



## **Unraveling Post-Election Dynamics: An Analysis of Groupthink in the Wake of the 2023 Presidential Election - Insights from Atiku and Obi Supporters**

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### **Abstract**

A heated contention arose over the outcome of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, with fervent followers of Peter Obi and Atiku Abubakar staunchly asserting their positions. This research delves into the repercussions of post-election groupthink syndrome on the perceptions and perspectives of these politically charged groups. Spanning from February 25, 2023, to September 25, 2023, the study meticulously scrutinizes media sources to explore the factors contributing to the emergence and endurance of Groupthink within these factions. The findings illuminate the roles of echo chambers, charismatic leadership, and confirmation bias in shaping group dynamics, perpetuating entrenched beliefs. The implications of these revelations underscore the need for initiatives in media literacy and critical thinking to empower citizens to navigate the information landscape successfully. Political leaders are urged to prioritize inclusive, fact-based decision-making to counteract the adverse effects of Groupthink, fostering a more enlightened and harmonious political discourse in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Decision-Making; Democracy; Elections; Groupthink; Information Processing

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The aftermath of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election witnessed a glaring manifestation of the challenges posed by the groupthink syndrome, notably in the contrasting claims of victory by Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi. Despite the availability of concrete election results and contrary evidence, the fervent supporters of both candidates engaged in a contentious argument, refusing to waver in their beliefs (Agomor, 2019; Mohammed & Agwai, 2021). This situation, as pointed out by Jolaosho (2023), serves as a striking illustration of the potential influence of groupthink—a psychological phenomenon where group members prioritize consensus and cohesion over critical thinking (Jolaosho, 2023).

The dynamics of this post-election scenario reveal a deep-seated adherence to group cohesion, leading to the dismissal of dissenting opinions and contradictory information. The echo chambers formed within these political factions contribute to the reinforcement of existing beliefs, making it challenging for individuals to objectively assess the available evidence. As observed by scholars (Agomor, 2019; Mohammed & Agwai, 2021), the resilience of these contrasting claims despite factual discrepancies is indicative of the powerful sway of groupthink.

Furthermore, charismatic leaders play a pivotal role in perpetuating groupthink within these political factions. The influence of leaders like Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi extends beyond mere guidance; it shapes the narrative and solidifies the collective identity of their supporters. The charisma and persuasive abilities of these leaders contribute to the construction of an ideological fortress, shielding supporters from external perspectives and alternative information.

Confirmation bias, another element at play, reinforces the group's shared beliefs and shields them from dissenting viewpoints. The selective exposure to

information that aligns with pre-existing opinions creates a self-reinforcing cycle, intensifying the group's cohesion. The recognition of confirmation bias in this context underscores the complexity of dismantling entrenched beliefs, as individuals tend to gravitate toward information that supports their existing views.

In light of these findings, addressing the groupthink syndrome in post-election scenarios requires multifaceted interventions. Initiatives focused on media literacy and critical thinking can empower citizens to navigate the information landscape more effectively. Political leaders, recognizing the potential pitfalls of groupthink, must prioritize inclusive decision-making processes that consider diverse perspectives and factual accuracy. Only through such measures can Nigeria hope to foster a more informed, resilient, and peaceful political discourse.

According to Kohnert (2023), the election's division and the ongoing disputes over its outcome highlight the urgent need to investigate how group dynamics, particularly groupthink, may have contributed to the entrenchment of beliefs among Atiku and Obi supporters (Kohnert, 2023). The tendency of groupthink to promote group biases and suppress opposing ideas may have had a key role in the longevity of the rival claims of victory (Elder & Paul, 2020; Epstein & Rooney, 2017). This study aims to shed light on the psychological processes that are active inside these politically charged groups by examining the different facets of the election and the polarization that followed.

Several intriguing nuances emerge when the groupthink phenomenon is explored in the context of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, where both Atiku and Obi's supporters strongly asserted victory. First off, Kolade, Obembe, and Olufemi (2023) contended that groupthink frequently fosters a climate in which opposing ideas are suppressed or

discouraged (Kolade, Obembe, & Olufemi, 2023). In this election scenario, each candidate's followers were presumably surrounded by others who held the same views as they did, acting as an echo chamber and fortifying their convictions. This strengthened their confidence that their candidate's victory was just and made it incredibly difficult for them to examine alternative perspectives or to objectively evaluate the available information because there were no alternative viewpoints, it was challenging for the supporters to have a meaningful discussion, which added to the political polarization that became apparent in the days following the election (Bauer, 2020; Coibion, Gorodnichenko, & Weber, 2020). Second, conformity is typically valued over original thought when groupthink is present. Supporters of Atiku and Obi who succumbed to groupthink may have felt under pressure to adopt the narrative that was well-liked by their respective groupings. A group polarization effect can occur when people try to follow the perceived consensus by adopting more radical beliefs and actions (Jolaosho, 2023; Lees & Cikara, 2021; Myers & Lamm, 1976; Okwelum, 2023).

Because of this, it could be challenging to reach an understanding or assist in mediating a peaceful resolution to the election issue because the supporters of both candidates may have become more adamant in their positions. Kohnert (2023) affirmed that this growing polarization could hurt the stability and cohesiveness of the political system in the nation (Kohnert, 2023). By examining how groupthink syndrome presents itself within distinct political groupings, researchers can learn more about how group dynamics impact people's opinions in the setting of crucial elections. The problem at hand is the persistence of opposing claims of victory by Atiku and Obi supporters in the aftermath of the 2023 presidential election.

Despite the availability of electoral results and evidence, both groups continue

to maintain their positions, demonstrating a resistance to information that contradicts their beliefs (Jost, Baldassarri & Druckman, 2022), this raises questions about the role of group dynamics, specifically groupthink, in shaping and reinforcing these entrenched viewpoints (Jost, Baldassarri, & Druckman, 2022). This study was motivated by the need to understand the factors contributing to political polarization in Nigeria and how groupthink may be involved. By examining how supporters of Atiku and Obi may have fallen prey to groupthink in the context of the 2023 presidential race, we hope to shed light on the psychological and sociological factors influencing political discourse and decision-making in the country.

This research stands at the intersection of political science and psychology, offering valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of groupthink within the realm of significant political events. The exploration of group dynamics sheds light on how collective thinking patterns can exert a profound impact on individual perspectives and behaviors. Such revelations hold substantial implications for understanding the multifaceted nature of political affiliations and allegiances.

The study's findings present an opportunity to reimagine strategies for fostering political discourse, particularly in the Nigerian context. By dissecting the mechanisms of groupthink, the research contributes to the development of approaches that may cultivate a more inclusive, cooperative, and constructive political climate. Recognizing the nuances of group dynamics becomes imperative for nurturing a democratic society that operates effectively and upholds the principles of informed decision-making.

In the broader global context, the relevance of groupthink in political divisions necessitates thoughtful consideration and proactive measures. Democratic societies worldwide can benefit from a comprehensive understanding of

how group dynamics contribute to political polarization. Armed with such knowledge, policymakers and leaders can formulate interventions aimed at mitigating the detrimental effects of groupthink and promoting an environment conducive to rational, unbiased, and fact-based political discussions.

The overarching objectives of the study revolve around pinpointing the specific mechanisms through which groupthink operates and unraveling the factors that drive individuals to steadfastly adhere to conflicting narratives. These insights provide a nuanced comprehension of political polarization, offering valuable guidance for encouraging discourse that is grounded in reason, openness, and reliance on factual information. Ultimately, the research contributes to the collective effort to strengthen political discourse both within Nigeria and on a global scale, fostering a more informed, resilient, and collaborative democratic landscape.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Two (2) theories are considered appropriate for explaining the Groupthink Syndrome in the Aftermath of the 2023 Presidential Election: Perspectives from Atiku and Obi Supporters". These theories (Social Identity Theory and Rational Choice Theory) provide complementary perspectives for understanding the dynamics of groupthink and political polarization in the aftermath of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, offering valuable frameworks for analyzing the behavior of Atiku and Obi supporters.

### **Social Identity Theory**

The Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979), offers a helpful framework for understanding how group membership influences people's behavior and perceptions (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This concept can be employed in the context of your research to explain why supporters of Atiku and Obi could have held onto their respective claims of victory with

such tenacity. According to Kolade, Obembe, and Olufemi (2023), individuals frequently categorize themselves into various social groups, such as political parties, and derive a feeling of identity and worth from joining these groups (Kolade et al., 2023). Kohnert (2023) and Okwelum (2023) argued that election results may have strengthened in-group bias and out-group disparagement by increasing the identification of these political groups (Kohnert, 2023). The supporters' propensity for group polarization and animosity toward competing ideas may be influenced by this heightened feeling of group identity (Jolaosho, 2023; Nabiebu, 2022; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). In this study, Social Identity Theory can provide insights into how the supporters' sense of belonging to their political camps influenced their attitudes, behaviors, and resistance to alternative information regarding the election results.

Rational Choice Theory, widely used in political science, posits that individuals make decisions by weighing the costs and benefits of various alternatives and selecting the option that maximizes their utility (Downs, 1957). In the context of your study, this theory can be applied to understand why some supporters of Atiku and Obi might have chosen to persistently claim victory despite contrary evidence. Rational Choice Theory suggests that individuals act in their self-interest, and this self-interest may sometimes override rational decision-making. Kolade, Obembe, and Olufemi (2023) argued that supporters may have believed that continuing to assert victory, even in the face of contradictory evidence, served their political interests by maintaining the morale of their political base, which, in turn, could impact their future political prospects (Kolade et al., 2023). Okwelum (2023) alluded that utilizing Rational Choice Theory allows for an examination of how individual and group interests may have driven the behavior of supporters, shedding light on

the motivations behind their actions in the post-election period (Downs, 1957; Matthieß, 2020; Okwelum, 2023).

### **Methodology**

The methodology for this study, given the timeframe and scope, is a content analysis of media sources from February 25, 2023, to September 25, 2023. Content analysis is particularly well-suited for examining the perspectives and narratives surrounding a complex and dynamic event like the 2023 Nigerian presidential election aftermath. Using this methodology, it is possible to analyze in-depth how political polarization and groupthink were presented, discussed, and maybe reinforced in news articles, editorials, interviews, and social media discussions over the given time frame. The advantage of using the content analysis methodology is that it provides a systematic and repeatable way to identify themes, patterns, and changes in media coverage, enabling a thorough knowledge of how the election dispute evolved and how the narratives around it altered over time. With the use of this methodology, it is also possible to integrate qualitative and quantitative elements, allowing for a thorough analysis of the media's impact on public perception as well as the dynamics of the Atiku and Obi supporters' groups.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **To examine the extent to which groupthink influenced the perceptions of victory among Atiku supporters**

The comprehensive investigation into the influence of groupthink on the perceptions of victory among Atiku supporters during the period from February 25, 2023, to September 25, 2023, unravels intriguing insights. The content analysis of diverse media sources serves as a crucial lens through which we can discern the intricate dynamics at play in shaping the collective mindset of Atiku supporters following the 2023 Nigerian presidential election.

The findings of this analysis underscore a notable manifestation of groupthink within the ranks of Atiku supporters, as evidenced by their remarkable conformity in perceiving victory. The media narrative during this period consistently spotlighted Atiku's supposed triumph, creating a narrative that resonated deeply within the supporter community. The prevalence of this shared narrative reflects the classic hallmarks of groupthink, where individuals prioritize consensus and cohesion over critical examination of information.

In the face of potentially contradicting information, Atiku supporters exhibited a tendency to dismiss alternative viewpoints, labeling them as biased or false. This resistance to divergent perspectives indicates a significant level of insulation within the group, reinforcing the collective belief in Atiku's victory. Jolaosho's (2023) observations underscore the resilience of this groupthink mentality, persisting even when official election results suggested a different outcome (Jolaosho, 2023). The reluctance to engage in meaningful debate and the reinforcing of a consensus further highlight the entrenchment of groupthink dynamics among Atiku supporters.

The significance of this analysis lies in its illumination of how groupthink operates within a specific political context, influencing perceptions and shaping a shared narrative despite external evidence. Understanding the extent to which groupthink permeates political supporter communities is vital for devising strategies that promote diverse perspectives, critical thinking, and informed political dialogue.

This finding has significant implications for our understanding of political group dynamics as well as broader repercussions for democratic discourse. The works of Kohnert (2023) indicated that the extent to which groupthink influenced Atiku supporters' perceptions shows how important group cohesion and conformity are in shaping political opinions, especially

in the face of contradictory evidence (Kohnert, 2023). This phenomenon raises concerns about the potential for misinformation and polarization to thrive in such environments, as individuals become less inclined to critically evaluate information or engage in open dialogue with those holding opposing viewpoints. This aligns with the suggestion of Kolade, Obembe, and Olufemi (2023) that to promote a healthier and more informed democratic discourse, strategies for fostering critical thinking and encouraging open discussion among political supporters should be considered as part of the solution to mitigate the adverse effects of groupthink in political contexts (Kolade et al., 2023).

### **To assess the impact of groupthink on the perspectives of Peter Obi supporters regarding the election outcome**

The in-depth content analysis of various media sources spanning from February 25, 2023, to September 25, 2023, unveils valuable insights into the pervasive influence of groupthink on the perspectives of Peter Obi supporters in the aftermath of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. This scrutiny of media content illuminates a discernible impact of groupthink dynamics on the viewpoints embraced by Peter Obi's dedicated supporters during this critical period.

The analysis underscores a pronounced sway of groupthink among Peter Obi supporters, with media coverage consistently amplifying his claims of triumph. The narrative of Peter Obi's victory propagated by the media became a cornerstone for his supporters, who embraced these reports as compelling evidence of his electoral success. Within the confines of this subgroup, a notable sense of group cohesion and homogeneity prevailed, leading to a collective dismissal or hostility toward opposing viewpoints and alternative analyses of the election results.

The prevalence of groupthink within the community of Peter Obi supporters is evident in the shared acceptance of a singular narrative, fostering an environment where dissenting voices are met with resistance. The group's cohesiveness and resistance to alternative perspectives showcase the potent impact of groupthink dynamics, influencing the collective mindset of Peter Obi supporters during this crucial post-election period.

This analysis serves as a critical contribution to understanding the complexities of group dynamics within political supporter communities, shedding light on the mechanisms through which groupthink shapes and reinforces particular viewpoints. Such insights are invaluable for fostering diverse and informed political discourse, mitigating the potentially detrimental effects of groupthink on democratic processes (Itodo, 2023). This aligns with the submission of Jolaosho (2023) that despite unfavorable facts or the official election results, Peter Obi's supporters remained steadfast in their belief that they had won (Jolaosho, 2023). This is an example of groupthink in action. This devotion to the group's dominant narrative, according to Kohnert (2023), had the effect of boosting the supporters' faith in Peter Obi's victory as a whole. Their claim has persisted as a result (Kohnert, 2023).

There are two implications to these findings. They start by highlighting the tendency of political supporters to engage in groupthink dynamics, which can prevent sincere, fact-based discussion and uphold political polarization. In the works of Kolade, Obembe, and Olufemi (2023), it was revealed that the significant influence of group cohesion on Peter Obi supporters' opinions suggests that group dynamics must be considered in efforts to advance more informed political debate and combat the harmful effects of groupthink (Kolade et al., 2023). Second, the impact of collective ignorance on Peter Obi supporters'

viewpoints emphasizes the need for a more extensive social discussion on media literacy and critical thinking. In this light, Okwelum (2023) advocated that because media sources have a significant impact on how political narratives are constructed, people need to be able to critically evaluate information and participate in productive conversation, especially when it conflicts with their previous views (Okwelum, 2023). By addressing these implications, society can work toward a more informed and balanced political discourse, essential for the health of democratic processes (Janis, 1972; Ojukwu, Umeifekwem, & Okeke, 2023).

**To identify the factors that may have contributed to the development and persistence of groupthink among both sets of supporters**

The comprehensive content analysis conducted on various media sources spanning the period from February 25, 2023, to September 25, 2023, yields valuable insights into the factors contributing to the emergence and persistence of groupthink among supporters of both Atiku and Peter Obi following the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. Among the notable factors identified, the role of echo chambers, both online and offline, emerges as a significant influencer.

The analysis brings to light how both sets of supporters, those of Atiku and Peter Obi, actively participated in echo chambers characterized by like-minded individuals and platforms that served to reinforce their existing beliefs. Media sources consistently portrayed these groups as engaging predominantly with content that aligned with their perspectives, creating self-contained echo chambers. Within these echo chambers, dissenting voices were marginalized, contributing to the insulation of followers from divergent viewpoints.

The isolation from competing beliefs within these echo chambers played a

pivotal role in fortifying groupthink dynamics. By shielding followers from perspectives that contradicted the dominant narrative, these echo chambers fostered an environment where adherence to the prevailing viewpoint was not only encouraged but also perceived as valuable. This reinforcement of a singular narrative within echo chambers significantly contributed to the development and perpetuation of groupthink among supporters of both Atiku and Peter Obi.

The recognition of echo chambers as a key factor in the dynamics of groupthink provides a nuanced understanding of how information environments contribute to the entrenchment of collective viewpoints. Addressing these echo chambers becomes crucial for fostering open and diverse political discourse, mitigating the negative impact of groupthink on the democratic process (Sunstein, 2017).

Another factor contributing to the development and survival of groupthink was the magnified confirmation bias found in these echo chambers. According to media accounts, proponents frequently sought out and highlighted information that corroborated their preexisting beliefs while downplaying or dismissing data that did the opposite. Due to this limited information exposure, the group became more polarized and the members' opinions became more firmly held. Furthermore, Jolaosho (2023) avowed that the presence of strong and charismatic leaders like Atiku and Peter Obi influenced the beliefs and behaviors of their followers and helped the group as a whole (Jolaosho, 2023; Okwelum, 2023).

It is important to think about the implications of these findings to comprehend the components that contribute to groupthink in political contexts. The study by Okwelum (2023) acknowledged that the prevalence of echo chambers and confirmation bias draws attention to the importance of media literacy and critical thinking education in

preparing people to traverse the complex information landscape and take part in more unbiased and open political dialogue (Kolade et al., 2023). Additionally, the submission of Kolade, Obembe, and Olufemi (2023) revealed that realizing how charismatic leaders can strengthen a group's cohesiveness calls for reflection on how leadership influences political polarization and the need to support those who prioritize inclusive and fact-based decision-making (Kolade et al., 2023). By addressing these factors, society can work toward mitigating the development and persistence of groupthink, thereby promoting healthier and more informed political discussions (Ojukwu et al., 2023; Sunstein, 2017).

## **CONCLUSION**

The study delving into the Groupthink Syndrome following the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, examining the perspectives of both Atiku and Obi supporters, sheds light on the pivotal role played by group dynamics, conformity, and echo chambers in shaping the beliefs of these politically polarized groups. The content analysis of media sources from February 25, 2023, to September 25, 2023, exposes a deeply ingrained groupthink mentality within both factions. This persistence in adhering to the dominant narrative of victory, despite contrary evidence, highlights the impact of group polarization and resistance to alternative perspectives, fueled by echo chambers and confirmation bias.

The insulation of supporters from diverse opinions within echo chambers, coupled with charismatic leadership, further solidifies group cohesion, and contributes to the perpetuation of entrenched viewpoints. These findings underscore the urgency of media literacy and critical thinking education to empower individuals in critically evaluating information and engaging in open, evidence-based political discourse. To

mitigate the adverse effects of groupthink and cultivate a more democratic discourse in Nigeria, there is a pressing need for inclusive leadership that encourages rational judgment.

Moving forward, a multifaceted approach is imperative to address the challenges posed by groupthink in the realm of political polarization. Prioritizing programs that enhance media literacy, diverse information consumption, and critical thinking skills can minimize the establishment and survival of echo chambers and confirmation bias. Political leaders can contribute by exemplifying inclusive decision-making based on facts and refraining from divisive language. Ultimately, fostering a more informed and peaceful political climate in Nigeria, where open discourse and fact-based decision-making prevail over ingrained beliefs and polarization, requires a profound understanding of the influence of group dynamics and the susceptibility of political supporters to groupthink.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The conclusions of this study on groupthink syndrome have important policy repercussions and suggestions after the Nigerian presidential election in 2023. First and foremost, both the educational and community sectors urgently require training in media literacy and critical thinking. Through these programs, people can learn to navigate the information world more skillfully, which will lessen their sensitivity to confirmation bias and echo chambers. They achieve this by equipping citizens with the skills necessary to recognize trustworthy sources, evaluate information critically, and spot prejudice. To promote an informed and discriminating voter, officials should subsidize the creation and execution of such projects.

Second, inclusive, and fact-based decision-making should be highly



prioritized by political parties and leaders. By encouraging open communication and tolerating a variety of viewpoints within their ranks, leaders can have an impact on their followers. Political parties should encourage a culture of transparency and accountability to make sure that their decisions and deeds are in line with democratic ideals. Policymakers can assist in rewarding such behavior by enacting laws and regulations that foster moral and inclusive political activity.

Finally, a multifaceted approach involving political leadership, media literacy, and education is required to address the difficulties brought up by Groupthink Syndrome in the context of political polarization. By putting these ideas and policies into action, Nigeria may strengthen its democratic institutions and foster social cohesion. This would result in a more educated and fair political dialogue.

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