Prophesied to be in Office: Interrogating and Communicating the Influence of Electoral Prophecies in Nigeria

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Abstract

The role of religion and communication in Nigeria's politics is undeniably pronounced and has arguably shaped the electoral process since the commencement of the present democratic dispensation. Especially, several studies suggest that Nigerians vote along ethnic and religious lines, however, insight into the phenomenon of electoral prophecy is lacking. This may not be unconnected to the under appreciation of the increasing role religious leaders have assumed in Nigeria's democratic process, which have warranted frequent divine predictions and prophecies insinuating a possible winner or loser in elections. As a result, religious leaders have been much sought after by political office seekers at all levels. Relying on both primary and secondary data, this study examines the impact of electoral prophecy on voters' choices in elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: Communication, Democracy, Election, Prophecy, Religion.

Introduction

There is a renewed recognition among scholars, think tanks and government on the influence of religion in shaping the socio-economic preferences and political identities of persons or group of persons in the world today (Pew Research, 2006). In contemporary times, religion has touched all facets of human existence, informing and shaping the way we live and interact with others (Nolte, Danjibo & Oladeji, 2009). Africa is one of the continents that provide thick and rich evidence of/on the interactions between religion and other spheres of life especially politics. It is religiously the world most dedicated region with an astronomical increase in the growth, presence and activities of religious organizations (Mangolos & Weinreb, 2013). In fact, there is an estimated 517 million Christians and 248 million Muslims in Africa respectively, and religious leaders are well respected far above political leaders in the continent (Pew Research, 2017).

Nigeria offers one of the best social laboratories in Africa to understand and interrogate the influence of religion on the African society especially as regards the emergence and continuous influence of religious leaders in African politics. This is because according to the

National Population Commission (2023), an estimated 40% are Christians and 50% Muslims are found in Nigeria (https://www.thisdaylive.com), making it the sixth-largest Christian population in the world and fifth largest Muslim population in the world. And also (5) five Nigerian religious leaders are among the richest pastors in Africa while Nigeria play host to many tele-evangelists that are owners of mega churches, radio and television stations with branches and wider reach in many Nigerian cities and several African countries (Ogunnubi & Ogbonna, 2020). More so, these "men of God" are routinely consulted by the political class for legitimation or endorsement. And many at times, they have influenced their congregants as regards active political participation (Burgess, 2015; Obadare, 2006).

However, a recurring decimal since Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 is the prevalence of prophetic utterances about Nigerian politics (Burgess, 2015). One particular aspect of these prophecies that have gained strong foothold in the Nigerian public space is statements concerning electoral outcomes proclaiming potential winners and losers. Many religious leaders in Nigeria are pseudo pollsters, although not trained in the science and art of electoral forecasting, have, however, formed the habit of making declarations on who will win or lose during elections in the country.

This frequent pronouncement posed significant threats to the current democratic project in Nigeria (Ikem, Ogbonna & Ognunubi, 2020). Given the high premium placed on the acquisition, demonstration and consolidation of state power by the ruling class in the country, electoral prophetism holds prospect of igniting ethno-religious and political conflicts in the country. While the dynamics and manifestations of electoral prophetism and its implications on the Nigerian state are beginning to receive scholarly attention, there is dearth of scholarship in understanding its influence in the just concluded 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper sets out to interrogate the dynamics and manifestation of electoral prophecies in Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

1. Find out the prophetic declarations about 2023 general elections.
2. Find out the influence of prophecy on voting.
3. Ascertain the implications of divine prophecies on Nigeria's electoral democracy.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods approach with qualitative dominance that included eight Focus Group Discussion (FGD) interviews consisting of 5-7 people in some locations, while others consisted 11-14 (particularly on the premises of selected churches) in the four States selected for this study, which include: Enugu, Lagos, Abuja, and Rivers respectively. These States were chosen because they are mainly Christian dominated and, election-related prophecies usually emanate from prominent religious figures located in these States. Respondents were first identified as members of their respective churches as well as voters in the just concluded 2023 general elections before participating in the interview in the premises of the church except in Abuja. The respondents were selected through purposive sampling, which was also complemented with the snowball sampling technique. The study also relied on an extensive review of secondary literature and analysis of related official reports on electoral prophecies.

Military Rule, Pro-Democracy Struggle, and Prophetic Activism

The entrance of prophetic mode of communication cannot be properly interrogated without the historical context that birthed it. The political trajectory of Nigeria was disrupted early immediately after independence in 1960. Between January and July 1966, a coup and a countercoup took place and became the beginning of 33 years' military rule in Nigeria. Perhaps, given the peculiarity and frequency of coups in Africa during the early 1980s to late 1990s, especially in West Africa, it incentivise the need to be foretold or privy about the possibility of such an event occurring. In the case of Nigeria, soothsayers were said to be the confidant and sole determinants of the personal conduct of Nigeria's former maximum ruler, the late General Sani Abacha (Mustapha, 1999).

As a result, there were several concerted efforts of civil society to force the military regime of General Sani Abacha out of power, particularly, fuelled by popular anger against the previous regime of General Ibrahim Babangida who aborted a democratic transition in 1993. It was in these pathetic conditions that the emergence of divine predictions (prophetism) was historically triggered to fill an existential void in the democratic struggle against military rule. According to Burgess (2015) Christian activism in Nigeria during this period employed a variety of strategies to influence the political sphere among which prophecy assumed an "antithetical political stances" of Pentecostal public pronouncements and protest against military regimes (Burgess, 2015, p.47). More so, the Pentecostalising effect of the public sphere and interpretation of physical realities resonated with popular imagination of repressive political power engendered by military regimes may not be limited only to indifference of institutions, but embellished with supernatural narrative (Marshall, 2010; Adelakun, 2022).

In its current manifestation, prophecy in some African democracies has become a more explicit and pronounced strategy of entrenching the presence and political relevance of not only Pentecostal leaders but Christian denominations also, professedly as a means to direct the nation and its people. Moreover, Ayatayo (2009), Burgess (2015), Obadare (2018) among others aver that the return to democracy eventually elevated Christian religious leaders to more influential roles in the political sphere in their attempt to propose spiritual solutions to tackle current socioeconomic and politico-moral problems confronting the society. Some of these religious leaders liken their role as being akin to those of Biblical Prophets who were able to blend both the political and spiritual roles. However, contention has arisen among others as to what degree has the elevated roles of Pentecostal leaders reinforced democratization process in Africa.

Nigeria Political Elites and Election Prophecy: Winning and Losing Election before you Contest

Several reasons have been adduced by scholars in an attempt to explain rising role of divine prediction role of Pentecostal clerics in the electoral process. Seemingly more convincing and evidential among others, Obadare (2022) persuasively argued that the widespread absence of most African state amid the far declining socio-economic standards of the people resulted to distrust of secular authorities which, consequently occasioned a popular resort to spiritual authorities whom the people feel are more trustworthy and reliable. In a 2022 cross-country Afrobarometer survey indicate as follows; majority of Africans say they trust their religious leaders as against political leaders and state institutions (Katenda, 2022). Other studies further confirm that religious leaders are increasingly more trusted than any government official or

institution during national crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic (Ossai, 2021; Agbo & Nche, 2022). Also, scholars have argued that a tangible manifestation of distrust of secular authorities is the breakdown of the social contract that binds citizens and the state. Consequently, citizens begin to adopt alternative coping strategies given the apparent ineffectiveness of the State. This is what Osaghae (1999) referred to as exiting from the State, which entails "retreat from the State by disaffected segments of the citizenry into alternative social, cultural, economic and political systems which are constructed in civil society" (Osaghae, 1999). Also, Obadare (2022) rightly pointed out that various non-state actors especially, religious bodies began to assume the role of the state; as a result, "Pastoral power and its announcements have become more relevant to the public than state power", further stating that, "One way in which the pastorate lays claim to legitimacy is through prophetic proclamations" (Obadare, 2022). (see https://www.cfr..org/blog/behind).

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of electoral prophecy has mostly enjoyed extensive media coverage with anecdotal studies such as Ayantayo (2009), Omenyo (2011), Ihejirika (2012), Burgess (2015), Deacon (2015), Nwolise (2015), Sackey (2017), Hove and Chenzi (2017), Acheampong (2018), Obadare (2006; 2018), Adelakun (2022), Ikem and Oladejo (2022). These studies have linked the resonance of prophecy to the ascendant political role of Pentecostal leaders in democracies across Africa. Hence, political leaders in Africa including presidents are reputed to frequently seek the guidance and assistance of prophets/pastors during national crisis or socioeconomic issues that may seem to defer effective policy response from the government. According to Omenyo (2011) "Some African heads of state are believed to seek assistance from men/women of God in times of serious national crises and this trend is more popular in times when there is an approaching presidential and parliamentary elections". These religious leaders are held in the highest regard for their spiritual powers and gifts, as well as the overwhelming influence they wield over millions of followers. During these periods, all kinds of prophets emerge to make predictions about the chances of various political parties and candidates. Further providing insights, Ellis and Haar (1998, p.188) states that:

> In Africa, however, unlike in Europe or North America, there is reason to believe that political elites do not use religion solely as a means of increasing their base of popular support but that in many cases they also believe that access to the spiritual world is a vital resource in the constant struggle to secure advantage over their rivals in political in-fighting.

In fact, scholars like Ellis and Haar (1998), Ayantayo (2009) and Omenyo (2011), have revealed in their studies of religion and politics in Africa, that the general perception holds sway among the publics and political elites about power having its roots in the invisible world. Consequently, several African leaders have had to surround themselves with spiritual experts whom they rely on for both the reinforcement of their power base as well for advice. With the resurgence of religion in the public space across Africa, Prophets/Pastors are increasingly being courted by politicians for spiritual endorsement. For instance, the former President of Ghana, Atta Mills, was reported to have visited late Prophet T.B. Joshua for prophetic direction during his 2008 presidential election bid. After his emergence as winner of the election, Mills attributed it to the prophetic revelation and direction of Prophet T.B. Joshua (Acheampong, 2018). Similarly, several prospective political candidates have trooped into churches seeking for prophetic insights with regard to their political pursuit (Obadare, 2018). As a result, in the case of Nigeria, before the

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) releases list of contestants, several media platforms are usually flooded by various pronouncements by Pentecostal Prophets/Pastors. Remarking about this same phenomenon in Ghana, Acheampong (2018, p.131-132) notes that:

> This form of political prophecy usually attracts national discourse, especially on public radio not only because of the pre-Christian notion of spiritual causality, but…generally, the alleged element of the unknown that is now revealed to the public- previously restricted to those within the 'spiritual circles'.

Acheampong (2018) further states that:

> The declaration of political prophecies works to the advantage of politicians in whose favour these predictions are made, since these enhance their electoral fortunes- not only in the eyes of Pentecostal voters, but also arguably non-Pentecostals, since the whole Ghanaian public sphere has been 'Pentecostalised'.

The view expressed above arguably depicts what obtains in Nigeria. Also, some Nigerian pastors are in the attitude of giving election-related prophecies about other countries electoral process. For instance, in a viral video that was shared on YouTube, a popular Nigerian pastor, Joshua Iginla gave a prophecy during 2019 crossover service at his church, about a possible crisis that may follow after the Malawian Constitution Court's annulment of the presidential election held in May 2019, calling on the general public to pray for Malawi to avert any political crisis. Seemingly confirming Iginla's prophecy, on the 3rd of February 2020, the Constitutional Court nullified the re-election of President Peter Mutharika and ordered for a presidential fresh election within 150 days. (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoEcFYpA2OQ).

Electoral Prophecies during Political Campaigns in Nigeria

As stated earlier, before the commencement of election campaigns in Nigeria, the public space is usually inundated with prophecies indicating a winner or loser. Elsewhere, the argument has been made that such election-related pronouncements by religious leaders are in contravention of existing electoral laws in the country (Ikem & Oladejo, 2022). Although the point was made that the Constitution guarantees individual rights to freedom of speech, however, the Electoral Act (2010 as amended) and the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc) Act (2015) restrain utterances capable of undermining the electoral process. For instance, the Electoral Act (2010 as amended) explicitly stipulates that places of religious worship should not be used to promote, propagate or attack political parties or candidates, or their programmes or ideologies (Cited in Ikem & Oladejo, 2022, p. 1901). However, it has been largely observed that majority of electoral prophecies are given in places designated for religious worship in Nigeria. Usually, the man of God may, during service, or at any special occasion such as crossover to a new year service, reel out supposedly divinely revealed issues whether about prominent political figures, celebrities, national or international potential occurrences among others. Referring to prophetic releases in Ghana, Acheampong (2018, p.127) observed that divine predictions as a form of political prophecy usually "gave hope and assurance of better times ahead in response to political crisis and or socioeconomic difficulties", however, in the present democratic dispensation, the reverse seem to be the case because prophecies are predominated by "negative happenings and calamities including floods, fire and the deaths of high profile politicians including presidents".

This distillation of the character of prophetic releases seem not to be the case in Nigeria; as present prophetic releases appears to express both hope and assurance on the one hand, while on the other, negative happenings and calamities. Whatever form these prophecies may take, the intention is however clear as to steer public interest to particular critical national issues in the public space.

It is unusual for politicians to seek spiritual endorsements from prominent religious leaders particularly, Pentecostals in Nigeria. Worth noting also, is the belief on the prophetic rhetoric largely deployed by contenders in order to appeal to the religiosity of voters. In this instance, prophecy has the possible effect of mobilizing a constituent for a particular party or candidate in an election. The widely contentious United States 2020 presidential election illustrates this point; where prophecies from evangelical leaders compelled a huge vote from majority of white evangelicals for former President Donald Trump (Smith, 2020). Hence, condemnation has increasingly trailed such prophetic declarations by pessimists, who argue that it undermines the deliberative democratic mode of the political process (Ikem, et al., 2021). It is important to note that despite rising acceptance of prophecies as a distinct mode of communicating God chosen candidate/ party in an election, there seem to be persistent discordant tunes that accompany such declarations among religious leaders (Nwolise, 2015). It is perhaps, for this reason that some have argued that it serves as a tool to attract political patronage and further expressed skepticism about providential nature of such prophetic claims (Obadare, 2018; Ikem, et al., 2021). For instance, Bishop Ayodeji Ipinmoroti had declared thus: "If Tinubu is interested, let him contest. I see him being crowned. But I need to tell it to his face on how to go about it as God had directed me to him" (Otabor, 2021).

Notwithstanding the opinion anyone may hold about the potential effect of electoral prophecies on the outcome of an election, recent survey suggests that Nigerians mostly trust pronouncements of their religious leaders more than their political leaders (Katenda, 2022). For instance, Reverend Father Mbaka, being the only non-Pentecostal priest, aptly described as the "spiritual authority on presidential politics in Nigeria" (Abati, 2018), have earned both national and international acclaim for his prophetic pronouncements on electoral outcomes. In 2015, Mbaka's prophecy unsettled Jonathan's administration when he publicly declared that the then President Jonathan was going to lose in the presidential election despite the latter garnering the support of several Christian leaders including those of the Catholic. Earlier, when the former First Lady, Mrs. Patience Jonathan visited his Adoration Ministry in Enugu, apparently to seek his support and endorsement, Rev. Mbaka rejected her gift and offertory; stating that he could not associate with someone God had not chosen for another term in office (Abati, 2018). According to report, the eventual outcome of the presidential election gave Mbaka more credibility among his followers and the then opposition party, All Progressives Congress (APC). As a result, he received a special invitation to the Presidential Villa reportedly equated to as though the Pope himself was visiting the capital city (Abati, 2018). It is doubtful whether Rev. Mbaka still enjoys the groundswell of goodwill after 2015 as he was subsequently sanctioned by the Catholic. Also, criticisms have trailed his frequent prophetic pronouncements about electoral outcome. For instance, a follow Catholic priest, Reverend Father Kelvin Ugwu, criticising Mbaka, stated thus:

> This time around, we have vowed never to listen to any self-acclaimed prophet and their prophecies. We are not saying prophecy is not good, but we are saying that the biggest prophecy from God in the 2023 election is for us to use our

common senses (Sunday, 2022) (see https://dailypost.ng/2022/06/16/2023why-you-must-ignore-mbakas-prophecy-on-peter-obi-fr-kelvin-sends-message-tonigerians/).

Moreover, Pastor Enoch Adeboye cautioned the seemingly indiscriminate spread of election-related prophecies as the 2023 general elections approached, thus: "Anyone who is prophesying now (that) this is the fellow who will win is deceiving you….You know why? Daddy (God) has not spoken yet; He hasn't said anything…. For one reason or the other, He has been very quiet on this one" (Oyero, January 7, 2023). Nevertheless, prior to Nigeria's 2023 general elections, the public space was inundated with prophecies indicating the fate of candidates in the presidential race.

Discussion of Findings

Objective 1. To find out the prophetic declarations about 2023 general elections in Nigeria

Table 1: Prophetic declarations about 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

S/n	Speaker	Declaration	Context of the Prophecy
1	Prophet Chris Okafor	I saw flag being given to Peter Obi but immediately he wanted to receive the flag, many forces rise up against him,	Peter Obi who was the running mate of Atiku Abubakar in 2019, left the PDP for Labour Party (LP) apparently for the party's failure to respect the
		they want to stop him from receiving the flag, but the good news is that they all failed.	rotation principle which undergird the sharing of political offices in Nigeria. Interestingly, when this prophecy was given many established contenders downplayed the LP perhaps due to its limited national appeal and spread.
2	Prophet Emmanuel Omale	I see people decamping to a party. I see people leaving a big famous party to a party that was famous before that is no longer famous. I see confusion and separation in a big party after the conference.	The prophet talks about a major theme among political parties- frequent defection.
3	Prophet Elijah Moses	God has revealed to me that the Igbo and Christians would dominate the government at all levels, including the National Assembly and a Christian President of Igbo extraction will take over the leadership of this country in 2023…."	This prophetic pronouncement fits into the marginalization narrative concerning Igbos and, particularly, accusations of the then President Buhari's led administration for being pro-northern and pro-Muslim.
4	Prophet Winner Williams Taras	God has already ordained that Peter Obi will be the President of Nigeria in 2023. I want Nigerians to know that there is a living God, this is the main reason the message of revelation is coming out.	According to media report, this cleric seems to have the reputation of credibility with his prophecies as he was said to have foresaw the defeat of Goodluck Jonathan in 2015.

5	Prophet Joshua Arogun	I am a prophet of God and by the grace of God, anything the Lord tells us comes to pass because we hear from him; we don't hear from men. We don't rely on public opinion for prophecies… I got a revelation about Nigeria's political dynamics in the next general election. I saw a man in prison (now released) and this man has been a former Governor from the South-East taking over from President Buhari.	Most prophets and pastors that announce election outcomes sometimes may want to create an impression about the credibility and providential claims of their prophecy.
6	Prophet Godfrey Gbujie	God's "plan" is that the proposed "2023 general elections" should and shall serve as mere "cannon fodder" to the judicious resolution of the very controversial "National question of Nigeria" to the satisfaction of His long-revealed "righteous judgment"	The insinuation that none of the presidential candidates will be sworn-in even when a winner has been declared by INEC is obviously aberrant to the 1999 Constitution (as amended).
7	Apostle Emmanuel Kure	Among all the leading contestants, God is yet to show me who will lead, but what I have seen and heard clearly	Although there was no follow up to this prophecy at least to provide clarity after the stipulated date,
		is that, by November (2022), God will shake the land and position the man to be our Messiah	essentially, political maneuvering was still playing out.
8	Bishop Ayodeji Ipinmoroti	If Tinubu is interested in the presidential race, let him contest. I can assure you he will win the election as God has shown me. Every problem has an expiry date. I can see the Nigerian workers jubilating. This will materialize if we do the right job by voting for God's chosen candidate for the 2023 election. That God chosen candidate is Tinubu.	The Prophet's declaration came amid speculations that Tinubu was interested in succeeding President Buhari.

	Pastor Sunday Nwolicha	I see many Christians in the North contesting for political offices. There will be a lot of manipulations by northern groups to remain in power or hold on to power. 2023 elections will be marred by electoral fraud, bribery and voting by under-aged (children precisely). Bola Ahmed Tinubu…will shock his political opponents, break grounds in the North and almost make his way to Aso Rock if he contests, but will meet with a strong brick wall that would crash his dream and entire political career and APC will be no more relevant.	This prophecy seems to be a reflection of popular narrative about the uncompromising dominance of northern Nigeria by Muslims as well as the prevalence of under-age voting that, as some analysts have argued, gives the North an undue electoral advantage compared to the South. Also, it is worth noting that the fact that such prophecy came far before intense political activities to seek for elective offices, may guide politicians in the direction to take.
	Prophet Shalom Kelvin Akinbo	I want you to know that God has rejected most of our leaders in this country…God is raising new leaders to lead Nigeria forward…. According to what I saw in the vision, the battle for the number one seat in this country can only be resolved by just one person who's not even a politician…Jack Rich is the new phase of Nigeria.	Political neophyte like Teinbo Jack Rich may have relied upon this prophecy to vie for the office of the president. Although he contested for the presidential ticket of the ruling APC, he failed to clinch it.

Source: Adopted with little modification from (Ikem, forthcoming).

Some of these prophecies sometimes reveal the identity-type of politics that is well entrenched in Nigeria. For instance, Pastor Alamu David based in Lagos State had, prior to the elections, declared that "Asiwaju (candidate of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) is the messiah of our time and denying him would be synonymous with the awful occurrence of Baba MKO Abiola and Baba Awolowo that we, especially the Yoruba tribe, regret afterward" (Nnamdi, 2022). The above prophecy maybe capable of stirring ethnic sentiments among voters, especially, among the Yoruba people.

Objective 2. To find out the influence of prophecy on voting.

During a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), participants revealed that they trusted the prophecy of their man of God more than what several opinion poll firms had disseminated based on scientifically generated data. But, one undeniable fact that opinion polls and electoral prophecies may have in common is the bandwagon effect. As observed during discussions with participants, there was a high tendency for prophecy to influence Christians more than any other religious group. Despite the subjectivity and non-scientific basis of prophecies, the tendency to believe them more than an objectively scientifically generated election forecast, suggests that the

religiosity of the people predominate more than any comparable variables. Although, arguments around the science of polls are rife between two strands of views. In the view of some analysts, polls may demonstrate how robust the democratic process is, and give the electorate adequate information to deduce the quality of a political party. On the other hand, some see polls as allowing citizens to be manipulated and induced through some emotional process which deprive them from expressing individual-held preference as indicative of the failure of the democratic process (Marsh, 1985; Stolwijk, et al., 2017). While one may argue that in Nigeria, multi-ethno-religious character of the society may raise public suspicion as the veracity forecast outcomes by pollsters, it is worse as politicians are quick to bastardise results that do not favour them. This was mostly the case in the just concluded 2023 general elections. As earlier stated, the fact that recently conducted cross-country survey by Afrobarometer suggests that majority of Africans say they trust their religious leaders as against political leaders and state institutions (Katenda, 2022), may give a hint to the popularity and legitimacy of divine electoral predictions in Nigeria.

Objective 3. Ascertain the implications of divine prophecies on Nigeria's electoral democracy.

Implications of Divine Prophecies on Nigeria's Electoral Democracy

As part of the struggle against military rule in Nigeria, Christian activism has contributed in no small measure towards the transition to democratic rule (Burgess, 2015). Similarly, some have pointed to the roles of Christian religious leaders to advance democratic tenets and practices in their mediatory role for a stable political system (Acheampong, 2018). In spite of these laudable credentials, the tendency of prophetic declarations by predominantly Pentecostal leaders in the 2023 Nigeria's general elections may demonstrate a possible strain in the electoral process. Arguably, the deluge of prophecies have greatly contributed in amplifying the sudden surge of dissatisfaction and distrust of INEC, as demonstrated in the swift rejection of INEC's declared presidential result. For instance, some clerics who prophesied in favour of a particular candidate have also denounced the result, making insinuation that the results were manipulated to favour the declared winner. For instance, the Peoples Democratic Party Presidential Campaign Council (PDPPCC) spokesman, Dino Melaye, who had publicly celebrated the prophecy of Prophet Mike Agboola about the victory of Atiku Abubakar, staged a walked out with his team from the National Collation Centre for the Presidential Election in Abuja, accusing the national Chairman of INEC of working in concert with the ruling party to rig the election. Recall the prophecy of Bishop Feyi Daniels cited earlier, which also hinted that a man in the system was collaborating with the ruling party to rig the election.

More so, the possibility of these prophetic pronouncements to discredit INEC cannot be ruled out. Despite the innovative introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) by INEC to ensure credible verification of voters, as well as the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) to improve on transparency of the electoral process for prompt transition of results from the 176, 734 polling units spread across the country to a central collation centre, sadldly, some political analysts and commentators were not satisfied with the outcome of the presidential election. Critics and commentators cite the humongous amount that went into procuring these devices and the assurances INEC gave Nigerians before the elections. As a strategy to eliminate vote rigging and election manipulation, the IReV was designed as a platform to enable transmission of election results from the various polling units spread across the country to the

central collation centre. Regrettably, there were difficulties transmitting the presidential election results from the various polling units due to technical issues. As the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2023) report reveals that two days after the presidential election which held on February 25, 2023, only 53, 154 polling unit results out of 176, 734 were available on the IReV platform. Consequently, there have been widespread allegations that "the IReV and BVAS technologies were deliberately disrupted in collusion with internal saboteurs in INEC whose aim was to circumvent and manipulate the presidential election process" (CDD, 2023, p. 5). The CDD report went further to state that "The fact that some Senatorial and Federal House of Representatives elections were uploaded, but not the presidential results, also fuelled rumours of vote manipulation" (CDD, 2023, p. 5). Therefore, there is public perception that the electoral process managed by INEC was not transparent and accountable enough which makes it susceptible to accusations by religious leaders of manipulation and the reason why their prophecies did not manifest. While widespread criticisms and subsequent litigations against the declared presidential result continues, there is sufficient reason to believe that prophecies is contributing to promote this distrust and brewing condemnation of the electoral Commission.

On the other hand, the contempt for credible and scientifically generated data through public opinion polls seems to be widespread among leading political parties and their supporters in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Regrettably, some of the surveys carried out by reputable organizations prior to the 2023 general elections were rejected by those it did not favour. In advanced democracies, outcomes of polls on election matters- party programmes and candidates among others- can provide insight and direction for both contesting parties/candidates as well as to the electorate. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, given the contentious nature of politics as well as the poor culture of relying on polls' results on any public issue, it is therefore, not surprising that the credibility of scientifically generated data- especially, as it relates to election, have always caused controversy among political actors. One of the essential elements that both public polls and prophecy seem to share in common is the degree of their credibility and ability to sway public opinion to a particular party or candidate. However, the distinction between prophetic claims and scientifically generated opinion polls data is arguably antithetical and seemingly irreconcilable.

This is because opinion polls systematically and methodologically take into consideration empirical factors and variables in the electoral environment to arrive at a verifiable conclusion of possible outcome of an election or party/candidate respectively. On the other hand, prophecies are mainly spiritual communications which only a receiver relays to a people with rarely any prove that it was divinely inspired or revealed. As rightly observed by Ellis and Ter Haar (1998), the predominant believe that power has its ultimate origin in the invisible world resonates among public.

More importantly, the propensity to trigger political conflict along ethno-religious lines given the diverse nature of the Nigerian society cannot be totally ruled out. For instance, amid the avalanche prophecies that characterized the 2015 presidential elections pre-empting a win for the then President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian Southerner against the incumbent president, Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim Northerner, ex-militant leaders and their groups from Jonathan's Niger Delta region, threatened war if the election turned out otherwise (Ikem, 2020). As reported, the exmilitant leaders were bend on carrying out attacks on strategic oil facilities spread across Niger Delta partly due to support for their son; but more importantly, the patronage which they were enjoying from Jonathan government's lucrative oil pipelines contracts. Therefore, the

possibility exists for prophetic pronouncement to create threats or actual crisis in Nigeria's fragile multicultural society of great concern to the sustenance of its democratic governance and security.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted a neglected aspect of Nigeria's electoral process, election-related prophecies and its influence on the process. The fact that religious resurgence in Africa, particularly in Nigeria amid an undermining historical/political context that demonstrated state failure suggests its relevance in today's electoral process. First, it is assumed by many religiously minded Nigerians, that the plethora of problems confronting the country needs a corrupt-free and righteous leadership to address them. Unfortunately, many still doubt the processes of leadership recruitment as enabling the expected messianic leadership to emerge. Therefore, it is assumed that a God chosen leadership can be trusted and held accountable at least to God, hence, the believe that through prophecy, such individuals meant to assume leadership positions in the country are revealed. More importantly, is the notion that power is rooted in the spiritual or invisible world.

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