HOW TO VOTE OR HOW NOT TO VOTE: REVISITING VOTING PATTERNS AND VOTERS BEHAVIOUR DURING NIGERIA'S 2011 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Although there were irregularities during the Nigerian presidential election of 2011, it was widely described as comparatively fairer than other elections conducted since the current democratic dispensation began in 1999. In 2011, over 5 in 10 electorates voted for Goodluck Jonathan of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP); just over 3 in 10 electorates voted for Muhammadu Buhari of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC); and approximately 1 in 10 people voted for Nuhu Ribadu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). The PDP has been in power since 1999. However, in 2011 roughly 4 in 10 electorates did not vote for the party. Approximately 10% of those who did not vote for the PDP also failed to vote for the other two main contenders – the CPC and the ACN. Those who did not vote for any of the three main political parties had their reasons. A good number of them were yet to establish their own personal political philosophy so they lacked strong affiliation with any political party. Many of them were unsure about how to vote in the elections making them open to input from any campaign. Some of them crossed party lines in the course of the campaigns. These characteristics are indicative of electorates that are often described as **swing voters**. Their behaviours are not always very easy to predict, but a very helpful starting point is to continuously track their spatial concentration. Swing voters can be crucial in presidential elections especially if it is a two-horse race!
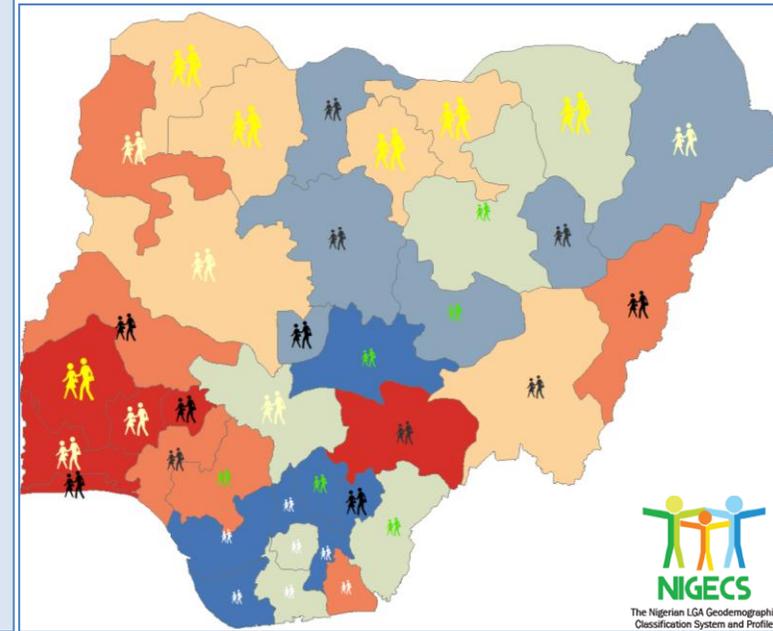
The maps that accompany this commentary compare the degree of spatial concentration of those who voted for each of the three main presidential aspirants in 2011 with the concentration of those described here as swing voters. Concentration indices were derived by transforming the corresponding shares of electorates and mapped using a quantile classification which helps maximise between-class differences and minimise within-class differences. From these maps, it is easy to detect clustering and correlation between voters and the geopolitical structure of Nigeria. Core PDP voters were highly concentrated in the South-South and South-East; CPC voters were concentrated in the North-West and North-East; and ACN voters were largely concentrated in the South-West, the North-West corridor and pockets of the North-Central zone. Swing voters were distinctly concentrated in many states in the Northern half of the country and with some significant representation in the South-West. **Amazingly, these geographical jurisdictions were supposed to be power houses of the two main opposition parties**. What is also noteworthy is that there is often a positive correlation between swing voters and those electorates who eventually abstain from elections. This means that there is an increased probability that the majority of eligible voters who stayed away from the 2011 election are located in the power houses of the main opposition parties! If this was the case, how did the opposition really expect to defeat the incumbent? It would be interesting to undertake a spatial analysis of those who registered for the election but failed to vote if only INEC would make these datasets available or if the opposition parties understood the power and usefulness of such analysis.

Could the story of that election have been different if the opposition parties knew: (1) That they needed to put aside their differences and form an alliance? (2) That after forming an alliance, they would require just over 20% more committed electorates to topple the PDP? (3) That while campaigning, they also needed a strategy to increase voter turn-out by around 20%-25% rather than depend on INEC to encourage people to come out and exercise their civil rights? (4) That those electorates who were highly unlikely to vote were actually located in their (opposition parties) backyards? (5) The best messages to take to these electorates to convince them to take part in the elections. Subtle intelligence of this nature can be derived from techniques and thinking within the field of quantitative electoral geography and backed up with action on the ground. Raising voter turnout during Nigerian presidential elections to around 70% is not something that cannot be achieved. In the 2003 presidential election, turnout stood at approximately 69%. Recent coordinated activities such as those witnessed during protests against the removal of petroleum subsidy coupled with the rapid upsurge in the use of digital social media especially amongst Nigerian youths are clear indications that voter apathy can be contained and reduced.

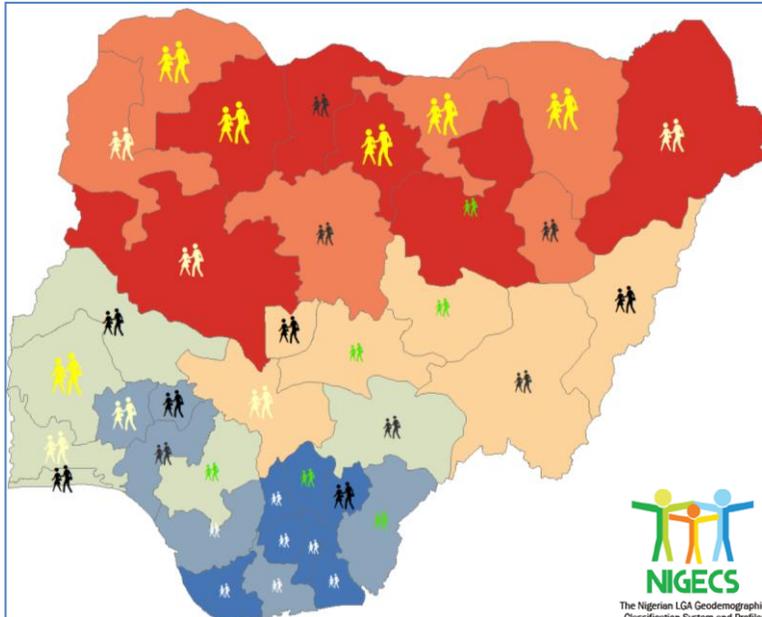## CONCENTRATION OF ACN VOTES VS. INDICATIVE CONCENTRATION OF ALL SWING VOTERS

If Goodluck Jonathan is retained as the PDP presidential flag bearer in 2015, and the political parties in opposition are unable to form an alliance, then we can expect to see a repeat of these spatial patterns of concentration. However, the share of votes that will accrue to the PDP in South-West states is highly likely to diminish. The ACN may not directly benefit from this as it appears to be losing its grip on the South-West. This reduction in PDP votes will still be insufficient for any opposition party to claim victory if an alliance is not formed. Should a different flag bearer be chosen by the PDP, then we can expect some significant distortions in these spatial patterns. The prediction and visual representation of these distortions are outside the scope of this short commentary but part of further work. Nonetheless, the emphasis here is that political parties need to become more sophisticated in their handling of spatial and quantitative electoral datasets and understand how these can be combined to their advantage with ancillary information.

While this list is not exhaustive, here are some issues that the opposition must consider in order to mount a formidable challenge against the incumbent in 2015: (1) Refresh their manifestos and rebrand themselves to show the public that they have clear understanding of the monumental human development challenges like poverty and unemployment confronting grass-root voters (2) Device, outline and continually communicate new feasible and viable strategies for mitigating these challenges(3) Start from now to radically work with their state governors, parliamentary representatives and LGA chairmen to raise their game. A working state can be used as a case study during campaigns but many of the states held by opposition parties are not working! (4) Purge themselves of hypocrites and sycophants and take the lead in the practice of internal democracy (5) Strengthen their capability to build local/community level intelligence and understanding of voting patterns and voters behaviour
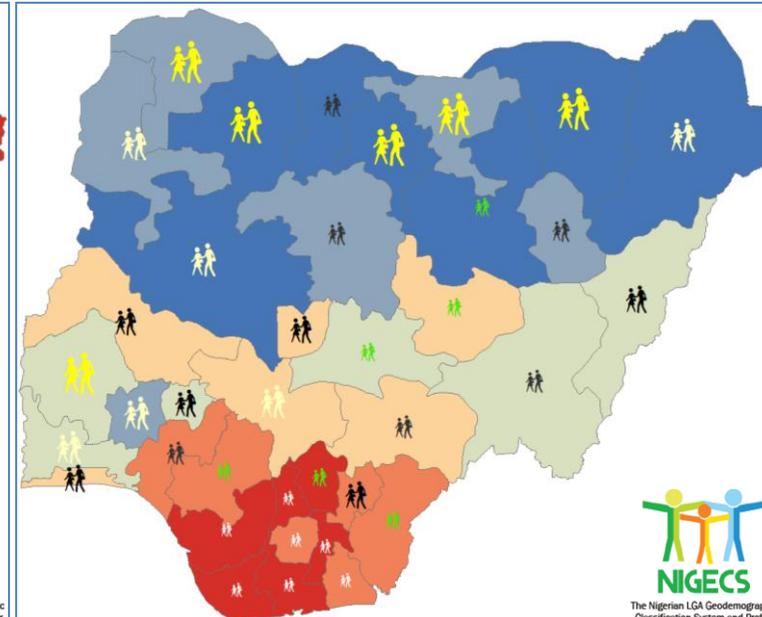
(6) Larger opposition parties need to form an alliance that works with other smaller parties. Without this, the voting public will remain largely polarised along multiple fault lines. This will remain favourable for the PDP (7) Adopt differential bespoke social marketing strategies to target and raise voter turn-out by up to 20%. A one-size fits all will not work! (8) Push for diaspora-based Nigerian citizens to vote in elections.

Above all, Nigerians must move beyond voting along ethno-religious fault lines if they expect elections to translate to credible and accountable governance.

CONCENTRATION OF CPC VOTES VS. INDICATIVE CONCENTRATION OF ALL SWING VOTERS

CONCENTRATION OF PDP VOTES VS. INDICATIVE CONCENTRATION OF ALL SWING VOTERS

Concentration of votes secured by party
- Very Low
- Low
- Below Average
- Average
- High
- Very High

Indicative concentration of swing voters
- Very Low
- Low
- Below Average
- Average
- High
- Very High

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