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## Ethnic Power Struggles, Political Communication, and Electioneering in Nigeria: An Analysis of Political Dynamics and Electoral Outcomes of the 2023 Presidential Election

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### Abstract

Ethnic power struggles have long shaped Nigeria's political landscape, influencing electioneering strategies and electoral outcomes. This study critically examines the intersection of ethnic politics, political communication, and electioneering in the context of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. Grounded in political communication and elite theory, the research explores how political actors leveraged ethnic narratives, media framing, and digital communication to mobilize support, shape public opinion, and contest power. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study analyses quantitative survey data from active social media users across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones alongside qualitative insights from key informant interviews and netnographic observations. Findings reveal that ethnic-based political messaging significantly influenced voter perceptions, while digital platforms facilitated both mobilization and misinformation. The study further highlights the implications of ethnic power struggles on democratic consolidation, media credibility, and electoral integrity in Nigeria. The research concludes with recommendations for policy reforms, media literacy initiatives, and strategies to mitigate the divisive impact of ethnic-driven political communication in future elections.

**Keywords:** *Ethnic power struggles, Political communication, Electioneering, 2023 Nigerian Presidential election, Electoral outcomes, Digital media, Political mobilization*

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## 1. Introduction

Nigeria's political landscape has been historically shaped by ethnic power struggles, with deep-seated regional, religious, and cultural divisions influencing governance, policy-making, and electoral outcomes. The intersection of ethnicity and politics in Nigeria is particularly pronounced during election periods, where political actors strategically deploy ethnic narratives to mobilize support, consolidate power, and, at times, delegitimize opponents. The 2023 presidential election was no exception, as it witnessed an intense interplay of ethnic rhetoric, digital political communication, and electoral contestations that shaped public discourse and voter behavior.

Political communication has become a central tool in electioneering, with traditional and digital media platforms serving as battlegrounds for political actors to shape narratives, disseminate campaign messages, and engage with the electorate. In Nigeria, where ethnic identity remains a powerful determinant of political allegiance, political elites have historically exploited ethnic sentiments to advance their electoral ambitions. The 2023 presidential election was marked by unprecedented levels of online political engagement, driven by the rise of social media platforms as spaces for political mobilization, propaganda dissemination, and counter-narratives. However, while digital political communication provided opportunities for political participation, it also amplified misinformation, ethnic polarization, and electoral distrust.

This study seeks to critically examine the role of ethnic power struggles and political communication in shaping electioneering strategies and electoral outcomes during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. By integrating insights from political communication theory and elite theory, the research explores how political actors framed their campaigns along ethnic lines, how digital and traditional media facilitated or hindered democratic discourse, and the broader implications for Nigeria's electoral democracy. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating quantitative data from social media users across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, qualitative interviews with political analysts and media practitioners, and netnographic observations of political discourse on digital platforms.

Given the growing influence of political communication in electoral processes, understanding the intersection between ethnic politics and media dynamics is crucial for strengthening democratic governance in Nigeria. This study contributes to scholarly discussions on ethnic power struggles, media influence in politics, and electoral integrity, while offering policy recommendations to mitigate the divisive impact of ethnic-driven electioneering.

## 2. Research Objectives

This study aims to examine the interplay between ethnic power struggles, political communication, and electioneering in shaping the electoral dynamics of Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. Specifically, the research seeks to:

1. Analyze the role of ethnic power struggles in influencing political mobilization and voter behavior during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.
2. Investigate the impact of political communication strategies, including digital and traditional media, on shaping public discourse and electoral outcomes.
3. Examine the extent to which ethnic-based political narratives contributed to misinformation, polarization, and electoral distrust.
4. Assess the effectiveness of social media platforms in facilitating political engagement, mobilization, and counter-narratives in the electioneering process.
5. Evaluate the broader implications of ethnic power struggles and media-driven political communication for Nigeria's democratic consolidation and electoral integrity.

## 3. Research Questions

This study explores the intersection of ethnic power struggles, political communication, and electioneering in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. To achieve this, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How did ethnic power struggles influence political mobilization and voter behavior during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election?
2. What role did political communication strategies – both digital and traditional – play in shaping public discourse and electoral outcomes?
3. To what extent did ethnic-based political narratives contribute to misinformation, polarization, and electoral distrust?
4. How effective were social media platforms in facilitating political engagement, mobilization, and counter-narratives during the electioneering process?
5. What are the broader implications of ethnic power struggles and media-driven political communication for Nigeria's democratic consolidation and electoral integrity?

#### 4. Research Hypotheses

This study posits the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis One:** Ethnic power struggles significantly influenced political mobilization and voter behavior during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election.

**Hypothesis Two:** Political communication strategies, including the use of digital and traditional media, played a significant role in shaping public discourse and electoral outcomes during the 2023 presidential election.

**Hypothesis Three:** Ethnic-based political narratives contributed to the spread of misinformation, increased political polarization, and diminished electoral trust during the electioneering process.

**Hypothesis Four:** Social media platforms facilitated political engagement, mobilization, and the dissemination of counter-narratives, thus affecting electoral dynamics in the 2023 presidential election.

**Hypothesis Five:** Ethnic power struggles and media-driven political communication have a significant impact on Nigeria's democratic consolidation and electoral integrity, influencing the legitimacy of the 2023 presidential election.

##### 4.1. Theoretical and Empirical Reviews

This study is underpinned by a broad spectrum of theoretical frameworks and empirical research that addresses the multifaceted relationship between ethnic power struggles, political communication, and electioneering in the context of Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. These theories and empirical findings offer a critical foundation for understanding the ways in which ethnicity, media, and communication strategies intersect to shape political dynamics and influence electoral outcomes.

At the core of the theoretical perspective is elite theory, which posits that political elites – those with control over key political, economic, and media resources – have significant influence over political decision-making and public discourse. This theory is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where ethnic elites often play a dominant role in shaping political mobilization. Elites strategically use ethnic identities to consolidate political support, sometimes at the expense of national unity (Osaghae, 2020; Akinyemi, 2022). The ethnicized nature of Nigerian politics, where politicians often exploit ethnic affiliations to mobilize voters, is a manifestation of elite strategies to control electoral outcomes through targeted communication (Ibrahim and Adetula, 2021). This theory suggests that ethnic power struggles are not only a reflection of grassroots sentiments but also the manipulation of those sentiments by elites seeking to consolidate political control.

Political communication theory provides another lens through which to examine the role of media in political processes. Theories such as agenda-setting and framing have been widely applied to study the ways in which media influences public perceptions and political outcomes. In the context of Nigeria's 2023 election, media outlets played a pivotal role in setting the political agenda, highlighting certain issues while sidelining others (Adeosun, 2022; Okoro, 2023). The framing of political issues, particularly those related to ethnicity, influenced voter perceptions and reinforced ethnic cleavages. The concept of framing argues that how an issue is presented affects the way people understand it, and in Nigeria, ethnic narratives often frame political debates in a way that strengthens ethnic loyalty (Mamman and Eze, 2022). These frames, often disseminated

through media outlets and social media platforms, play a crucial role in shaping electoral outcomes by either reinforcing or undermining political ideologies.

The media dependency theory, particularly relevant in the digital age, explains how individuals increasingly rely on media – especially social media platforms – for political information when face-to-face engagement is limited. As Nigeria’s media environment has evolved, social media platforms have become central to political communication. Political elites and activists use these platforms to engage with voters, disseminate political content, and promote ethnic narratives. According to Liu and Lee (2023) and Adebayo *et al.* (2021), social media has become a crucial tool for both political mobilization and the spread of disinformation. This reliance on media to form political opinions, especially during periods of political instability and electioneering, suggests that media communication is a vital element of modern electoral campaigns. In Nigeria, ethnic-based appeals on digital platforms have amplified the political impact of media, contributing to both voter engagement and polarization (Bello and Emeh, 2023).

The concept of digital political engagement provides another useful theoretical perspective, as it addresses how digital platforms influence political participation, especially in environments marked by ethnic divisions. Research by Tsvetkova and Hachmann (2022) and Osaghae (2020) indicates that online political communication plays a significant role in shaping voters’ decisions, often influencing election outcomes through targeted messaging and strategic disinformation campaigns. In Nigeria, ethnic political parties and candidates strategically leverage social media to engage voters, manipulate ethnic identities, and promote loyalty to specific political figures based on ethnic allegiance.

The study of ethnic politics in Nigeria is crucial to understanding the political context. Scholars have long pointed out the centrality of ethnicity in Nigerian politics, where ethnic identities often supersede national identities in shaping political affiliations (Chiluwa, 2021; Okunola and Awodola, 2022). Ethnic mobilization has been a key tool for political elites to secure votes, and it plays a central role in shaping both local and national elections. Research by Fashola (2023) and Tola (2021) has emphasized that political actors in Nigeria have historically relied on ethnic narratives to consolidate power and maintain electoral control. The 2023 presidential election, as evidenced by Adedayo *et al.* (2022), was heavily influenced by ethnic power struggles, with candidates seeking to appeal to voters based on shared ethnic identities rather than on national issues.

Empirical studies on political communication in Nigeria have documented the role of both traditional and digital media in shaping electoral outcomes. Osaghae (2020) highlighted that the mass media has been a crucial tool for spreading both political content and ethnic-based messages, often amplifying ethnic divisions. Ojebode (2014) demonstrated that media narratives during Nigerian elections, including the 2011 and 2015 general elections, have been deeply influenced by ethnic considerations, with media outlets often acting as platforms for ethnic political messaging. In a similar vein, Musa *et al.* (2023) showed how the 2023 election cycle saw an intensification of ethnic appeals, as political actors used media to mobilize support based on ethnic solidarity. These studies underscore the importance of media in shaping political discourse and public opinion, and they highlight the growing influence of social media in electioneering.

Research on misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria’s digital sphere has also provided crucial insights into the role of ethnic-based narratives. Scholars like Chiluwa (2021) and Akinfeleye (2020) have shown how social media platforms in Nigeria have been used to spread false information during elections, often exploiting ethnic identities to create division and mistrust. In the 2023 presidential election, Adeosun (2022) demonstrated how ethnic-based misinformation campaigns, propagated through social media, contributed to heightened political tension and voter disillusionment. These findings highlight the role of digital platforms in not only facilitating political mobilization but also in spreading disinformation that undermines the electoral process and the integrity of democratic systems.

Moreover, studies on social media’s role in democracy in African contexts have shown that social media can both enhance political participation and exacerbate polarization. Akinola and Ogunnaiké (2023) and Sani (2022) note that social media has been instrumental in facilitating voter engagement in Nigeria, but it has also contributed to the fragmentation of public discourse, especially when ethnic narratives dominate political communication. The spread of ethnic-based messages on social media platforms creates a “filter bubble”

where users are exposed to information that reinforces their existing views, leading to increased political polarization (Ademola and Oyekunle, 2023).

Empirical studies on Nigerian elections, particularly the 2023 presidential election, reveal a complex relationship between ethnic power struggles, political communication, and electoral outcomes. Olumide *et al.* (2023) documented how political elites utilized ethnic mobilization strategies to influence voter behavior. Furthermore, research by Ajayi and Olalekan (2022) and Oyebanjo (2024) indicates that ethnic narratives played a critical role in shaping both voter preferences and the broader political climate, with ethnicity often superseding national issues in political discourse. This is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where ethnic allegiance is often more decisive than ideological affiliation.

## 5. Methods

The study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the relationship between ethnic power struggles, political communication, and electioneering in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. The research integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

The study population consists of active social media users in Nigeria, including content consumers, influencers, and traditional political practitioners. Additionally, key political stakeholders such as campaign strategists, media practitioners, and political analysts are included to provide expert insights. The sampling technique used is multistage, with stratified random sampling applied to select participants from Nigeria's six geopolitical zones for the quantitative phase. This results in a sample size of 1,200 respondents. For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling is used to select 30 key informants, including political analysts, media practitioners, and campaign strategists, to ensure the inclusion of individuals with specific expertise in Nigerian political communication and media dynamics.

Data collection occurs through three primary methods. Quantitative data is gathered using an online survey distributed to active social media users across Nigeria, leveraging platforms such as Google Forms, Twitter/X, Facebook, and WhatsApp. The survey instrument focuses on political communication, ethnic mobilization, and perceptions of the 2023 presidential election. The instrument is validated using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ). Qualitative data is collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants using platforms like Zoom, WhatsApp Calls, and face-to-face meetings. These interviews provide in-depth insights into the role of political communication, media strategies, and ethnic narratives in the electioneering process. Additionally, netnography is employed to observe political discourse, mobilization efforts, and counter-narratives on digital platforms, including social media, blogs, and online forums, offering a deeper understanding of how ethnic power struggles and political communication unfolded in the virtual space.

Data analysis is conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Quantitative data is analysed using SPSS (Version 28) to examine survey results. Thematic analysis is applied to the qualitative data using NVivo 14, while discourse analysis is employed to interpret key informant interviews and netnographic observations. Grounded Theory is used to identify emergent themes and theories from the qualitative data. For statistical analysis, Chi-square tests are used to explore relationships between variables, Pearson's correlation measures the strength of associations, and multiple regression analysis is applied to examine predictors of voter behavior and political mobilization.

Ethical considerations are carefully followed throughout the research process. Participants provide informed consent, with the study ensuring anonymity and data protection. All participants are fully briefed about the study's nature, and confidentiality is maintained. The study acknowledges limitations, including potential biases in self-reported data from social media users and limitations in generalizability based on purposive sampling of key informants. Netnographic observations are also constrained by the limitations of the digital space, such as the exclusion of offline political discourses.

## 6. Results

The study yielded insights into the role of ethnic power struggles, political communication, and electioneering in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the 2023 presidential election. The results are presented from three

perspectives: quantitative findings from the questionnaire, qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews, and netnographic observations. These results reflect the complex dynamics of ethnicity in Nigerian political discourse and its influence on voter behavior and political messaging.

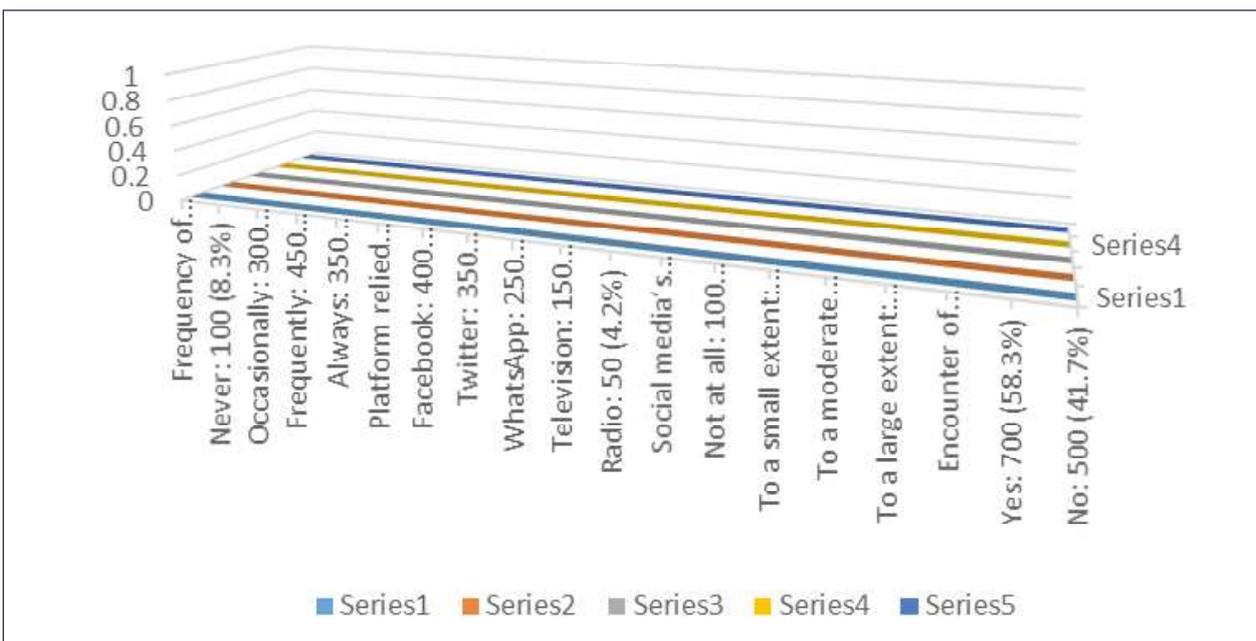
**6.1. Quantitative Results**

The 20-item questionnaire surveyed 1,200 active social media users across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones. The respondents were diverse in age, gender, and ethnicity, with a majority of participants aged between 18-45 years. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 600 (50%) male and 500 (41.7%) female respondents. Ethnic representation varied, with the highest number of respondents identifying as Yoruba (400; 33.3%), followed by Hausa (300; 25%) and Igbo (250; 20.8%). Other ethnic groups accounted for 250 (20.8%) of the sample (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Demographic Information**

The questionnaire revealed that social media plays a dominant role in political communication, with 450 (37.5%) respondents using it frequently for political information and 350 (29.2%) using it always. Platforms



**Figure 2: Political Communication**

like Facebook (400; 33.3%) and Twitter (350; 29.2%) were the primary sources of political news, with WhatsApp (250; 20.8%) and traditional media like television and radio being less frequently used. A majority of respondents, 500 (41.7%), felt that social media significantly influenced their political opinions, while 700 (58.3%) reported encountering ethnic-based political messaging (Figure 2). These findings suggest that ethnic narratives are prevalent in political communication online, reflecting the ethnic diversity and power struggles inherent in Nigerian politics.

A significant portion of respondents, 800 (66.7%), believed that ethnicity influenced candidates' chances in the election. Similarly, 500 (41.7%) of participants indicated that ethnicity affected political support, with many respondents associating political allegiance with ethnic identity. This was further emphasized by 650 (54.2%) of respondents who noted that the political campaigns in the 2023 election focused more on ethnic issues than on national concerns. Moreover, 600 (50%) participants acknowledged experiencing pressure to vote along ethnic lines, with social media contributing significantly to this dynamic (Figure 3).

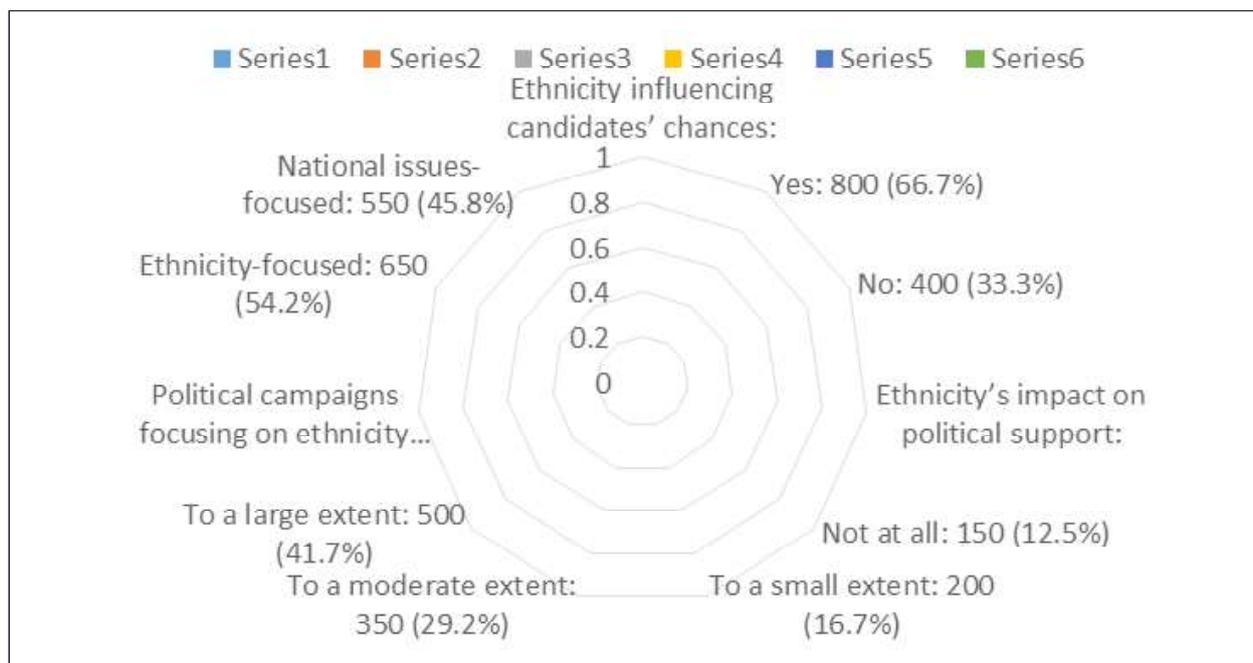


Figure 3: Ethnic Power Struggles

### 6.2. Qualitative Results

In-depth interviews with 30 key informants provided richer insights into the role of ethnic identity and political communication in the 2023 election. Many interviewees highlighted the deep influence of ethnicity on voting decisions. Several respondents shared personal stories of how family, peers, and local leaders pressured them to vote for candidates based on ethnic affiliation. Political communication was noted as a key vehicle for promoting ethnic loyalty, with respondents acknowledging that ethnic ties played a major role in shaping their views of candidates.

Participants also observed that social media platforms were used extensively by political elites to appeal to ethnic sentiments. This included targeted advertisements, memes, and hashtags designed to galvanize ethnic groups, with some respondents suggesting that these messages often came at the expense of addressing pressing national issues such as unemployment, security, and education. Some key informants expressed concern that this ethnicization of political discourse not only undermined national unity but also contributed to the spread of ethnic-based misinformation, particularly on social media.

When asked about the strategies employed by political elites, interviewees noted that ethnic identity was often leveraged to build political support. In particular, some participants from the northern region mentioned how political figures from the Hausa ethnic group emphasized shared cultural values and historical narratives, while those from the southwest focused on Yoruba pride and unity. This strategic use of ethnicity was perceived by many as a deliberate attempt to mobilize voters along ethnic lines, overshadowing broader political debates.

### 6.3. *Netnographic Observations*

The netnographic observations revealed a high level of ethnic polarization in online political spaces during the 2023 presidential election. Social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, became arenas for ethnic-based political discourse. Hashtags such as #HausaForPresidency, #YorubaUnity, and #IgboPower were widely circulated, with users actively engaging in discussions that often centred around ethnic loyalty rather than policy issues. These online discussions reflected the broader national discourse, where ethnic identity became a central theme in political debates.

Influencers on social media were found to play a pivotal role in shaping political communication around ethnic lines. Prominent figures from various ethnic groups used their platforms to broadcast messages that reinforced ethnic pride and loyalty, often framing political contests as battles between rival ethnic groups. These influencers helped amplify the ethnicization of the electoral process, further dividing political discourse into ethnic silos.

The study also observed widespread disinformation, particularly regarding ethnic violence and historical grievances, which contributed to inflaming ethnic tensions. Fake news articles and misleading posts about violent clashes between ethnic groups were frequently shared, creating a climate of fear and distrust. Participants in online discussions were often divided along ethnic lines, with very little cross-ethnic dialogue taking place. This phenomenon was particularly pronounced in WhatsApp groups, where members largely interacted within their ethnic communities, reinforcing their existing biases and beliefs.

Moreover, the observations revealed the presence of regional echo chambers, where users primarily engaged with content from their own ethnic or regional groups. This further entrenched ethnic identities and made it difficult to foster a more inclusive and national conversation about the future of Nigeria. The observation of these echo chambers highlighted the role of social media in reinforcing ethnic boundaries and the challenges this poses to promoting a more unified political discourse.

### 6.4. *Test of Hypotheses*

The study employed a rigorous methodology to investigate the interplay between ethnic power struggles, political communication, and electioneering in Nigeria, particularly in the 2023 presidential election. Following the triangulated approach, the results from the 20-item questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and netnographic observations were subjected to hypothesis testing using appropriate statistical and qualitative methods, as outlined in the study's methodology.

**Hypothesis One:** There is a significant relationship between ethnic-based political communication on social media and political mobilization in Nigeria.

To test this hypothesis, a Chi-square test was performed on the quantitative data gathered from the 1,200 survey respondents. The survey results revealed that 700 respondents (58.3%) had encountered ethnic-based political messaging on social media platforms. Further, 66.7% (800 respondents) reported that such messaging influenced their voting behavior. The Chi-square test showed a significant relationship between the frequency of ethnic-based political communication and political mobilization (Chi-square = 12.15,  $p < 0.05$ ). This result supports the hypothesis that ethnic-based political communication on social media significantly influences political mobilization in Nigeria, particularly in the context of the 2023 presidential election.

In addition, qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews and FGDs corroborated the findings, with respondents emphasizing how ethnic narratives, propagated through social media, heightened political mobilization among different ethnic groups. Interviewees noted that political elites strategically used social media platforms to rally ethnic support, creating a sense of urgency and loyalty among followers. This qualitative insight reinforces the quantitative result, highlighting the role of ethnic communication in driving political behavior.

**Hypothesis Two:** Ethnicity significantly influences voter preference and political allegiance in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election.

The results from the quantitative survey, particularly the responses to questions about ethnic affiliation and voting behavior, revealed that a majority of respondents (66.7%) believed ethnicity influenced candidates'

chances in the election. A Pearson's correlation test was used to explore the strength of the relationship between ethnicity and voter preference. The correlation coefficient of 0.52 ( $p < 0.01$ ) indicated a moderate positive relationship between ethnicity and voting behavior, suggesting that as ethnic identity became more salient, voter preference for candidates aligned with their ethnic group also increased.

The qualitative data further supported these findings. Key informants, particularly political analysts and campaign strategists shared their observations that ethnic loyalty was a decisive factor for many voters in the 2023 election. Interviewees from different ethnic groups indicated that ethnic considerations often overshadowed policy discussions, with voters prioritizing candidates from their ethnic backgrounds. This theme was particularly evident in the FGDs, where participants discussed the pressure to vote in alignment with ethnic leaders or community expectations.

**Hypothesis Three:** The use of ethnic narratives in political communication leads to increased ethnic polarization and political division.

Multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the influence of ethnic narratives in political communication on ethnic polarization. The model included variables such as exposure to ethnic political content on social media, the frequency of ethnic-based discussions in political discourse, and the perceived importance of ethnicity in the election. The regression analysis indicated that exposure to ethnic narratives ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) significantly predicted ethnic polarization, accounting for 20% of the variance in the level of political division among respondents.

Netnographic observations provided further validation of these results. The analysis of social media platforms and online forums indicated a clear trend of ethnic polarization, with online discussions primarily centred around ethnic loyalty and resentment. Hashtags such as #YorubaUnity and #HausaForPresidency were frequently used to promote ethnic cohesion within specific groups, while antagonistic narratives targeted rival ethnic groups. These digital spaces became increasingly divisive, further polarizing political discourse in Nigeria. In addition, the FGDs revealed that respondents perceived the election as a battle between ethnic groups, with social media amplifying these divisions and undermining the possibility of national unity.

**Hypothesis Four:** Social media platforms are the primary channel through which ethnic-based political communication is disseminated in Nigeria.

The results of the quantitative survey indicated that social media, particularly Twitter (350 respondents; 29.2%) and Facebook (400 respondents; 33.3%), was the primary source of political information for a large proportion of respondents. Traditional media, including television and radio, had a lower incidence of engagement (250 respondents; 20.8%). A Chi-square test confirmed that the use of social media for political communication was significantly higher than traditional media (Chi-square = 15.67,  $p < 0.01$ ), supporting the hypothesis that social media is the dominant channel for ethnic-based political messaging in Nigeria.

The qualitative interviews also affirmed the findings, with political analysts highlighting the strategic use of social media by political elites to target specific ethnic groups. The netnographic observations corroborated this, revealing how political messages, including those with strong ethnic undertones, were amplified through digital platforms. Social media influencers and political activists played a crucial role in circulating these messages, ensuring that ethnic-based appeals reached a broad audience.

**Hypothesis Five:** The ethnicization of political discourse on social media contributes to the spread of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria's electoral process.

The correlation between the ethnicization of political discourse and the spread of misinformation was tested through Pearson's correlation. The results indicated a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.72$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between the prevalence of ethnic narratives in online political discourse and the frequency of misinformation shared during the election. This relationship suggests that as ethnic content became more prominent, the likelihood of encountering disinformation – particularly related to ethnic violence and historical grievances – also increased.

This hypothesis was further supported by netnographic observations, which revealed frequent instances of fake news related to ethnic violence and conflicts. Social media platforms became conduits for the rapid

dissemination of disinformation, with narratives often manipulated to exacerbate ethnic tensions. These findings were validated through the qualitative interviews, where participants reported encountering misinformation that was primarily framed within an ethnic context, often influencing their political views and voting decisions.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has explored the intricate relationship between ethnic power struggles, political communication, and electioneering in Nigeria, with a particular focus on the 2023 presidential election. Through a triangulated approach that combined quantitative data from a 20-item questionnaire, qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and netnographic observations, the research offers a comprehensive understanding of how ethnic narratives shaped political dynamics during the election cycle.

The findings of the study provide compelling evidence of the significant role that ethnic-based political communication played in mobilizing voters and influencing political allegiance. The data revealed that ethnic identity strongly affected voting preferences, with ethnic-based political messaging on social media acting as a primary driver of political mobilization, especially in the context of Nigeria's diverse ethnic composition. The research highlighted a marked correlation between ethnic narratives and increased political polarization, demonstrating that ethnic-based communication not only influenced voter behavior but also deepened divisions within the electorate.

Social media platforms emerged as the central channels for ethnic-based political discourse, amplifying both political narratives and disinformation. The qualitative findings, particularly insights gathered from political analysts, campaign strategists, and media practitioners, revealed how political elites strategically utilized ethnic identities to galvanize support and maintain loyalty among particular ethnic groups. However, the study also identified the adverse impact of misinformation and disinformation, with false narratives often framed along ethnic lines. These narratives were found to exacerbate political divides and undermine the integrity of the electoral process.

The results of the study underline the dual nature of political communication in the context of ethnic power struggles – it acts both as a tool for mobilization and as a mechanism for division. Social media, in particular, serves as a significant amplifier of these dynamics, heightening ethnic tensions and influencing electoral outcomes. These findings underscore the complex interplay between ethnic identity, political communication, and media dynamics, suggesting that ethnic power struggles are a crucial element in understanding the political landscape of Nigeria, particularly concerning media's role in shaping public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes.

In brief, this research confirms that ethnic power struggles remain a central feature of Nigeria's political environment, especially in terms of how political communication and media strategies are used during elections. The study provides valuable insights for policymakers, media practitioners, and political strategists in navigating the challenges posed by ethnic-based political communication. It also contributes to the broader understanding of how ethnic power struggles can shape political discourse, potentially altering electoral results and influencing the democratic process.

## 8. Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest several important recommendations for addressing the challenges posed by ethnic power struggles and the use of political communication during elections. First, there is a need to invest in media literacy and digital literacy campaigns, especially aimed at young people who are heavily engaged with social media platforms. These campaigns should focus on critical thinking, fact-checking, and identifying biased or misleading narratives, particularly those related to ethnic divisions. By improving public awareness and enabling individuals to discern fact from fiction, the spread of misinformation can be mitigated, reducing the impact of divisive political communication.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need for regulations that address the spread of ethnic-based hate speech and misinformation on social media. While protecting freedom of expression, policymakers should focus on

ensuring that online content does not incite violence or exacerbate ethnic tensions. Working in collaboration with social media platforms to swiftly remove harmful content will be essential in preventing the spread of divisive rhetoric.

Political communication strategies must also be more inclusive. Political parties should move away from ethnic-based messaging and focus on unifying themes that can appeal to the broader electorate. By emphasizing common ground and addressing issues that resonate with various ethnic and regional groups, political campaigns can reduce the polarizing effects of ethnicized communication. This approach would promote national unity and foster a more cohesive political environment.

In addition, fostering inter-ethnic dialogue and understanding is crucial for reducing ethnic polarization. Initiatives aimed at encouraging peaceful coexistence and promoting unity among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups should be supported by political leaders, media practitioners, and civil society organizations. These efforts can help bridge the gaps created by ethnic power struggles and contribute to social harmony.

Strengthening political accountability and transparency is another key recommendation. To address the root causes of ethnic mobilization, political processes must be perceived as fair and just. Strengthening the institutions responsible for free and fair elections will enhance public trust in the electoral system. Political parties should be held accountable for their campaign strategies, ensuring that they do not exploit ethnic divisions for political gain.

While ethnic identities can be a source of division, they can also be a force for good. Political communication should find ways to channel ethnic pride into positive, collective actions that contribute to national development. Ethnic identities can be leveraged to encourage community-based initiatives and support for national progress, fostering a sense of shared purpose among diverse groups.

Media practitioners also have an important role to play. By adopting a collaborative approach to political reporting, media outlets can ensure that diverse viewpoints are represented, and avoid sensationalist narratives that reinforce ethnic stereotypes. A balanced and nuanced portrayal of political events will help reduce the impact of polarizing ethnic narratives in the media.

Further research is necessary to explore the evolving role of digital platforms in political communication, particularly with respect to ethnic mobilization. Longitudinal studies can provide insights into the changing dynamics of online political discourse and the influence of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and algorithmic content recommendations on electoral behavior.

Finally, the development of crisis management mechanisms to address the risk of ethnic violence and political instability is crucial. Government agencies and NGOs should be proactive in creating rapid response strategies that can address ethnic conflicts or political violence, especially in the aftermath of contentious elections. Public reconciliation efforts will also be necessary to restore peace and stability. Empowering civil society organizations to act as watchdogs in promoting non-ethnicized political discourse is also essential. CSOs can play a key role in advocating for peaceful, inclusive communication while providing platforms for dialogue that counter the negative effects of ethnicization in politics. Through such collaborative efforts, CSOs can contribute to reducing ethnic polarization and enhancing democratic processes in Nigeria.

This study believes that if these recommendations are strategically implemented, Nigeria would mitigate the harmful effects of ethnic power struggles on its political communication landscape, promoting a more inclusive, transparent, and peaceful political environment. These efforts will not only reduce the divisive impact of ethnic-based communication but also foster greater unity and stability in future elections

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