INTER-EMIRATE STRUGGLES AND ITS INFLUENCE ON GUBERNATORIAL COMPETITION IN KEBBI 2007-2023

BASIRU AHMAD
Department of Political Science Federal University Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State
Rfbahmad@Gmail.Com, 08144711253 ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8840-9597

SULEIMAN MUHAMMAD
Federal university Birnin Kebbi Department of Political science
Sulenairazkk@gmail.com

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Abstract

The persistent political dominance of Gwandu emirate especially by producing all the elected governors from 2007 to 2023 has created perceptions of marginalization among the other emirates, particularly, Argungu, Zuru and Yauri. This study therefore, examines the influence of inter-emirate struggles on gubernatorial competition in Kebbi State.
Methodology/Theory: *The study was anchored on case study approach. The data was collected using qualitative instruments of data collections. KII, IDI and FGD were utilized the main instruments of data collections. For KII and 25 respondents was selected using purposive sampling techniques. Data was presented and analyzed using thematic method. Social identity theory was adopted as the theoretical framework of analysis.*
Findings*: Findings reveal that Gwandu Emirate has historically maintained political dominance due to institutional advantages which include numerical strengths, also it was discovered that Gwandu controlled virtually structures of all major political parties and has the high numbers of local government in the state. In addition, the study discovered that there is no formal rotational principle of zoning between the emirates. Hence, gubernatorial election became highly competitive*
Contribution to Knowledge*: The studies bring about a modest and objective field-based study of sub-ethnic identity in Kebbi State making radical departure beyond the popular ethnic narratives. Also, the study has popularized the use of Social identity theory as framework of analysis in political Science.*
Recommendations*: The Study recommends the development of zonal rotation of governorship position; creation of inclusiveness, dialogue and justice between the emirates; and allocation of resources and projects to emirates*

Introduction

The interplay between group struggles and electoral competition is a defining characteristic of politics in plural African societies. Electoral competition in many third world countries particularly Africa are not merely contested between political parties but often strongly shaped by historical antecedents, ethnic affiliations, and traditional power structures. Elections, therefore, frequently reflects deeper and tribal competition where elites and group leadership exploits advantages of social identity in mobilizing supporters and influencing electoral outcomes (Boone, 2003). In many cases, these power struggles are framed within regional, ethnic, and traditional leadership structures that predated modern state formations.

Nigeria represents classical example of this phenomenon, due its pre-colonial background, colonial reorganization of boundaries, coupled with problems of organized groups in governance. Nigeria operates as a federal democracy, with legally defined power sharing arrangement between the center and federating units. Despite this, electoral contests are often shaped by elite negotiations and the alignment of political actors with traditional rulers (particularly in northern Nigeria), who command both symbolic and practical authority within their domains (Vaughan, 2006).

Kebbi State presents a unique case in which gubernatorial elections are deeply influenced by the traditional emirate system. The state is historically structured around four major emirates Gwandu, Argungu, Zuru, and Yauri each with distinct historical background and sociopolitical identities. Although, these emirates share common cultural and religious foundations, their historical rivalries and varying degrees of political influence have shaped gubernatorial contests, from 1999 to 2023 competition among these emirates for influence, coupled with the rise of identity based mobilization, raises critical questions about the implications for democratic governance, inclusivity, and national unity. Over the years political actors had have exploited the relevance of identities in promoting their goals. That explains why political elites within the same emirate frequently cooperate when their interests align, and fight when their interest opposed.

The emirate system in the state, a traditional institution with significant political and cultural influence, has often intersected with contemporary democratic frameworks, resulting in alliances, conflicts, and contestations for power and resources. Since the state's creation in 1991, Gwandu Emirate has consistently dominated the political landscape, producing governors and securing high-ranking appointments in federal positions. This persistent dominance has created perceptions of marginalization among the other emirates, particularly, Argungu, Zuru and Yauri, whose representatives have repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with their exclusion from critical political and decision-making processes (Abubakar, 2018). This is evident because throughout the democratic experience of the state, five (5) elected governors has been produced, four out of whom came from Gwandu Emirate with only one from Yauri emirate. This study therefore, examines how inter-emirate struggles influence electoral outcomes,

In a similar narration Adebayo (2019) posited that political competition in Nigeria is deeply influenced by historical power structures, group agitations, and elite struggle. That is why understanding and explanation of the relationship between group struggles and democratic governance in Nigeira and Kebbi state in particular emains a subject of significant

scholarly debate. This is so despite the fact that, Modern democratic institutions emphasize formal electoral processes, inter group struggles continue to shape political behavior, influence electoral outcomes, and determine elite alignments. In northern Nigeria, where emirate systems have historically played a central role in governance, political competition is often structured around these traditional power bases. While existing research on identity politics and group competition in Nigerian politics has focused on ethnic, religious, and regional influences on elections (eg, Osaghar, 1991; Muazzam, 2000; Anugwom, 2000; Egwu, 2004; Suberu, 2001; Mustapha, 2007; Nnaoli, 2008, Ogundiya, 2014; Peter, 2017; Oluwole, 2019; Etim, 2019; Alabi, 2020; Katu, 2020, Tope, 2021; Aminu, 2022; Sarah, 20023, among numerous others), limited attention has been given to the role of intra-state groups struggles, particularly within emirate systems. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how inter-emirate struggles have influenced gubernatorial competition in Kebbi State between 2007 to 2023.

Many scholars who invested huge resources on the literature of group struggles and competition in Nigeria, their theoretical dispositions to explain the minority groups' agitations and contestations merely look at the majority-minority contestations in terms of ethnic, religious or class disparities on primordial basis without considering other scenarios where people construct group identities for making claims against underrepresentation, exclusion and marginalization (Musa, 2022). There are vast literatures on Kebbi State as developed by scholars over the years, however there little or no clear picture of the role of inter-emirate struggle on election, political appointment and even resource allocation. The most rich as well academic documented research on inter-emirate struggles was carried out by Musa (2022) his research extensively discussed the nature of inter-emirates struggle in Kebbi State especially as regard to resource allocation, recruitment in civil service and infrastructural development with little attention to the nature, dimension as well the trends of inter-emirates struggle on gubernatorial elections competition in Kebbi State. It is within background that this study aim at examining the influence of inter-emirate struggles on gubernatorial competition in Kebbi State.

Literature Review

Group Identity and Election Competition in Nigeria

Group identity could be contextualized or conceptualized within broader area of identity politics which according to Oluwole, (2019) refers to political mobilization and activism based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and other social identity. The emergence of identity politics has had a significant impact on political discourse and the elections outcomes in various part of the globe including Nigeria.

Studies have shown that in Nigeria where there are over 250 ethnics groups and a history of inter-ethnic conflicts especially during first republic political elites used regionalism, tribal and ethnic consciousness as strong vehicle for political mobilization it was along these lines that political parties in first republic are considered as regional and tribal in outlook. The impact of this continued to have visibility in Nigerian political arena leading to group consciousness. These groups often promote interests of their ethnics groups and maybe more likely to engage in inter group conflict and competition. In fact this facilitates the

emergence of what Musa (2017) termed as thuggery of liberalization. To quote him

> *Thuggery of liberation is a positive development in politics, particularly communities that are coming together to speak with one voice in order to liberate themselves from domination and exploitation of their tribes or communities. In this respect, a community may gang up to elect indigene of that community so as to bring development to their people. Most of the less develop communities in an attempt to bring development closer to their people do come together and speak with one voice" (Musa, 2017).*

Thus, when voting pattern are characterized by ethnicity, access to public services, incidence of poverty and wealth difference amongst ethnic groups, people tend to vote for candidates in line with the politicians they have best suit their ethnic interest. Due to prevalence of group struggles in Nigerian elections some scholar are of the view that, 90% of elections outcome from 1999 to date are directly or indirectly influenced by contestation and group based struggles. This is evident in the finding of Odeyede and Adeyemi (2018) who study 2015 general elections in Nigeria and observed that voters support and mobilize for candidates who they perceived as representing their group interests. To strengthen this argument Peter (2007) asserted that:

Nigerian political behavior is driven by ethnic solidarities. Ethnic political parties, clientelism, and social polarization are all associated with strong communal allegiances. These practices are regarded as inherently corrosive to a plural democracy" Peter (2007).

While Osaghe and suberu in Tope (2021) in their effort to described the nature of electoral competition in Nigeria, they contended that "the political elites in a bid to capture power have reconstructed these identity groups to promote antagonism, ingrained ethnic identification that makes peaceful politics all but impossible. Resources allocation among other issues engenders violent contestation according to identity formation. This view was corroborated by Olayode (2015), in his research identity politics and gubernatorial election in Plateu state. He stated that the results of the 2015 general elections clearly portrayed the dominance of ethno-regional sentiments as determinants of voting behavior and political participation across the country. And that this pattern of voter's behavior could be clearly observed from the presidential through gubernatorial, national and state assemblies' elections, aspirants were largely chosen on the basis of ethno-regional identities. In the presidential election, the president and vice president elect received almost 90 per cent of their votes on the basis of ethno-regional identity.

This phenomenon has been observed in past elections, where politicians have used ethno-religious sentiments to secure votes from their respective constituencies. The implication of identity politics on the Nigerian electoral process is far-reaching. It could lead to the neglect of critical issues, such as economic development and security, in favor of identity-based concerns. It could also fuel inter-group tensions and violence, as seen in past electoral cycles. This is so because once a particular ethnic group came to power, they view it as an avenue of exploiting other ethnic group, which is another reason why some community gang up in form of agitation in order to prevent others from exploiting them (Aminu, 2017). More interestingly the prevalence of identity politics in the 2019 and 2023 general election highlighted the need for more inclusive politics and a redefinition of national identity in Nigeria.

The dominance of ethnic and religious identities in the electoral process underscored the failure of the country to build a common national identity that transcends these differences. There is a need for a concerted effort by political leaders, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to promote a more inclusive and nationalistic political discourse that emphasizes commonalities rather than differences. Meanwhile, ethnicity determines the choice of votes and voter‘s decisions in electioneering in Nigeria. The electoral choice of Nigerians is ethnically colored as party formations are ethnically designated and motivated.

Another concern is that identity politics would hinder the country's ability to address pressing social and economic challenges, such as poverty, corruption, and underdevelopment. As Adebanwi (2018) observed that the preoccupation with identity has often undermined the pursuit of development, as resources are channeled towards satisfying the demands of specific groups rather than towards the broader goal of national progress.

To address these challenges Jega, (2018) had advocated for a shift towards a more inclusive and nationalistic political discourse, one that emphasizes the importance of unity and cooperation over division and polarization.

The Role of Traditional Rulers in Nigerian Politics

Traditional institutions are indispensable for political transformation in Africa, as they represent a major part of the continent’s history, culture, and governance system. Researches and scholarly perceptions on the role of traditional rulers and their institutions in shaping the behavior of political landscape in Nigeria is very comprehensive and old as the system of administration and governance itself, they have a long stay since during the pre-colonial era in which they developed different patterns of administration.

Daniel and Osa, (2013) rightly noted that for a number of centuries before the advent of the British, governance in different parts of what make up the present day Nigeria was synonymous with traditional institutions and their rulers. Except in a few cases (as in the case of the south-east, particularly the Ibo community), local administration was centered on the traditional ruler who was considered the repository of religious, legislative, executive and judicial functions. In effect, the traditional ruler formed the nucleus of governance with vital duties facilitating peaceful coexistence, cooperation and mutual cooperation.

Arguably, the success of British colonialism in Nigeria began only when British colonial officials began to realize that colonial success depended greatly on the recognition and involvement of the traditional rulers that they began to patronize and incorporate them into the Indirect Rule system. Contemporarily, traditional rulers have a great influence in election and electioneering processes in Nigerian democratic politics.

With independence and 1975 local government reforms traditional rulers became ineffective as they have no formal duty. However some scholars like (Augie 2001, Kuna, 2009, Jega, 2014, Bunza, 2017, and Musa 2022) maintained that these institutions continue to be paramount as politicians often seek their blessings and endorsement for political cost.

From the above literature what is missing was that limited attention was given the case of Kebbi State because in Kebbi emiratism is much more importance than political constituency. Hence, politicians recognized emirate loyalty as basis for political patronage.

The Kebbi State Context

Empirical studies focusing on intra-state traditional power struggles and their influence on electoral politics are notably limited. There is a scarcity of case studies or field-based research documenting the nature, trends, and political implications of inter-emirate competition in Kebbi State. This gap leaves a critical void in understanding how local power relations directly affect electoral outcomes and identity politics at the micro-level. This study therefore, bridge his gab by providing filed based research on politics of enter-emirate competitions in Kebbi state.

Most of the studies conducted have theoretical gaps some did not employ any theory while others adopted theories that are weak in explaining the dynamic nature of identity politics especially in inter-group relations. Thus this study closes this gap by using Social Identity Theory.

Finally, there is a notable scope and geographical gap in the literature. Most studies emphasize national or broad regional identity politics, often neglecting sub-national dynamics. Kebbi State, with its distinct historical, cultural, and territorial affiliations among its four dominant emirates—Gwandu, Argungu, Zuru, and Yauri remains understudied. Without localized research, the literature risks generalizing political struggles and missing important intra-state variations that significantly shape gubernatorial competition and identity mobilization.

This study aims to fill that gap by examining how inter-emirate struggles and cooperation have influenced gubernatorial competition in Kebbi State from 2007 to 2023.

Concept of Identity Politics

Identity politics refers to a form of political engagement that is rooted in a particular social identity or experience, such as race, gender, sexuality, or nationality (Crenshaw, 1991). This approach to politics emerged in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s as a response to the exclusion of historically marginalized groups from mainstream political and social institutions. At its core, identity politics seeks to empower these groups by acknowledging and addressing the ways in which social identities shape people's experiences, opportunities, and life chances.

Concept of Emirate

An emirate is a territory ruled by an emir, a title used by monarchs or high office holder in Muslim world. From historical point of view, an emirate is a political religious unit smaller than a caliphate. According to encyclopedia Britannica (2010) emirate refers to a state or possession ruled by an emir.

The emirate system is a traditional governance structure predominantly found in the northern region of Nigeria, where Islamic and Hausa-Fulani culture influence strong. It is rooted in pre-colonial era and continues to play a significant role in modern governance. The system was primarily established following the 1804 Jihad led by Usmanu Danfodiyo.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis: Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT), formulated by Tajfel and Turner (1979), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of group identity and intergroup behavior. The theory posits that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept and self-esteem from their membership in social

groups, and they are motivated to maintain or enhance a positive social identity relative to other groups. This motivation to achieve positive distinctiveness leads to behaviors aimed at favoring one's own group while differentiating it from others. SIT's emphasis on group membership and social categorization makes it especially relevant for analyzing political competition grounded in identity, such as that found among the emirates in Kebbi State.

In the context of Kebbi State, identity politics is strongly influenced by the historical, cultural, and territorial affiliations of the four dominant emirates: Gwandu, Argungu, Zuru, and Yauri. These emirates represent long-standing social groups that shape political loyalties and mobilization patterns. Members of these emirates identify closely with their emirate, forming a collective identity that influences their political choices and actions (Mustapha, 2007; Suberu, 2001). Social Identity Theory allows us to understand how these affiliations operate as powerful social categories that inform political behavior, particularly in gubernatorial contests where representation and resource allocation are at stake.

SIT clarifies how competition for political power among the emirates is driven by the desire for positive social identity. The historical dominance of the Gwandu Emirate in Kebbi's political arena generates perceptions of inequality and marginalization among the other emirates, who seek to challenge this status quo to improve their own group's standing (Egwu, 2004). According to SIT, this intergroup competition is a natural outcome of groups striving to achieve or maintain favorable comparisons with others. Political rivalry and struggles for gubernatorial positions are thus not merely contests for office but symbolic battles over the recognition, prestige, and status of each emirate's identity.

Furthermore, SIT's concepts of social mobility and social creativity provide insight into the strategic behaviors of less dominant emirates. When groups perceive limited opportunities to alter their marginalized status, they may adopt strategies such as forming alliances or emphasizing distinct cultural traits to improve their social standing. The emergence of the Zuru, Argungu, and Yauri Emirates Alliance (ZAYEA) exemplifies this phenomenon, as these emirates collectively negotiate political inclusion and representation to challenge Gwandu's hegemony. Such alliance-building represents a form of social creativity, where groups redefine social comparisons or create new bases for positive distinctiveness.

Voter behavior in Kebbi also aligns with SIT's propositions. Individuals tend to support candidates they perceive as representing their emirate's interests, as group membership shapes political preferences and loyalty. This group-based mobilization reinforces collective identity but can also intensify inter-emirate divisions. The salience of emirate identity becomes a key determinant in electoral outcomes, as voters' self-esteem and social identity are linked to the political success of their group.

Moreover, SIT helps to explain the dual nature of identity politics in Kebbi State. While it fosters group solidarity and political participation, it also has the potential to exacerbate intergroup tensions and conflicts, particularly when competition is perceived as zero-sum. These tensions occasionally manifest as political rivalry or social unrest, undermining democratic processes and social cohesion in the state (Mustapha, 2007). SIT thus provides a critical lens to analyze both the integrative and divisive effects of inter-emirate identity politics.

Social Identity Theory is instrumental in identifying pathways to mitigate conflicts arising from identity-based competition. By understanding how group identities shape political behavior, policymakers and civil society actors can design interventions that promote inclusive governance, intergroup dialogue, and cooperative political frameworks. The theory emphasizes that fostering superordinate identities or shared goals can reduce intergroup hostility and facilitate more harmonious political competition.

Research Methodology

This research adopted case study approach. Data are collected using qualitative sources of data in which interviews (K.I.I, I.D.I and F.G.D) was utilized as maIn sources of data. Respondents were selected in line with their experience and general knowledge about the phenomena under investigation in other word purposive sampling technique was adopted in the research. Purposive sampling focuses on obtaining depth, riches, and context specific insights . One of the key strengths of this sampling technique as argued by Craswell and Poth (2017) is its ability to target individuals or groups who possess specific characteristics, experiences, or knowledge that are central to the research problem. This makes it especially useful in studies exploring complex social phenomena or situations where the researcher needs to select individuals who have direct experience with the issue being studied. For example, in this research, purposive sampling enables the selection of key political elites, or stakeholders who can offer nuanced insights into political behavior, governance or identity related issues.

The population of the study was Kebbi State population in which 25 people was selected for K.I.I and 58 people are selected for Focus Group Discussion.

Data was analyzed thematically. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly.

Tablet 1.1: In-depth interview

S/N	Respondent	Frequency
1	State chairman of Political Parties (APC and PDP	2
2	Gubernatorial candidates who participate in 2023 gubernatorial elections	3
3	Chairmen of Emirates development association	4
4	Traditional rulers of emirates	4
5	Zonal chairmen of political parties	3
6	Total	16

Source: research computation 2026

The choice of 16 participants for In-Depth Interviews is justified, as Guest et al. (2006) found that data saturation often occurs within 12 interviews. Patton (2002) emphasizes that qualitative research prioritizes depth over quantity. Thus, 16 interviews are sufficient for capturing rich, diverse insights.

Table 1.2: Key Informant Interview

S/N	Interview	Number of interview
1	State INEC Chairman	1
2	State youths leader of APC and PDP	2
3	Women leader of APC and PDP	2
4	Expert on identity politics	2
5	Total	9

Source: Research Computation (2026)

Justification for the above 9 respondents is well outlined by Kuzel (1992) in Abdurahman (2023) who argues that 6-8 informants are adequate enough in qualitative research whereas Crewswell (1998) opined that "the sample size of interview in a qualitative research should range between 5-25.

Influence of Inter-Emirate Struggles on Gubernatorial Competition In Kebbi 2007-2023

The data reveal that emirate identity has a significant influence on electoral outcomes, primarily through control of party structures, candidate selection processes and voter mobilization. Many respondents believed that politics of emirate struggles plays vital role in candidate selections, voter mobilizations, and voter choice (R1, R12). It was rightly observed that party funding to some large extent determines the level of influence group or individual may gain which is valuable in influencing elections especially primary elections. According to respondent practically elites from Gwandu emirate are more boyount financially than elites in the other emirates. In fact, they use money as a factor to influence primaries not only in Gwandu emirates but even in some emirates. For example, in 2023 after Dr Tanko Sunun was made a minister, elites from Gwandu went to Yauri and greatly influenced the winner of by-election. This mirrors Olorungbemi's (2021) study, which found that in many northern Nigerian states, dominant groups exert disproportionate influence over political parties. This control is often not visible but embedded in delegate selection, financial sponsorship, and intra-party negotiations.

Some respondents regarded emirate loyalty in Kebbi state as culture and norm. People in most cases regardless of their knowledge and profession politically act according to emirate loyalty and attachment. Respondent posits that:

> *It has become a culture and tradition in Kebbi people talk in term of my emirate. Emirates to some extent shadow senatorial constituency, in schools and in work place people of Kebbi group themselves along the line of emirates. During elections people vote based on emirate identity, it becomes part of our socialization process, our children grow with emirate visions, so emiratism influences not only politics in Kebbi but also appointment into key critical positions. There was a time in which some group of elites from Zuru petitioned the appointment of individual from Gwandu to the position of Vice Chancellor of Federal University of Agriculture Zuru, there are many similar cases, we act and react on emirate boundaries (R5, 2025).*

In related development another respondent argued that:

> *Emirate influences political outcomes although not official remains a key factor in determining governatorial elections result. Take for example in 2019 it was alleged that Gwandu emirate council has warned traditional rulers across the emirate to make*

sure that they vote for Saidu Dakingari agaist Galaudu. This is not parculiar to only Gwandu almost all emirates have through which they issued a communication to their people on who to vote during elections and due the respect people have in their emirates. They vote according to their elites aspiration. In Kebbi, politicians do not need to consult or lobbing masses for support once you agreed with group of political elites in particular constituency you may get masses turnout, that has been the case (R16, 2025).

Furthermore, respondent R9(2025) stated that:

It is shameful to democracy the way political elites from Gwandu manipulated APC primary in the state in favor of Kauran Gwandu against Dr Yahaya Abdullahi the then Senate Leader. After the primary election, it was gathered that he scored zero vote from all the votes cast. Therefore, during governortorial election vast majority of people in Argungu voted for PDP. The same happened in 2007 General Muhammadu Magoro from Zuru Emirate was in 2007 adopted as the candidate of the PDP. When Governor Adamu Aliero led his APP in a merger with the PDP, however. the gubernatorial ticket of PDP was given to Dakingari (from the Aliero group) who flied the ticket of the party and eventually won the election under the PDP but the turn out in Zuru was very low (R9, 2025).

The impact of identity politics on the Nigerian electoral process could be seen in the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. In 2015, Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the north, won the presidential election with strong support from northern Muslim voters. His opponent, Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the south, received overwhelming support from southern Christian voters. The election was largely viewed as a competition between the Muslim north and the Christian south. Similarly, in the 2019 presidential election, Buhari won a second term with strong support from northern Muslim voters, while his opponent, Atiku Abubakar, a Muslim from the north, received strong support from southern Christian voters. The election was once again viewed as a competition between the Muslim north and the Christian south. And same happened during Presidnetial elections in 2023 in which chrsitians especially from south-south and southeast voted Peter Obi a Christian candidate and Bola Ahmed Tinubu win majority Muslim northern states of Nigeria.

In both cases, identity politics played a significant role in shaping electoral outcomes. Candidates and parties relied on ethnic and religious identities to mobilize voters, and voters identified with their respective groups and supported candidates who they perceived as representing their group's interests. However, the impact of identity politics on the Nigerian electoral process is not always positive. SIT also predicts that group membership could lead to intergroup conflict and competition, and this has been the case in Nigeria. Ethnic and religious identities have often been used to mobilize violence and undermine the democratic process. In the 2019 presidential election, for example, there were reports of violence and electoral malpractice in some parts of the country.

From the submission above it is clear that inter emirate struggles in most instances affected voter turnout and make electorates to vote candidate who they perceived as theirs even if he is not the most qualified or capable of sound leadership. This was seen in the response of R13 (2025) who stated that “In terms of integrity, commitment to transparency and zero corruption Isa Galaudu is far better than Atiku Bagudu, but he cannot make it, because he is not from mighty Gwandu emirate. While Osaghe and suberu in Tope (2021) in their effort to describe the nature of electoral competition in Nigeria, they contended that “the political elites in a bid to capture power have reconstructed these

identity groups to promote antagonism….ingrained ethnic identification that makes peaceful politics all but impossible. Resources allocation among other issues engenders violent contestation according to identity formation. This view was corroborated by Olayode (2015), who stated that the results of the 2015 general elections clearly portrayed the dominance of ethno-regional sentiments as determinants of voting behavior and political participation across the country. And that this pattern of voter's behavior could be clearly observed from the presidential through gubernatorial, national and state assemblies' elections, aspirants were largely chosen on the basis of ethno-regional identities. In the presidential election, the president and vice president elect received almost 90 per cent of their votes on the basis of ethno-regional identity.

Respondents also noted that resource disparity is a critical determinant. R9 (2025) stated that, "There are rich people in all emirates, but only Gwandu elites spend their money to contest. Others are afraid of losing it." Political ambition, therefore, is not just about identity or ideas but about financial risk-taking. This confirms that Nigerian democracy remains a high-stakes investment terrain, where only those with capital and elite networks thrive. Oyedele and Adeyemi (2018) provided further support for the role of identity politics in shaping electoral outcomes in Nigeria. The study found that in the 2015 presidential election, ethnic and religious identities played a significant role in determining voting patterns. The study also found that voters were more likely to support candidates who they perceived as representing their group's interests. These findings are consistent with the predictions of SIT, which posits that group membership shapes attitudes and behaviors.

Even when non-Gwandu candidates emerged, they often require Gwandu's endorsement to succeed. R10 (2025) references the case of a Yauri candidate who only won after securing Gwandu elite support. This reinforces the idea that Gwandu's dominance is not just electoral but systemic. It operates through what Shola (2011) calls "vertical power networking," where political influence cascades from a dominant node across peripheral entities. This aligned with the assumption of social identity theory which states that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from their membership in social groups. In the context of Nigerian politics, voters identify with their ethnic or religious group, and their sense of self-esteem and pride is tied to the success of their group in the electoral process. As a result, voters may be more likely to support candidates and parties that they perceive as representing their group's interests.

Furthermore, voter behavior is significantly influenced by emirate loyalty. R2 (2025) remarks that, most people vote for candidates from their emirates unless offered strong incentives. Intra-emirate solidarity often overrides inter-party competition, turning elections into territorial referenda rather than issue-based contests (R20 & R17, 2025). This phenomenon has been observed in past elections, where politicians have used ethno-religious sentiments to secure votes from their respective constituencies. The implication of identity politics on the Nigerian electoral process is far-reaching. It could lead to the neglect of critical issues, such as economic development and security, in favor of identity-based concerns. It could also fuel inter-group tensions and violence, as seen in past electoral cycles. This is so because once a particular ethnic group came to power, they view it as an avenue of exploiting other ethnic group, which is another reason why some community gang up

in form of agitation in order to prevent others from exploiting them.

Discussion of finding

The findings of this study offer a layered and nuanced understanding of how identity politics, particularly in the form of inter-emirate struggles, shapes gubernatorial competition in Kebbi State. Thematic evidence gathered through elite interviews, supported by demographic data and empirical records, point to four central issues: historical inequalities rooted in colonial administrative structures; elite manipulation of identity for political gain; institutional control and structural domination by a single emirate; and the persistent marginalization of other emirates in terms of political access and inclusion.

A further dimension evident in the data is the complete structural and institutional control of political platforms by Gwandu elites. Respondents pointed to their dominance in party structures, bureaucracy, and even religious institutions. Election data from 1999 to 2023 indicates that all elected governors of Kebbi State originated from Gwandu Emirate, further reinforcing this domination. This pattern of elite continuity mirrors findings by Olorungbemi (2021), who analyzed gubernatorial elections in the Northwest and concluded that historically dominant emirates tend to monopolize party delegate structures and financing networks. The Kebbi case fits within this framework: Gwandu's elite not only dominate political parties but also influence appointments across the civil service, thereby reproducing their influence through formal and informal institutions.

Respondents from Zuru, Yauri, and Argungu frequently lamented the lack of access to gubernatorial power and blamed both historical exclusion and internal elite disunity. This disunity often leads to betrayal, fragmented support, and a lack of coherent political strategy. R6 (2025) noted that attempts to unite under one candidate often failed due to ambition, mistrust, and inducements by dominant actors. This is confirmed by empirical work by Ola (2015), who argued that identity-based resistance in northern Nigeria often fails due to intra-elite conflict and weak coalition-building mechanisms. In Kebbi, efforts by Zuru, Argungu and Yauri elites to promote gubernatorial candidates (e.g., in 2019 and 2023) were hampered by lack of resources and internal divisions.

The absence of institutionalized zoning mechanisms compounds these issues. Unlike states such as Enugu, Ebonyi, and Niger, where informal power rotation has been adopted to ensure equitable representation, Kebbi lacks such political conventions. Studies by Anifowose (2016) and Ibrahim & Hassan (2020) support the idea that informal zoning enhances political inclusion and reduces group tensions in plural societies.

Finally, the study reveals that emirate identity strongly influences voter behavior in Kebbi State. Most respondents agreed that citizens are more likely to vote along emirate lines, regardless of party platform or individual merit. R2 described elections as "emirate projects" rather than issue-based competitions. This pattern is supported by Horowitz (1985), who characterized elections in ethnically divided societies as ethnic censuses. In Kebbi, voter alignment appears to mirror the identity of gubernatorial candidates, especially during party primaries and community mobilization. Recent INEC reports from the 2015 and 2019 elections support this finding, as polling data reveals higher voter turnout and party loyalty in emirates with strong candidates from their own

origin, particularly Gwandu. This behavior suggests a symbolic attachment to emirate identity that overrides political ideology.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study provides a better and deeper understanding of group struggles in Kebbi State, particularly how inter-emirate rivalries and alliances have shaped gubernatorial competition between 2007 and2023. It contributes to existing literature on identity politics by shifting attention from the broader ethnic and religious cleavages often emphasized in Nigerian politics to sub-ethnic and intra-state struggles within the emirate system. In doing so, the study closes an important gap in scholarship by demonstrating how emirate-based mobilization, feelings of exclusion, and elite bargaining influence on electoral outcomes. Beyond its empirical relevance, the study also strengthens the application of Social Identity Theory in explaining how identity-driven affiliations affect political alignments, cooperation, and competition in Nigeria's evolving democratic process.

The study therefore recommends the following:

1. Adopt a Power Rotation (Zoning) Policy: Kebbi State should formalize a rotational gubernatorial framework among the four emirates to ensure balanced political representation. Political parties could initiate this informally before legislation. Facilitate Emirate-Level Dialogue Forums: Establish inter-emirate political platforms to foster understanding, prevent elite betrayal, and build broad-based alliances in support of marginalized emirates.

2. Institutionalize Emirate Equity in Appointments: Kebbi State government should adopt a quota system in key appointments to reflect emirate diversity across ministries, agencies, and commissions. Implement voter sensitization campaigns to reduce identity-based voting and encourage issue-based electoral decisions. NGOs, religious leaders, and the media should lead this initiative. Empower local civil society groups to monitor party primaries, promote internal democracy, and track representation across emirates.

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