



Influence of grassroots political movement on electoral system in Nigeria: A comparative study of Kwankwasiyya and Obidient Movement in Kano State

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Abstract

The emergence of grassroots political movements has increasingly transformed electoral politics in Nigeria by challenging the dominance of traditional political parties and reshaping patterns of political participation and voter behaviour. This study examines the influence of grassroots political movements on Nigeria's electoral system through a comparative analysis of the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements during the 2023 general elections, with particular focus on Kano State. Anchored on Resource Mobilization Theory, the study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from 400 respondents selected through a multistage sampling technique across five Local Government Areas in Kano State using structured questionnaires administered physically and through Google Forms. Qualitative data were further generated through content analysis of social media activities associated with both movements. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The findings reveal high levels of awareness of both movements, with the Obidient Movement recording broader national visibility due to its extensive use of digital platforms, while the Kwankwasiyya Movement demonstrated stronger grassroots structures and deeper political loyalty among supporters. The study further found that grassroots political movements significantly influenced political awareness, voter mobilization, and electoral decision-making, with a majority of respondents indicating that movement affiliation affected their voting choices more than traditional party loyalty. Social media emerged as a critical instrument of political communication and mobilization, particularly among young voters. The study also established that a potential alliance between the two movements could substantially influence future electoral outcomes and challenge the dominance of established political parties, although ideological and structural differences may constrain such cooperation. The study concludes that grassroots political movements have become significant actors in Nigeria's democratic process, contributing to the evolution of electoral behaviour, political participation, and citizen engagement. It recommends greater integration of digital and community-based mobilization strategies to strengthen democratic participation and electoral accountability in Nigeria.

Keywords: Electoral Behaviour, Grassroots Political Movements, Kwankwasiyya Movement, Obidient Movement, Political Mobilization

1. Introduction

The dynamics of electoral politics in emerging democracies have undergone significant transformation in recent years, particularly with the rise of grassroots political movements that operate outside conventional party structures. Traditionally, electoral behavior in countries such as Nigeria has been shaped by elite-driven party systems, ethnic alignments, patronage networks, and regional loyalties (Lindberg, 2010; Omotola, 2010). However, recent developments suggest a gradual shift toward citizen-driven political engagement, where informal movements increasingly influence voter preferences, participation, and electoral outcomes.

Grassroots political movements are typically characterized by decentralized organization, mass participation, and reliance on informal networks rather than institutionalized party mechanisms (Tarrow, 2011). In emerging democracies, such movements often arise in response to perceived governance failures, economic hardship, and political exclusion (Bratton, 2008). They serve as alternative platforms for political expression, mobilizing citizens who may feel disconnected from traditional political elites. This trend reflects a broader transformation in democratic participation, where agency is shifting from formal political institutions to civic actors and social networks (Dalton, 2008).

Nigeria's 2023 general elections provide a compelling context for examining this transformation. While the country has historically maintained a dominant party system, recent electoral cycles have witnessed the emergence of influential grassroots movements capable of reshaping political discourse and voter alignment (International Crisis Group, 2023). Notably, the Kwankwasiyya Movement, associated with Rabiu Musa

Kwankwaso, and the Obidient Movement, linked to Peter Obi, represent two distinct models of grassroots mobilization with significant electoral implications (International Crisis Group, 2023).

The Kwankwasiyya Movement is rooted in longstanding political structures and regional identity, particularly in Northern Nigeria. It combines elements of patronage, ideological loyalty, and grassroots organization to sustain political influence (Mustapha & Whitfield, 2009). Its electoral strength was evident in the 2023 presidential election, where the movement demonstrated strong regional dominance, especially in Kano State (Independent National Electoral Commission [INEC], 2023). This underscores the enduring relevance of structured, identity-based grassroots networks in shaping localized electoral outcomes.

In contrast, the Obidient Movement represents a more contemporary form of political mobilization, driven largely by youth participation, digital platforms, and issue-based advocacy. Emerging in the build-up to the 2023 elections, the movement leveraged social media to mobilize support and transform online activism into tangible political engagement (Zakka & Jerry, 2023). The movement was fueled by widespread dissatisfaction with governance, economic challenges, and a desire for political change, particularly among young Nigerians (International Crisis Group, 2023). It also contributed to a broader political awakening, re-energizing civic participation and reshaping national political discourse.

Importantly, the rise of the Obidient Movement reflects the growing intersection between digital activism and electoral politics. Social media platforms enabled rapid information dissemination, narrative framing, and mass mobilization, amplifying voices that were previously marginalized in traditional political

processes (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). This aligns with broader global trends in which digital networks serve as critical tools for grassroots political organization and electoral influence.

Despite their differences, both movements underscore the increasing significance of informal political actors in Nigeria's democratic process. They challenge conventional theories that prioritize formal institutions and elite competition, highlighting instead the role of grassroots mobilization in shaping electoral behavior. Moreover, these movements illustrate how different forms of mobilization identity-based versus digitally driven can coexist and influence electoral outcomes in distinct ways.

2. Literature Review

Election: An election is a formal institutional mechanism through which citizens select representatives or decide on public policies within a political system. It is widely regarded as a core feature of democratic governance, providing legitimacy to political authority and enabling political participation (Dahl, 1989). Elections serve as a means of translating popular preferences into governmental power, thereby linking the electorate to decision-making processes. Elections involve organized processes of voting, vote counting, and result declaration, typically conducted under the supervision of an electoral management body such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria. However, beyond their procedural dimension, elections also embody broader political dynamics, including competition among elites, mobilization of voters, and negotiation of power among different social groups (Schumpeter, 1942). In emerging democracies, elections often function not only as instruments of representation but also as arenas for contestation shaped by structural factors

such as ethnicity, patronage, and socio-economic inequalities (Lindberg, 2006). In such contexts, electoral behavior may be influenced by informal networks, identity affiliations, and political movements rather than purely ideological considerations.

Moreover, elections provide opportunities for both formal political actors (such as political parties) and informal actors (such as grassroots movements) to mobilize support and shape voter preferences. This makes elections a critical site for analyzing political participation and democratic consolidation, particularly in contexts like Nigeria where political engagement extends beyond institutional frameworks.

Grassroots Political Movements:

Grassroots political movements refer to forms of collective action that originate from ordinary citizens at the local level, rather than from political elites or formal institutions. These movements are typically characterized by decentralized structures, voluntary participation, and reliance on informal networks for mobilization (Tarrow, 2011). Unlike traditional political parties, grassroots movements are often less hierarchical and more flexible, enabling them to respond quickly to political opportunities and societal grievances. They are usually driven by shared identities, interests, or causes, and they aim to influence political outcomes, public policy, or governance processes (Della Porta & Diani, 2006).

In the context of emerging democracies, grassroots political movements frequently arise as responses to perceived failures of governance, political exclusion, or dissatisfaction with established political actors (Bratton, 2008). They provide alternative channels for political participation, especially for marginalized groups such as youth, women, and economically disadvantaged populations. Contemporary grassroots movements increasingly utilize digital technologies and social media platforms to enhance

mobilization, coordination, and message dissemination. This has given rise to hybrid forms of activism that combine online engagement with offline political participation (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). Such digitally enabled movements can rapidly expand their reach and influence, as seen in recent electoral cycles across various emerging democracies.

In Nigeria, grassroots political movements such as the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements illustrate two distinct models of mobilization. While the former is rooted in long-standing political networks and identity-based organization, the latter reflects a decentralized, youth-driven, and digitally coordinated form of political activism. Both demonstrate how grassroots initiatives can shape electoral behavior by influencing voter turnout, political awareness, and candidate preference.

Historical Overview of Elections in Nigeria

The history of elections in Nigeria reflects the country's broader political evolution, marked by colonial legacies, military interruptions, and ongoing efforts at democratic consolidation. Electoral processes in Nigeria have transitioned from limited colonial participation to universal suffrage within a multi-party democratic framework, although challenges of credibility, transparency, and inclusiveness have persisted.

Electoral politics in Nigeria can be traced to the introduction of the Clifford Constitution of 1922, which established the first elective principle in the country. This constitution allowed for limited franchise, enabling a small number of Nigerians primarily in Lagos and Calabar to elect representatives into the Legislative Council (Coleman, 1958). However, participation was highly restricted based on income, gender, and residency qualifications, thereby excluding the majority of the population. Subsequent constitutional developments, including the

Richards Constitution (1946), Macpherson Constitution (1951), and Lyttleton Constitution (1954), gradually expanded political participation and regional representation. These reforms laid the groundwork for party formation and competitive politics, leading to the emergence of major political parties such as the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), Action Group (AG), and Northern People's Congress (NPC) (Sklar, 1963). The pre-independence elections of the 1950s played a crucial role in preparing Nigeria for self-governance, culminating in the 1959 federal election, which determined the leadership that would guide the country into independence in 1960.

Following independence, Nigeria conducted its first post-colonial elections in 1964. These elections, along with the 1965 Western Region elections, were marred by widespread irregularities, electoral violence, and allegations of rigging (Dudley, 1973). The inability of political elites to manage electoral competition peacefully contributed significantly to political instability. The electoral crisis of this period ultimately led to the military coup of January 1966, which marked the end of the First Republic and the suspension of democratic governance. Between 1966 and 1979, Nigeria experienced prolonged military rule, during which electoral activities were largely suspended. However, efforts were made toward a transition to civilian rule, culminating in the drafting of a new constitution and the organization of elections in 1979. The 1979 elections marked Nigeria's return to civilian rule under the Second Republic. These elections introduced a presidential system of government and were conducted under the supervision of the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO). While relatively more organized than earlier elections, they were still characterized by logistical

challenges and legal disputes (Osaghae, 1998). The 1983 general elections, however, were widely criticized for electoral malpractice, including ballot stuffing and result manipulation. The perceived lack of credibility in the electoral process contributed to another military takeover in December 1983.

The military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida initiated a transition program that led to the 1993 presidential election, widely regarded as the freest and fairest in Nigeria's history. The election was won by Moshood Kashimawo Olawale (MKO) Abiola, but its annulment by the military government triggered a political crisis and widespread protests (Diamond, 1995).

The annulment undermined public confidence in electoral processes and delayed Nigeria's return to democratic governance.

Nigeria's current democratic era began in 1999 with the transition from military to civilian rule. Since then, the country has conducted regular general elections every four years, overseen by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Early elections in this period, particularly in 1999, 2003, and 2007, were criticized for irregularities, electoral violence, and administrative inefficiencies (Human Rights Watch, 2007). However, gradual improvements have been observed, especially with the introduction of electoral reforms such as biometric voter registration and the use of smart card readers.

The 2015 general election marked a significant milestone, as it resulted in the first peaceful transfer of power from an incumbent ruling party to an opposition party in Nigeria's history (Akinola, 2017). This development was widely seen as evidence of democratic progress. More recently, the 2023 general elections showed both advancements and emerging challenges. While technological innovations such as the Bimodal Voter

Accreditation System (BVAS) were introduced to enhance transparency, issues related to electoral logistics, voter suppression, and result transmission persisted (INEC, 2023). Notably, these elections also witnessed the rise of influential grassroots political movements, including those associated with Peter Obi and Musa Kwankwaso Rabi, reflecting evolving patterns of political participation.

Historical Overview of the Obidient Movement

The Obidient Movement is a contemporary grassroots political phenomenon in Nigeria that emerged in the build-up to the 2023 general elections as a strong support base for the presidential candidacy of Peter Obi. Unlike traditional political party structures, the movement did not originate as a formal political organization but developed organically through citizen engagement, particularly among young Nigerians, professionals, and members of the diaspora. Its evolution reflects broader shifts in political participation, where digital communication and issue-based advocacy increasingly shape electoral politics in emerging democracies.

The origins of the movement can be traced to the period following Peter Obi's emergence as the presidential candidate of the Labour Party in 2022. Dissatisfied with the dominance of established political elites and motivated by concerns over governance, economic instability, unemployment, and corruption, many Nigerians especially youth began to mobilize in support of his candidacy. The term "Obidient" evolved as a symbolic identity marker representing political allegiance to Obi's reform-oriented agenda and a broader desire for political change.

A defining feature of the Obidient Movement is its heavy reliance on digital platforms and social media networks for mobilization and communication. Platforms such as Twitter (now X), Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok became

central tools for political engagement, enabling rapid dissemination of campaign messages, political debates, and mobilization calls. This digital-first approach distinguished the movement from traditional grassroots structures in Nigeria, which are often geographically localized and reliant on physical mobilization. By early 2023, the movement had grown into a nationwide and transnational political network, with significant participation from Nigerian youths both within the country and in the diaspora. It played a critical role in reshaping political discourse, particularly by challenging established narratives dominated by Nigeria's major political parties. The movement's supporters actively engaged in online advocacy, voter education, fundraising, and grassroots coordination of campaign activities.

During the 2023 general elections, the Obidient Movement demonstrated significant electoral influence, particularly in urban centers such as Lagos, Abuja, Nassarawa, Plateau and parts of the South-East. Although it did not translate into a presidential victory, the movement succeeded in altering traditional voting patterns and increasing political awareness among previously disengaged citizens. It also contributed to higher levels of youth political participation and voter turnout in several constituencies. Post-election developments indicate that the Obidient Movement has continued to exist as a political identity and civic platform rather than dissolving after the electoral cycle. It remains active in political discourse, governance accountability debates, and mobilization for future elections, including the anticipated 2027 general elections. Its sustainability highlights the transformation of political movements in Nigeria from election-specific campaigns to more enduring forms of civic and political engagement.

History of Kwankwasiyya Movement

The Kwankwasiyya Movement is one of the most established grassroots political formations in Nigeria, deeply rooted in the political evolution of Kano State and Northern Nigeria more broadly. The movement is closely associated with the political leadership and ideology of Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, a former governor of Kano State and prominent national political figure. Unlike newer digital movements, Kwankwasiyya developed gradually as a structured political network grounded in loyalty, ideology, and long-standing grassroots organization. The origins of the movement can be traced to Kwankwaso's first tenure as Governor of Kano State between 1999 and 2003, during Nigeria's Fourth Republic. During this period, his political style emphasized populist governance, investment in education, and strong engagement with rural communities. Although the term "Kwankwasiyya" was not fully institutionalized at the time, the foundations of a loyal political following were established through his governance style and grassroots outreach.

The movement became more formally recognized during Kwankwaso's second tenure as Governor (2011–2015), when "Kwankwasiyya" emerged as a clearly defined political identity. It was during this period that the movement developed its distinctive symbols, including the red cap (Jan Kwankwasiyya), which became a visual marker of political affiliation and solidarity. The movement also expanded its organizational structure, incorporating youth mobilization, student support networks, and community-based political engagement across Kano State and beyond. Among his many strategies is the exploitation of the psyche of the people, in his campaign at Kofar 'Na'isa', he introduced some slogans like "mahaha", "wujuwuju", janbaki.... His saying: Ina

matasa? is very appealing to the youth (Mahmud and Ozden, 2025)

Kwankwasiyya is characterized by a strong patronage-based and mentorship-driven structure, where political loyalty is reinforced through social programs, scholarships, and political inclusion of supporters in governance processes. This structure has contributed to its durability and resilience within Nigeria's competitive political environment. The movement's influence is particularly strong in Kano State, where it has consistently shaped electoral outcomes at both state and national levels. Following Kwankwaso's emergence as a national political actor, the movement expanded beyond Kano, establishing networks across Northern Nigeria and among diaspora supporters. In subsequent elections, particularly in 2015, 2019, and 2023, Kwankwasiyya played a significant role in mobilizing voters and influencing electoral outcomes, especially in Kano State where it demonstrated strong electoral dominance.

In the 2023 general elections, the movement maintained its relevance by supporting Kwankwaso's presidential candidacy under the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), securing substantial votes in Kano State and reinforcing its position as a major regional political force. Its electoral strength is largely attributed to its disciplined grassroots structure, strong political identity, and deep-rooted loyalty among supporters. Unlike newer movements that rely heavily on digital platforms, Kwankwasiyya is primarily offline, structured, and institutionally embedded, relying on face-to-face mobilization, political mentorship, and long-term community engagement. This distinguishes it as one of the most organized grassroots political movements in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Theoretical Framework: Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource Mobilization Theory, propounded by scholars such as McCarthy and Zald (1977), places a strong emphasis on the notion that the success of social and political movements is mostly determined by their capacity to efficiently gather, arrange and utilize resources. These resources may include material assets (funding, logistics), human capital (volunteers, leadership), social networks, and access to communication channels. The theory challenges earlier perspectives that viewed movements as spontaneous or irrational, instead arguing that they are organized, strategic, and goal-oriented entities. Movements succeed not merely because of grievances, but because they possess the capacity to mobilize support and sustain collective action (Tarrow, 2011).

Resource Mobilization Theory is especially helpful for understanding how the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements function in the context of this investigation. The Kwankwasiyya Movement has a strong organizational capability, as seen by its established political structures, devoted support bases, and extensive grassroots networks, especially in Northern Nigeria. Its mobilization is based on established institutional ties and enduring political connections.

On the other hand, the Obidient Movement relies heavily on youth participation, digital platforms, and decentralized coordination, demonstrating a distinct approach to resource mobilization. The movement was able to organize a large number of followers, spread political messages, and arrange events via social media, bypassing the conventional party infrastructure. The changing nature of resources in modern political mobilization, in which networked communication and digital capital are crucial, is emphasized by

this (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). As a result, Resource Mobilization Theory offers a framework for comparing how various resource types traditional vs. digital affect the efficacy of grassroots movements in changing voting patterns.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to examine the influence of grassroots political movements on electoral behavior in Nigeria, with particular focus on the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements in Kano State during the 2023 general elections. Kano State was selected as the study area because of its strategic importance in Nigeria's electoral politics, its status as the traditional stronghold of the Kwankwasiyya Movement, and the significant activities of the Obidient Movement during the election period. The target population comprises all registered voters in Kano State who were eligible to participate in the 2023 general elections. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2023), Kano State had approximately 5.9 million registered voters. A sample size of 400 respondents was selected using the Taro Yamane sampling formula, while a multistage sampling technique was employed. Five Local Government Areas Nasarawa, Fagge, Tarauni, Gwale, and Kano Municipal were purposively selected due to their high voter concentration and visible presence of both political movements, after which respondents were selected through simple random sampling to ensure adequate representation. Data for the study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered physically and electronically through Google Forms,

while secondary data were sourced from books, journal articles, official reports of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), newspapers, conference papers, and other relevant publications. To complement the survey findings, the study also employed qualitative content analysis of selected social media content associated with the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements on platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube during the 2023 election period. The validity of the research instrument was established through expert review by specialists in Political Science and Research Methodology, while reliability was ensured through a pilot study conducted among respondents outside the selected study areas. Data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and tables with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns relating to political mobilization and electoral influence. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the comparative influence of the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements on electoral behavior in Kano State.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 400 questionnaires were administered and successfully retrieved and analyzed. The demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 4.1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 400)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	232	58.0
	Female	168	42.0
Age	18–25	110	27.5
	26–35	142	35.5
	36–45	78	19.5
	46–60	50	12.5
	60 and above	20	5.0
Educational Qualification	Primary	34	8.5
	Secondary	96	24.0
	Tertiary	214	53.5
	Postgraduate	56	14.0
Occupation	Student	128	32.0
	Civil Servant	102	25.5
	Self-employed	110	27.5
	Unemployed	42	10.5
	Other	18	4.5

Fieldwork, 2026

The gender distribution shows that male respondents (58.0%) slightly outnumbered female respondents (42.0%), indicating moderate gender balance in political participation within the study sample. Age distribution reveals that the majority of respondents fall within the 26–35 age bracket (35.5%), followed by those aged 18–25 (27.5%), suggesting that the study largely reflects youth and young adult political engagement, which is significant given the youth-driven nature of the

Obidient Movement. In terms of educational qualification, more than half of the respondents (53.5%) possess tertiary education, indicating a relatively well-educated sample capable of engaging critically with political issues. Occupational distribution shows that students (32.0%) and self-employed individuals (27.5%) form a large proportion of respondents, reflecting the broad-based nature of grassroots political participation across different socio-economic groups.

Table 2: Awareness of Grassroots Political Movements (N = 400)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Awareness of Kwankwasiyya Movement	Yes	312	78.0
	No	88	22.0
Awareness of Obidient Movement	Yes	356	89.0
	No	44	11.0
Source of Awareness	Social Media	198	49.5
	Television/Radio	72	18.0
	Friends/Family	68	17.0
	Political Rallies	44	11.0
	Other Sources	18	4.5
Participation in Movement Activities	Yes	176	44.0
	No	224	56.0

Fieldwork, 2026

The findings in Table 2 reveal a high level of awareness of both grassroots political movements among respondents. The Obidient Movement recorded slightly higher awareness (89.0%) compared to the Kwankwasiyya Movement (78.0%), suggesting that digital-based political mobilization may have broader visibility across the electorate. In terms of information sources, social media (49.5%) emerged as the dominant channel through which respondents first encountered these movements. This highlights the increasing role of digital platforms in shaping political awareness and reinforces the relevance of

online mobilization strategies in contemporary Nigerian politics. Traditional media sources such as television and radio accounted for 18.0%, while interpersonal networks (friends and family) contributed 17.0%. Regarding participation, less than half of the respondents (44.0%) reported active involvement in activities organized by either movement. This suggests that while awareness is high, active engagement remains moderate, indicating that grassroots movements may have stronger influence in shaping political perception than direct participation.

Table 3: Mobilization and Political Participation (N = 400)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean Decision
The Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements actively mobilize citizens for political participation.	42.5	38.0	12.5	7.0	Agreed
Social media played a major role in mobilizing voters during the 2023 elections.	55.0	33.0	8.0	4.0	Strongly Agreed
These movements increased my interest in political discussions.	39.5	40.0	14.0	6.5	Agreed
Grassroots movements encourage voter turnout during elections.	47.0	36.5	10.0	6.5	Agreed

Fieldwork, 2026

The results in Table 3 indicate a strong positive perception of grassroots political

movements in relation to political mobilization and participation in Nigeria.

For the first item, a combined 80.5% of respondents agreed that the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements actively mobilize citizens for political participation. This confirms that grassroots movements are widely perceived as significant actors in contemporary political engagement. The second item reveals an even stronger consensus, with 88.0% of respondents affirming that social media played a major role in voter mobilization during the 2023 elections. This finding highlights the centrality of digital platforms in modern electoral politics and supports the

argument that political communication has increasingly shifted toward online spaces. Similarly, 79.5% of respondents agreed that these movements increased their interest in political discussions, suggesting that grassroots mobilization extends beyond voting behavior to broader political awareness and civic engagement. And also, 83.5% of respondents agreed that grassroots movements encourage voter turnout, indicating that these movements contribute meaningfully to electoral participation and democratic engagement.

Table 4: Electoral Behavior and Voting Influence (N = 400)

Item	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Did grassroots political movements influence your voting decision in 2023?	Yes	236	59.0
	No	108	27.0
	Not Sure	56	14.0
Which movement influenced you more?	Kwankwasiyya	102	25.5
	Obidient	168	42.0
	Both	84	21.0
	None	46	11.5
Party affiliation was less important than movement influence during voting.	SA	38.5	38.5
	A	35.0	35.0
	D	16.5	16.5
	SD	10.0	10.0
Grassroots movements help voters make informed electoral choices.	SA	44.0	44.0
	A	37.0	37.0
	D	12.0	12.0
	SD	7.0	7.0

Fieldwork, 2026

The findings in Table 4 reveal that grassroots political movements had a significant influence on electoral behavior during the 2023 general elections. A majority of respondents (59.0%) indicated that grassroots political movements influenced their voting decisions, while 27.0% reported no influence and 14.0%

were unsure. This suggests that grassroots movements are becoming important actors in shaping electoral preferences in Nigeria. When asked which movement had greater influence, 42.0% of respondents identified the Obidient Movement, while 25.5% selected the Kwankwasiyya Movement. Additionally, 21.0% reported influence

from both movements, indicating some level of cross-movement political exposure. The relatively stronger influence of the Obidient Movement may be attributed to its extensive digital outreach and youth-driven mobilization strategy. Regarding political alignment, a combined 73.5% of respondents agreed that movement influence was more important than party affiliation during voting. This finding is particularly significant as it

suggests a gradual weakening of traditional party loyalty in favour of movement-based political identity. Furthermore, 81.0% of respondents agreed that grassroots movements help voters make more informed electoral choices. This indicates that these movements not only influence voting behavior but also contribute to political awareness and decision-making processes.

Kwankwasiyya and Obidient Movements (N = 400)

Table 5: Comparative Assessment of

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Decision
The Obidient Movement relies more on digital mobilization than Kwankwasiyya.	48.0	39.0	9.0	4.0	Agreed
Kwankwasiyya has stronger grassroots (offline) political structures than Obidient.	52.5	34.0	8.5	5.0	Agreed
The Obidient Movement has a wider national reach than Kwankwasiyya.	46.0	38.5	10.5	5.0	Agreed
Kwankwasiyya demonstrates stronger political loyalty among supporters than Obidient.	41.5	37.0	14.0	7.5	Agreed

Fieldwork, 2026

The results in Table 5 highlight clear differences in the structure, mobilization strategies, and electoral influence of the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements. A combined 87.0% of respondents agreed that the Obidient Movement relies more on digital mobilization than Kwankwasiyya. This confirms the central role of social media and online platforms in the Obidient Movement’s political strategy, reflecting its strong youth and technology-driven orientation. Conversely, 86.5% of respondents agreed that the Kwankwasiyya Movement possesses stronger grassroots (offline) political structures. This finding reflects its long-established political network, particularly in Northern Nigeria, where physical mobilization, loyalty

networks, and traditional political structures remain highly influential. On national reach, 84.5% of respondents agreed that the Obidient Movement has a wider national presence than Kwankwasiyya. This suggests that the Obidient Movement’s decentralized and digital nature allows it to transcend regional boundaries more effectively. However, 78.5% of respondents also agreed that Kwankwasiyya demonstrates stronger political loyalty among its supporters. This indicates that while the Obidient Movement is broader in reach, Kwankwasiyya may be deeper in terms of ideological or patronage-based commitment.

Table 6: Prospects of Merger and Electoral Implications (N = 400)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Decision
A possible alliance between Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements would significantly influence Nigeria's 2027 elections.	50.5	35.0	10.5	4.0	Agreed
A merger between both movements would increase voter turnout in future elections.	46.0	37.5	11.0	5.5	Agreed
Political differences between the two movements may hinder any possible alliance.	42.0	36.0	15.0	7.0	Agreed
A Kwankwasiyya–Obidient alliance could challenge the dominance of major political parties in Nigeria.	53.0	33.0	9.0	5.0	Agreed

Fieldwork, 2026

The findings in Table 6 indicate a strong perception among respondents that a potential alliance between the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements could have significant implications for Nigeria's future electoral landscape. A combined 85.5% of respondents agreed that a possible alliance between both movements would significantly influence the outcome of the 2027 general elections. This suggests widespread public recognition of the increasing political relevance of grassroots movements in shaping national electoral dynamics. Similarly, 83.5% of respondents agreed that such a merger could increase voter turnout in future elections. This implies that combining the mobilization strengths of both movements Kwankwasiyya's grassroots structure and Obidient's digital reach could enhance political participation across different demographic groups. However, 78.0% of respondents also acknowledged that political and ideological differences between the two movements may hinder any formal alliance. This highlights the structural and contextual challenges associated with merging movements that operate on different political logics and mobilization strategies. Despite these challenges, a significant 86.0% of respondents agreed that a Kwankwasiyya–Obidient alliance could potentially challenge the dominance

of major political parties in Nigeria. This reflects growing public perception that grassroots movements are becoming viable alternatives to traditional party structures.

Discussion of Findings**Political Awareness and the Role of Social Media**

The findings of this study reveal a significant transformation in Nigeria's electoral landscape, particularly in the growing influence of grassroots political movements such as the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements. The high level of awareness recorded for both movements demonstrates their growing prominence in contemporary Nigerian politics. The Obidient Movement recorded a higher awareness level than the Kwankwasiyya Movement, indicating the effectiveness of its digital mobilization strategy. The dominance of social media as the primary source of awareness highlights the changing nature of political communication in Nigeria, where digital platforms increasingly shape political consciousness and voter engagement. This finding supports the arguments of Nwafor and Odoemelam (2022) and Ojebode et al. (2023), who contend that social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and WhatsApp have become critical instruments of political communication and mobilization. Similarly, Loader, Vromen, and Xenos

(2014) argue that digital technologies facilitate the emergence of networked citizenship, enabling citizens to participate in political discourse outside traditional media structures. However, despite the high awareness levels, active participation remained relatively moderate, suggesting that awareness alone does not necessarily translate into sustained political engagement. This observation corroborates Bratton's (2013) position that structural and socio-economic constraints often limit the conversion of political awareness into active participation in many African democracies.

Grassroots Mobilization and Political Participation

The findings further indicate that both the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements have significantly enhanced political mobilization and citizen participation. A substantial proportion of respondents agreed that the movements actively encouraged political discussions, increased interest in governance issues, and stimulated voter turnout during the 2023 general elections. The strong acknowledgement of social media as a major mobilization tool demonstrates the growing integration of digital communication into electoral politics. This finding is consistent with Uwalaka (2023), who notes that the 2023 elections marked a turning point in Nigeria's digital political culture, particularly among young voters. The result also validates the proposition of Resource Mobilization Theory, which emphasizes that successful movements depend on their ability to effectively organize and deploy available resources, including communication networks, leadership, and membership support. While the Obidient Movement relied heavily on digital resources, the Kwankwasiyya Movement depended largely on established grassroots structures, illustrating different pathways through which political participation can

be stimulated. These findings further support Tarrow's (2011) argument that social movements create alternative channels of political engagement that complement formal democratic institutions.

Influence of Grassroots Movements on Electoral Behaviour

One of the most significant findings of the study is the extent to which grassroots political movements influenced voting decisions during the 2023 elections. The majority of respondents acknowledged that movement affiliation influenced their electoral choices, while many indicated that movement influence was more important than party affiliation. This suggests a gradual shift from conventional party-centered politics toward movement-based political identification. The stronger influence attributed to the Obidient Movement reflects its extensive digital outreach, youth-oriented messaging, and appeal to voters seeking political change. This finding aligns with Inglehart's (2018) post-materialist theory, which posits that contemporary voters increasingly prioritize values, identity, and issue-based concerns over traditional partisan loyalties. Similarly, Dalton's (2017) theory of cognitive mobilization suggests that politically informed citizens increasingly rely on independent political judgment rather than inherited party affiliations. The findings therefore indicate that grassroots political movements are becoming influential actors in shaping electoral preferences and political decision-making in Nigeria.

Comparative Mobilization Strategies of the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient Movements

The comparative analysis reveals important differences between the two movements in terms of organizational structure, mobilization strategies, and political reach. The Obidient Movement was largely perceived as a digitally driven

and nationally dispersed movement, while the Kwankwasiyya Movement was viewed as possessing stronger grassroots structures and deeper loyalty among supporters. These findings support Adejumobi's (2000) distinction between emerging network-based political movements and traditional patronage-oriented political organizations in Africa. The Kwankwasiyya Movement's enduring influence can be attributed to its long-established grassroots networks, political mentorship structures, and strong regional identity, particularly in Kano State. Conversely, the Obidient Movement represents a newer model of political engagement that relies on digital activism, decentralized coordination, and issue-based advocacy. The stronger loyalty associated with the Kwankwasiyya Movement further supports Scott's (2019) argument that patronage-based political systems often generate deeper and more durable political commitments among supporters. The findings therefore demonstrate that while both movements are influential, they derive their strength from different forms of resource mobilization, validating the central assumptions of Resource Mobilization Theory.

Prospects of Political Alliance and Future Electoral Implications

The study also reveals strong public perception regarding the potential electoral significance of a possible alliance between the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements. Most respondents believed that such a coalition could significantly influence future elections, increase voter turnout, and challenge the dominance of established political parties. This finding reflects growing recognition of the political power of grassroots movements in shaping democratic outcomes. Bratton and van de Walle (2021) argue that alliances among informal political actors often produce substantial electoral realignments

in emerging democracies. Likewise, the International Crisis Group (2023) notes that contemporary Nigerian politics is increasingly characterized by fluid coalitions rather than rigid party structures. The expectation that a merger could enhance voter participation also aligns with Putnam's (2000) concept of social capital, which emphasizes the role of collective networks in promoting civic engagement. Nevertheless, respondents expressed concerns regarding ideological and structural differences between the two movements. These concerns support the observations of Njoku and Olemeforo (2025), who argue that hybrid political coalitions often encounter challenges relating to leadership, organizational culture, and ideological coherence. Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that grassroots political movements possess the capacity to redefine Nigeria's political landscape and contribute to the emergence of a more competitive and participatory democratic system.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

The study concludes that grassroots political movements, particularly the Obidient and Kwankwasiyya movements, have become influential forces in Nigeria's electoral politics, significantly shaping political awareness, participation, and voting behavior in the 2023 general elections. The findings reveal a clear shift from traditional party-centered politics toward citizen-driven and movement-based engagement, largely facilitated by digital platforms and informal networks. While the Obidient Movement demonstrates the growing power of digital mobilization, youth participation, and national reach, the Kwankwasiyya Movement reflects the continued relevance of structured, loyalty-based grassroots organization rooted in regional political dynamics. Despite high levels of

awareness, the relatively moderate level of active participation suggests that these movements are more effective in influencing political perceptions than sustaining deep engagement. Importantly, the study highlights a declining emphasis on party affiliation, with many voters prioritizing movement influence and issue-based considerations in their electoral decisions. The prospect of a potential alliance between the two movements further underscores their strategic importance, as such a coalition could reshape Nigeria's political landscape, enhance voter turnout, and challenge the dominance of established political parties, although ideological and structural differences may pose limitations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical and policy-oriented recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of grassroots political movements and strengthen democratic participation in Nigeria. First, grassroots political movements should develop structured engagement strategies that convert high awareness into sustained participation. While awareness levels are impressive, the gap between awareness and active involvement suggests the need for more inclusive and continuous mobilization efforts such as community outreach, political education programs, and local organizing beyond election periods. Second, there is a need to strategically integrate digital and offline mobilization approaches. The Obidient Movement's strength in digital engagement and the Kwankwasiyya Movement's strong physical grassroots structures demonstrate that a hybrid model would be more effective. Political movements and actors

should therefore combine social media campaigns with face-to-face engagement to reach both urban and rural populations more effectively. Third, policymakers and electoral stakeholders, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission, should leverage the growing influence of grassroots movements to promote voter education and participation. Collaborating with these movements can enhance civic awareness, improve voter turnout, and strengthen the credibility of electoral processes.

Fourth, political parties should adapt to the changing dynamics of voter behavior by becoming more responsive to issue-based politics and citizen demands. The declining importance of party loyalty indicates that parties must move beyond elite-driven politics and engage more meaningfully with grassroots concerns, especially those of young people.

Fifth, regarding the prospects of alliance, any potential collaboration between the Kwankwasiyya and Obidient movements should be based on clear ideological alignment, shared policy goals, and mutual trust like the OK movement. Without this, structural and political differences may undermine the effectiveness of such a coalition. Dialogue, negotiation, and strategic compromise will be essential for any successful partnership ahead of future elections. Finally, there is a need for continuous academic and policy research on grassroots political movements in Nigeria and other emerging democracies. As political engagement continues to evolve, further studies will be crucial in understanding the long-term implications of movement-based politics on democratic consolidation, governance, and political stability.

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