions of a new Nigeria

that is being born, but is it a critical turning point? A nexus? More importantly, will it have massive impact on 2023?

The answer is No, it will not and why is that? The people who partook in this social movement to a large extent got what they wanted, a way to express frustration, a ban on the then version of SARS, etc. The people who put a lot of effort and time into this may not have moved on, but the protesters have. However, the people perpetuating the current political state in the country have not moved on, for them, this is a full-time job, the End-Sars movement was a flash in the pan – 3 years? as against people dedicating their entire lives to politics. People need to realise that Politics is a career, just like Law or Medicine – except the university is in the streets and elections are the final exams you use to graduate and get your certificate. Politicians are doing everything they can to ensure 2023 is predictable and that means working tirelessly to cancel out the effect of movements like #EndSars.

On a more positive note, let me add this - I do think there has been significant emotional impact on our 'future' leaders. Some of the visuals, the experiences that young people had, will impact the new leaders being created now andthey will reference #EndSars later on. So, it's going to have an impact, certainly an emotional one, but to say that we are going to see significant impact in 2023, we disagree.

Considering the performance of the current government and the fact that President Buhari will not be on the ballot next time around; do you think the pattern of voting in 2015 and 2019 would subsist?

JIRO: It is true to say that President Buhari drove a lot of the voting sentiments in the Northern Alliance states and was behind a great deal of their political activity. However, to say that he is the only thing uniting that group of people is untrue. In our minds, the northern alliance and that behaviour will persist post-Buhari into 2023 and

> People need to realise that Politics is a career, just like Law or Medicine – except the university is in the streets and elections are the final exams you use to graduate and get your certificate.

there are a few reasons for that; the first one is Buhari is still a factor even though he is not going to be president, you can tell by how he has moved and how politics is playing out, that he wields unprecedented power for an outgoing President of the ruling Party.

The reason PDP will struggle to resurrect votes in the North once Buhari leaves is the lack of patronage. Parties live on patronage right across the world. If your party is in power, you expect there to be patronage, donations to enable the party to strengthen itself, etc. Once a party remains in opposition too long in a State, the party machinery on the ground gets progressively weaker. The party machinery gets the vote out, campaigns, canvasses, etc. That is what perpetuates strongholds and if you inspect the opposing parties in stronghold states, you'll find they are low on infrastructure, income and patronage and that does not just turn around, these things are there to create votes on election day. Without infrastructure on ground, without the motivation, the patronage, the people, the influence, the innovation on one side and with all those things on the other side, you can be sure the opposing party is not going to make a massive difference.

However, the Rockies is still relatively neutral, hence both parties have more equal infrastructure on ground.

TJ: I think for the most part, the pattern will subsist.

As mentioned earlier, Buhari's emergence came post the coalescence

of anti-PDP sentiments in the north in such a way that he became the poster for it. Those sentiments still exist except for pockets of resistance built on the back of strong PDP governors in charge and maintaining the PDP machinery. In addition, Buhari's absence from the ballot does not negate his ability to hold sway over his "followers" when he canvasses for a particular candidate. His political strength was in full display with the emergence of the APC Chairman and all the activities that led to his consensus appointment.
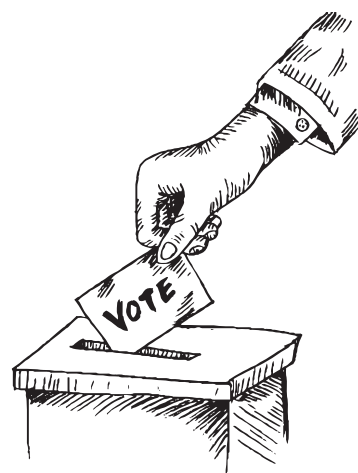
Unfortunately, the reality of the ruling party performance over the past 8yrs will not be a critical enough factor in the voting pattern. As we have given context to and explained, the real key for the 2023 elections is with the Rockies. A candidate combination that maximizes the votes from that region is what would make the difference between winner and loser.

What then are the critical drivers you think that may determine the pattern of voting in 2023?

JIRO & TJ: We have a theory, and it revolves around the idea that political power in Nigeria revolves around three things - contiguous location, tribe/cultural affinity and religion. What we are saying is that the larger the group of active voters with these three things in common, the more political power

they wield. Also, the less likely they are to swing from one party to another. We have identified two such groups:

Let's talk about the larger and hence most powerful one – and this is the one based in the Northern Alliance. We know that there are many differences among the groups in that region, but when it comes to politics – they have the highest number of people in contiguous states with strong tribal/cultural and religious affinity in Nigeria.

Conversely, the smallest group of people who have these three things in common are the Igbos, and those are the contiguous southeast states which have strong tribal/cultural affinity and are dominated by the same religion and language. But when it comes to raw voting numbers, it does not come close to the Northern Alliance with the southeast contributing less than 25% of total Bible Belt votes in 2019.

The Yorubas are not dominated by one religion (and perhaps add to the swing nature of these states) and the Ijaws do not seem to dominate contiguous states.

We see these drivers remaining a force in 2023, so we expect the winning party to leverage this "free" knowledge in candidate selection.

The clamour for (& against) restructuring is strong in the north & south. To what extent will this influence the behaviour of Nigerians at the polls?

JIRO: Tough one to answer really, I mean, which candidate will be brave enough to make it part of their manifesto? Education has a large part to play here - for some , that word restructuring means Nigeria splitting apart. The risk of being misinterpreted is too high thus we doubt it will be a major campaigning issue of any candidate. That said, if it does become front and centre, it will make for interesting debate and permutations. Fundamental issues like that have the potential for creating huge political shifts as changes like that are likely to motivate a lot of people who may previously not have voted. But

like I said, it is our position that it will not be a front and centre issue of any of the mainstream candidates.

In the 2015 and 2019 general elections, the power of money was noticeable. There were cases of vote buying and compromise of electoral officers. With the high level of poverty in the country right now; do you not see the possibility of a repeat of such even with the amended Electoral Act law that has come into effect?

JIRO & TJ: VIISAUS is fascinated by vote buying. We have been investigating the effects of vote buying across different levels of elections in Nigeria for the past six years and can tell you that the impact tends to be isolated, its success or failure has cultural connotations and it does not guarantee success. Overall, we find it far more effective during the primaries, where a great deal of vote buying occurs but in a general election, we find it tends to be less effective. Can we put figures on that? maybe around 10%, and definitely not more than 20%. Poverty in the country has always existed; rigging and vote buying have always existed and yet the political machinery still produces new candidates, surprises and shocks every single time. After all – no vastly unpopular candidate has been able to buy their way to the presidency against a very popular candidate yet.

Let us talk a little bit about the INEC and put our opinion out there. VIISAUS operate election day situation rooms (you may have seen the one we did on TV for Edo 2020), so we have a lot of first-hand experience of INEC election operations. We are big supporters of this INEC management team and we think the impact of some of the changes that the team has made with regards to technology adoption and how much work has been done to try and deal with the rigging that happens at collation has had a real impact, massive in some places. So let us put it this way; there will be an impact because of poverty – yes, there always is, but I suspect

the impact will be isolated, and not around 15% - not enough to turn the election we are heading into.

Cases of voter apathy have been growing in the polity over trust deficit in leaders. How can this be addressed?

JIRO & TJ: Voter apathy is a really tough one. I was in a twitter space the other day and someone said to me that eight million people have registered, and surely that's a sign that the #EndSars movement is causing increase in registered voters and we should see that increase in actual votes. But there are couple of reasons why we do not expect that to happen; one is this strange depression of votes that happened last time - there's no guarantee that, that will not happen again. Secondly, the areas of the country that show very large registration typically show quite low turnout when it comes to voting. I mean Lagos is projected to top seven million registered voters, which is more than the population of some small countries yet if turnout continues to drop as projected, (I think it was like 16% the last time), less than 500,000 Lagosians will vote in the next election – out of 6.5 million potential voters. So, you can do the mathematics, it's a big problem. I know you say trust deficit in leaders has a part to play, but actually the BIGGEST reason people do not vote in Nigeria is "convenience". I mean in other climes people can actually post their votes. There are all sorts of innovations being created in fintech in Nigeria – but what about politics? We have to make it easier to participate and we have to make it safer. We have to get a situation where it does not take too much out of you to choose your leader, without risk to your life, without risk to your property, etc. There has got to be a way where we can change this and that is where things like technology have to be taken into consideration. We are glad about the way INEC is moving, but more can be done - people want to vote, it is just not convenient, people want to vote but it's fear for safety and those can be addressed jointly by efficient, technology-enabled remote voting.