

Perception of Political Othering in the 2023 Elections by the Electorate in South-South, Nigeria



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Abstract

The study was carried out to ascertain the perception of the electorate on political othering in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The rationale behind the study was to find out whether the electorate's perception of political othering affected their electoral behaviour in the election. Anchored on the choice theory, the study adopted the survey research design to generate quantitative data analysed in the study. The hypothesis formulated in the study was tested with the Pearson Product Moment Correction Coefficient (PPMCC) with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) at 0.05 significance. Findings showed that the electorates have knowledge of political othering. It also showed that the perception of the electorate of the political parties and candidates is not dependent on the descriptions of the political parties and the political candidates by the politicians and the candidates. It was recommended among other things that Political parties and candidates should intensify the tempo of advertisements of their programmes and strategies. This will create more awareness about the policies, programmes, philosophy and other activities of the party and its political candidates.

Keywords: *Political Othering, 2023 Presidential Election, Politics, Electorate, South-South*

Introduction

Political othering refers to political rhetorics that emphasise differences. That is party A labels party B as corrupt, Christian versus Muslim, North versus South, us versus them. The mass communication media serve as true platforms for an aspiring political office bearer to communicate his or her political intent to the people. Different political parties are allowed to run for office in Nigeria's version of democracy. In democracy, this is referred to as a multi-party system. Because of the large number of political parties that

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ran for office, political observers labelled some supposedly unpopular political parties as "pretenders" and other seemingly popular political parties as "contenders."

Despite the large number of political parties and individuals that ran in the 2023 presidential election, it appears that only the leading political parties and candidates--the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party--are popular among the people. This is due to the influence and affluence of major political parties and their candidates, as well as their domination in the political activities leading up to the 2023 presidential election. These political parties' campaigns and strategies dominated the electoral process, while the remaining political parties operated on the periphery. In their campaign operations, these three political parties, the APC, the PDP and the LP exhibited the concept of political othering. Political othering is the practice of viewing someone as lacking the attributes required to be a member of one's group. It is the general sense of attempting to exclude someone from a group because that individual does not belong to the in-group. Political othering refers to the "us vs. them" mentality that a person is different because he or she does not belong to a specific group--that is, a political party. Racism, race, religion, and other forms of political othering are some of the dimensions of political othering. These characteristics are common in the Nigerian environment.

These techniques are ways for people to identify with the two major political parties. Politicians and political groups used images and films to promote their ideals through various forms of mass media. Othering is defined as "a process (...) through which identities are set up in an unequal relationship" by cultural geographer Crang (1998, P. 61), as mentioned in Draulic (2015). Othering is the simultaneous construction of the self or in-group and the other or out-group in mutual and unequal opposition through the identification of some desirable characteristics that the self/in-group possesses and the other/out-group lacks and/or some undesirable characteristics that the other/out-group possesses but the self/in-group lacks.

The foregoing is the concept of political othering, or being the polar opposite of oneself. It is the strategies or beliefs that support oneself, a political party, or a candidate. Political parties and politicians adopt strategies for the electorate, such as manifestoes and other campaign methods that differentiate them from other political parties and candidates. These strategies of various political parties are communicated to the electorate, who evaluate which political party or candidate to vote for in an election. As a result, this study was conducted to determine the perception of political othering on electoral behaviour in South-South Nigeria.

Political othering has been studied by researchers. Jensen (2011), for example, conducted research on othering, identity formation, and agency. The study investigated the idea of othering's ability to define identity formation among ethnic minorities. Othering in political thinking: A social representational approach to social order was also investigated by Staerkle (2013). AbdulMagied (2022) researched othering, identification, and recognition: the social exclusion of the manufactured other.

These are empirical investigations. However, none of these researches was designed to analyse and investigate the influence of political othering on electorate voting patterns. Arising from this concern, therefore, this study was carried out to fill this gap. So, this study is embarked upon to ascertain how these political rhetorics influence the electoral behaviour of the voters in the electoral process in South-South, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives which are to:

- 1 Find out the level of awareness of the electorate in South-South, Nigeria of political othering.
2. Ascertain the perception of the electorate on the level of effectiveness of political othering in the election campaign

Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant relationship between the electorate's level of awareness of political othering and their attitude towards othering statements.

Concept of Political Othering

Political othering distinguishes political parties and their candidates. Political othering refers to political discourse that highlights distinctions between political parties and candidates. It promotes an "us-them" mentality among various political parties, religions, races, and ethnic nationalities. Othering" is a broadly inclusive conceptual framework that captures expressions of prejudice and behaviours such as atavism and tribalism, but it is also a term that points to deeper processes at work, only some of which are captured by those terms, according to Powell and Menendian (2015, p. 5). It is not uncommon to hear commentators refer to Islamophobia or ethnocentrism as "racism," although religion and ethnicity are not racial categories. Similarly, anti-gay and lesbian marriage legislation and exclusionary gender norms are forms of othering, but individuals who suffer from them are not defined by ancestry, nationality, religion, or tribe. According to (Culea 2014), othering is a social and linguistic mechanism that distinguishes 'we' from 'them'. The "us-them" dichotomy and the concept of others as a result of this process underline the critical importance of binary oppositions in social structures (Onal 2021). According to Vichiensing (2017), othering generates an exclusionary matrix. He goes on to say that othering develops inequality and creates tension, dissension, or even conflict between members of two groups. Furthermore, Golkowska (2014) believes that the term othering is comparable to ethnicity and stereotyping in that it always implies the superiority of the in-group that deems itself superior to the out-group.

Jensen (2011) conducted a study on othering, identity formation, and agency. The study investigates the idea of othering's ability to define identity formation among ethnic minorities. The study discusses the concept's origins, current application, and some objections. According to the study, young ethnic minority men in Denmark are prone to intersectional othering, which includes exotist obsession with the other. The study also stated that the idea of othering is appropriate for comprehending power structures.

While the current study employed a mixed research strategy that included surveys and textual analysis, the Jensen study relied on library research methods.

Staerkle (2013) carried out a research work titled *Othering in Political Thinking: A Social Representational Approach to Social Order*. The study contends that political thinking is entrenched in social order representations. In its most basic form, social order refers to the norms, regulations, and laws that define our "living together" as a group, a community, or a society. As members of social groups, humans must necessarily live together, think together, and act together. Individuals, on the other hand, are compelled to actively participate in the organisation of their political community by adopting political attitudes consistent with their ideal social order.

This study is comparable to the current study in that both focused on political othering. While the current study is an empirical study, the Staerkle study is a qualitative investigation. The current study employed the survey research method, whereas the Staerkle study employed the library research approach

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the rational choice theory. Cesare Beccaria formulated the theory in the late 18th century. The theory first emerged as an economic theory. But, it has been used in numerous social science fields, such as political science, sociology, psychology, etc. The theory assumes that voters are self-interested individuals who make logical decisions. Voters rationally pick between two candidates when given two options based on whether or not they can realise their ambitions. The rational choice theory goes by many names based on the specific attitudes that are the best predictors of voting decisions, according to Miller (1992), cited in Ikpe (2010). The rational choice hypothesis emphasises the voters' motivations. It supports a particular group of people's electoral voting behaviour as well. People vote for a variety of reasons, not always based on the qualifications or background of the political candidate for an election, given the pluralistic and multicultural nature of the nation. Ikpe (2010) points out that the rational choice theory's main tenet is that each voter makes decisions based on his or her self-interest. In other words, voters build their own opinions on topics, performance, and personalities before selecting the party that will most likely implement the policies and demonstrate the performance they desire. Voters' decisions to support a particular candidate running for office are justified by rational choice.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design. A survey is an empirical study that uses a questionnaire or interview to discover descriptive features of a phenomenon, according to Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo, and Okpanachi (2017). The survey is employed in the study to enable the researcher to study the different traits and heterogeneity of the study population. The population of the study comprises the total number of registered voters in local government areas that constitute the heart of three select state capitals in South-South, Nigeria. They are Egor, Ikpa-Okha and Oredo in Benin City, Edo State with a total population of 613,896, Yenogoa in Bayelsa State with a population of 199,895 and Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor in Rivers State with a population of 1,085,860. The figures were retrieved from the INEC website (<https://cvr.inecnigeria.org>). The target population is 1,899,651. The sample size is four hundred (400). The sample size was derived from the Taro Yamane's formula. To draw and select the four hundred (400) samples from the target population, the researchers used the multistage sampling technique. Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo and Okpanachi (2012) cited in Ekwueme and Ngene (2017) note that "multi-stage sampling requires the researcher to choose his samples in stages until he gets the required sample.

In the first stage, the researchers randomly selected three state capitals from the six state capitals in the South-South geopolitical zone of the country. The researchers wrote and folded the names of the six state capitals. Thereafter, the folded lists were put into a basket. The researchers shook the basket and a research assistant was asked to select three pieces of paper with blindfolded eyes. This yielded Benin City in Edo State, Yenogoa in Bayelsa State and Port Harcourt in Rivers State.

In the second stage, purposive sampling was used by the researchers to select local government areas that constitute the heart of each of the three state capitals. This procedure yielded Oredo, Egor and Ikpoba-Okha in Benin City; Yenogoa local government in Yenogoa; Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor local government areas in Port Harcourt.

It is seemingly impossible to study all the parts of the state capitals in the study. Thus, in the third stage, the researchers used simple random sampling to select three streets from each of the selected local government areas. The names of all the streets in each of the local government areas were written on separate pieces of paper and put in a basket. Then, a research assistant was asked to pick three pieces of paper from each of the baskets for each of the local government areas. Following this procedure, three streets were selected from Oredo, Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, Yenogoa, Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor local government areas.

In the third stage, the researchers purposively selected compounds from the selected streets; purposive sampling was also used to select compounds with registered voters. On each of these streets, ten (10) houses were selected from each of the streets.

In the fourth stage, purposive sampling was also used to select registered voters from each of the houses. The registered voters were selected based on their number in each of the houses. Following this procedure, in some of the streets, thirty (30) registered voters were selected while in some streets, twenty (20) were selected. This gave rise to four hundred (400) respondents. The researchers conducted a pilot study to pre-test the questionnaire among forty (40) registered voters resident in Oredo local government area of Edo State (that is 20% of the copies of the questionnaire). The results obtained were used to establish the reliability coefficient using Cronbach's coefficient alpha method with the aid of SPSS which stood at 0.913 and this value was considered an acceptable reliability for the study. The copies of the questionnaire were distributed and retrieved by the researchers. The copies of the questionnaire were analysed in frequency tables and simple percentages with the aid of SPSS. The hypothesis generated was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) at the 0.05 level of significance with the aid of SPSS.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 400 respondents were sampled on their knowledge of political othering and their level of participation in politics. Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire administered, 399 were retrieved and considered useful for analysis. The remaining one copy of the questionnaire was lost because it was not filled properly.

Awareness of Political Othering

Options	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	89	22.3	22.3	22.3
Agree	217	54.4	54.4	76.7
Undecided	58	14.5	14.5	91.2
Strongly disagree	8	2.0	2.0	93.2
Disagree	27	6.8	6.8	100.0
Total	399	100.0	100.0	

Data in the table above show the level of knowledge of political othering. The data above showed that the majority of the respondents agreed that they have knowledge of political othering. This implies that the respondents are conversant with what political othering is all about and when political parties and candidates exhibit it in the electoral process.

Perception of the Effectiveness of Political Othering on the Electorate in South-South

Perception on the effectiveness of political othering on the electorate in South-South	Strongly Agree	%	Agree	%	Un-decided	%	Strongly disagree	%	Disagree	%	mean	Std
I do not like PDP because APC and the Labour Party describe them as a corrupt party	51	12.8	83	20.8	88	21.1	83	20.8	94	23.6	3.2155	1.35196
I do not like APC because the PDP and Labour Party describe them as ethnic bigots	62	15.5	99	24.8	76	19.0	59	14.8	103	25.3	3.10553	1.42974
I do not like Labour Party because APC and PDP Party describe them as having no structure	83	20.3	99	24.8	62	15.5	98	24.6	57	14.3	2.8672	1.37271

The table above indicates the perception of the effectiveness of political othering on the electorate. The data show that the majority of the respondents representing 25.3% disagreed that they do not like APC because the PDP and Labour Party describe them as ethnic bigots.

Hypothesis

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis of the relationship between electorates' level of awareness and political othering and othering statements.

Correlations

		Level of Awareness	Political Othering
Level of Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.926**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	399	399
Political Othering	Pearson Correlation	.926**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	399	399

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data in Table 1 were used to test the hypothesis shown above.

Findings obtained from the test of the formulated hypothesis reveal that there exists a significant positive relationship between the level of awareness of the electorate and political othering since the r value=0.926 (93%). P value <0.05 , shows that the result is statistically significant. Using the table value for statistical significance ($n-2=399-2=397$). Since r calculated of $0.926 >$ table value 0.087 , it shows that the result is statistically significant.

Discussion of Findings

The data above showed that majority of the respondents agreed that they are aware of political othering. This implies that the respondents are conversant with what political othering is all about and when political parties and candidates exhibit it in the electoral process. This finding reinforces the data from the first hypothesis tested in the study.

Data from Table 3 indicates that the calculated r -value of 0.926 is greater than the critical r -value of 0.087 at 0.01 level. In light of the above, therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no is rejected. Hence, the alternative hypothesis that states there is no significant relationship between be electorate's level of awareness of political othering and their attitudes towards othering statements is accepted. This finding agrees with the finding in the study on political advertising and voting behaviour among Uyo residents during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria carried out by Okon (2019). He investigated how political advertising tactics used by parties and their candidates affected the decisions made by voters in Nigeria's 2015 general elections.

The data from the table show that majority of the respondents representing 25.3% disagreed that they do not like APC because the PDP and Labour Party describe them as ethnic bigots. This finding aligns with the assumptions of the rational choice theory. The thrust of rational choice theory, according to Ikpe (2010), is the individual voter who, as a rational creature, casts a ballot based on personal self-interest.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the study concludes that political othering does not have a negative influence on the electoral behaviour of the voters as they still vote for their choice of candidates and political parties despite the political parties/candidates' descriptions of one another. The study recommended that political parties and candidates should intensify the tempo of advertisements of their programmes and strategies. This will create more awareness about the policies, programmes, philosophy and other activities of the party and its political candidates. Political parties and candidates should engage more in the sensitisation of their programmes and policies through the various media of mass communication. Also, the electorate should be made to properly identify with the parties and the candidates in order to be more conversant with the policies and programmes of the political parties.

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