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- Dr Adewale Opawale is the MD & CEO of STREAM Insight - Strategic Research & Management Insight, based in Lagos Nigeria. Under his 16 years leadership, STREAM Insight has massively expanded from Nigeria into a pan-African research organisation with projects across numerous African countries and sectors.
 - With a background in development research and international public health, Adewale created a niche for STREAM Insight in development and social research. He has consistently delivered in this space for about two decades, serving various clients and development partners across the African continent, particularly in sectors like health, agriculture, education, NGOs, government parastatal, governance and politics, energy etc. He has also served as a UN resource person on research and intervention projects across ten countries.
 - He is a member of the Social Research Association (SRA), United Kingdom, a Fellow of the Institute of Data Processing Management of Nigeria (IDPM), and a Fellow of the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH), United Kingdom.
 - Over the years, Dr Opawale has granted several media interviews on research, data, and development issues in Africa, including being featured in the prestigious The New York Times.



Beyond the Algorithm: Reclaiming Accuracy in Public Opinion Research in Africa



Presenter: Dr. Adewale Opawale
Affiliation: STREAM Insight
Presented at: NiMRA Conference. Lagos, Nigeria
Date: 25th June 2026

Conference Theme:

Consumer & Social Intelligence as Transformative Power

Topic:

Beyond the Algorithm:
Reclaiming Accuracy in Public Opinion Research in Africa.

Can algorithms truly understand Africa?

- We're talking:
 - Machine Learning
 - Forecasting Models
 - Natural Language Processing
 - Digital Tracing (online patterns & behaviours)

- We are told:
 - big data can predict elections,
 - digital footprints reveal public opinion
 - AI can replace field intelligence
 - and machine learning can decode human behaviour at scale.

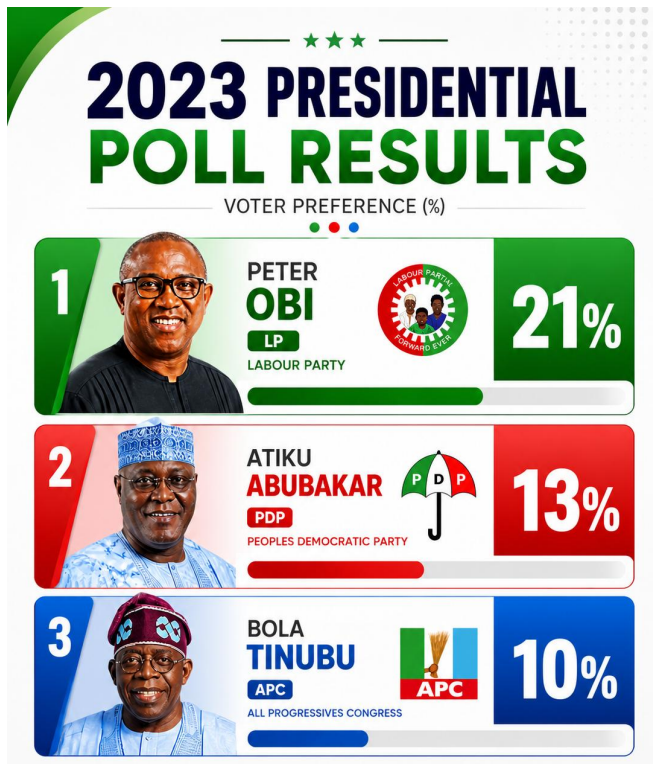
Can an algorithm alone explain:

- silence born from fear,
- loyalty shaped by ethnicity,
- distrust of institutions,
- hidden voting behaviour,
- or cultural nuances expressed in languages many AI systems still cannot process accurately?

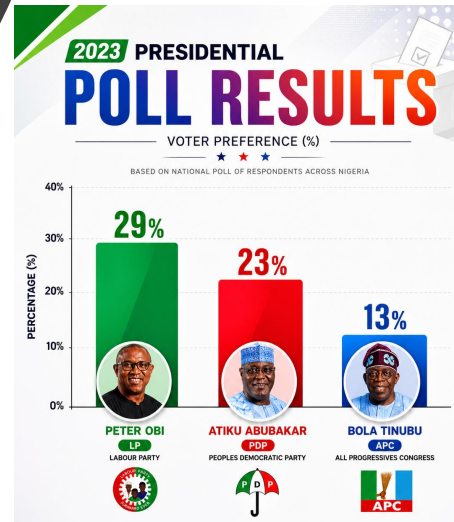
Today, this presentation argues that while AI is powerful, African public opinion research cannot completely surrender itself to algorithms vet.

The nights many of us were terribly wrong !!!

- Misled governments
- Distorted policy
- Influenced markets wrongly
- Destabilised elections
- Eroded trust in research itself

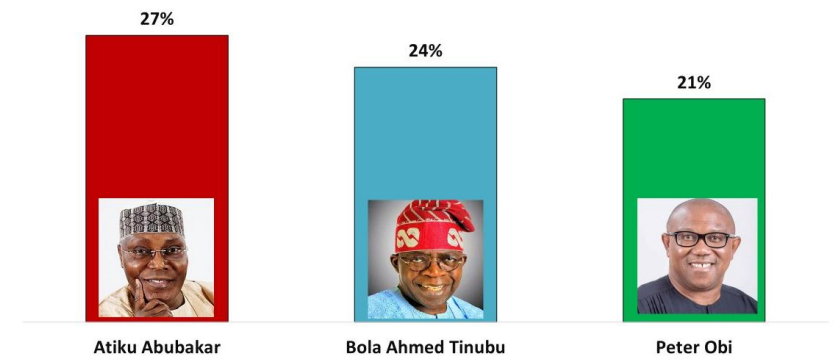


Poll A



Poll B

How the 2023 Presidential Votes are Most Likely to be Distributed



Poll C

Nigeria is about to hold Africa's largest democratic exercise. Here's what to know about its presidential election



By Nimi Princewill and Stephanie Busari, CNN

🕒 8 min read · Updated 3:14 PM EST, Wed February 22, 2023



▶ Here's what to know about Nigeria's presidential election

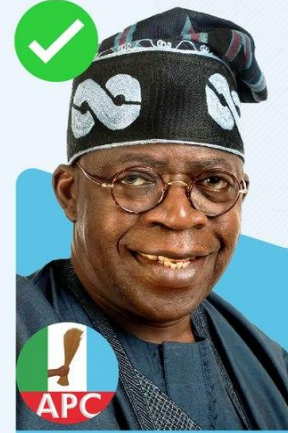
Who is tipped to win?

A [predictive poll](#) by XXX puts **Obi** ahead of the two main challengers

Another [poll](#) by YYY does not foresee a frontrunner but suggests that **Obi and Abubakar could garner a sufficient number of ballots to meet the 25% vote spread** in 24 of Nigeria's 36 states required by law to win.

The forecast [whose survey](#) polled **three million** people and predicts a close race between the opposition **PDP (38%)** and the ruling **APC (29%)**.

2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS



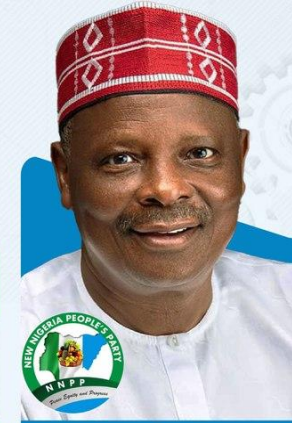
Tinubu

8,794,726
Votes



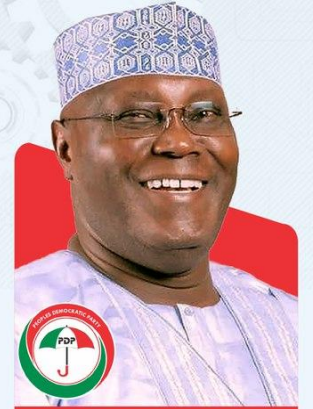
Obi

6,101,533
Votes



Kwankwaso

1,496,687
Votes



Atiku

6,984,520
Votes

States Won

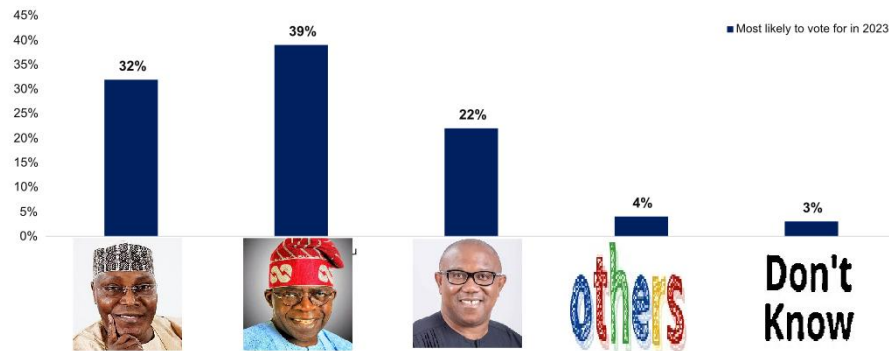


Top 4 Candidates
23,377,466 **97.3%**

Other Candidates
648,474 **2.7%**

Total Valid Votes
24,025,940 **100%**

Data Source: INEC

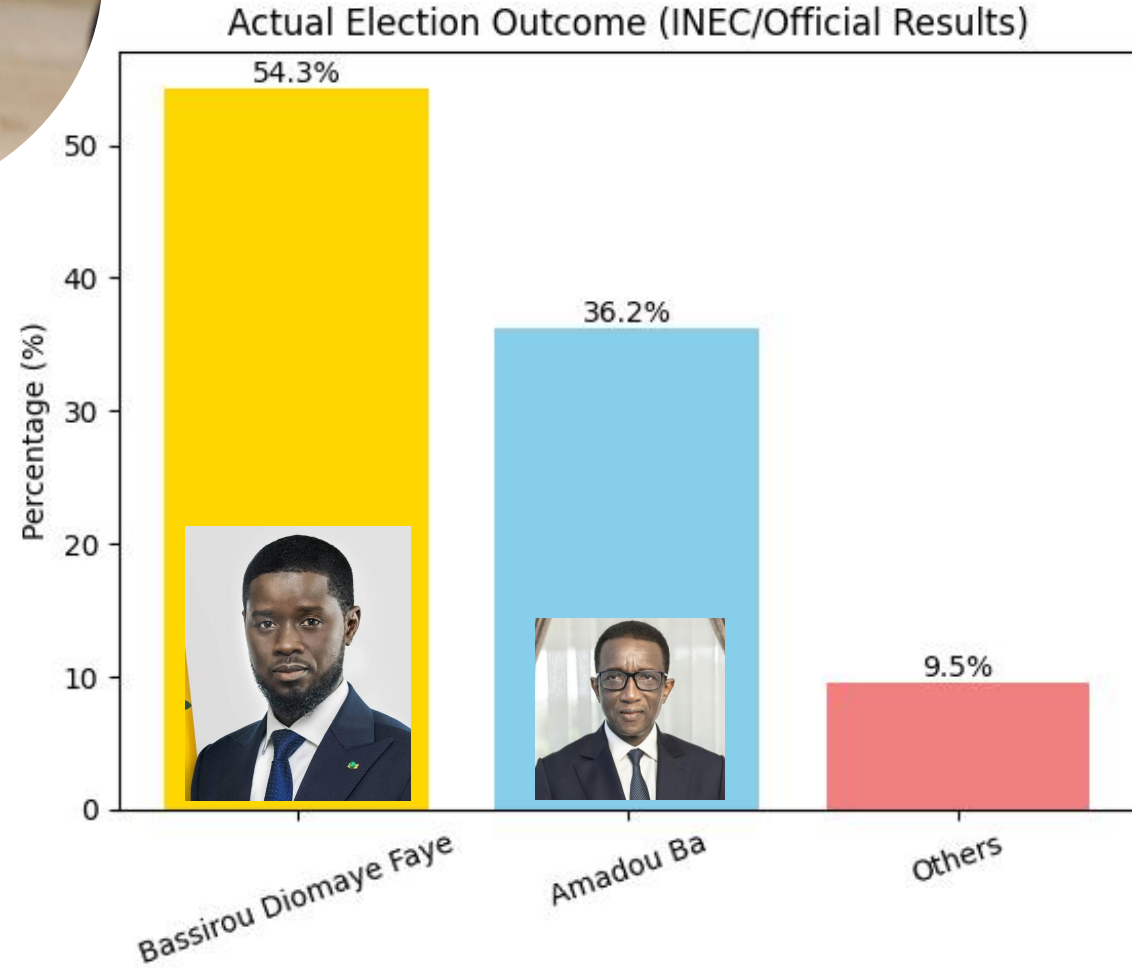


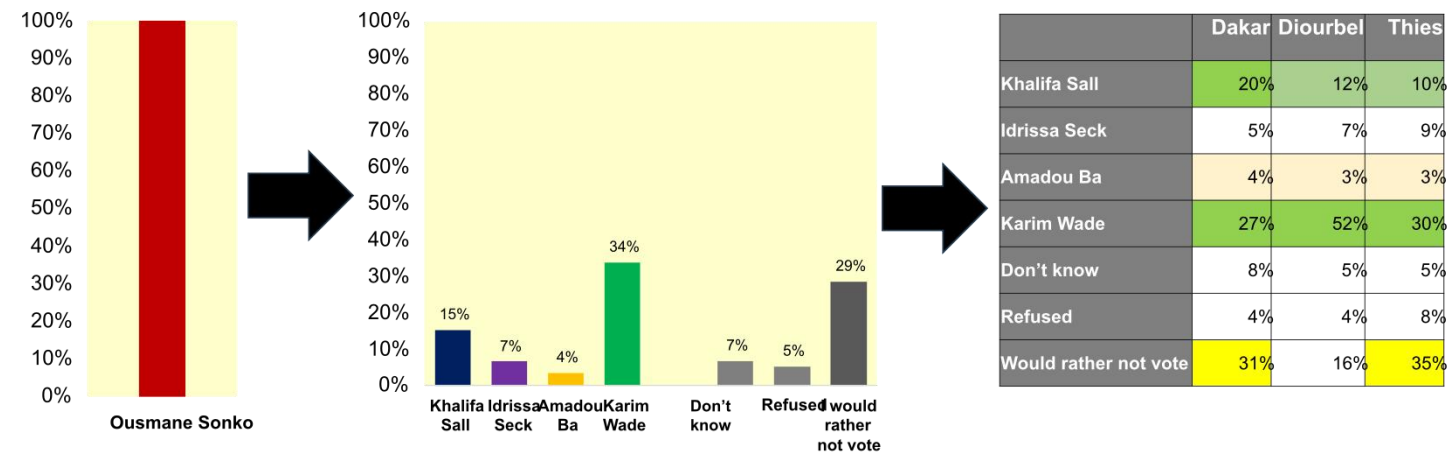
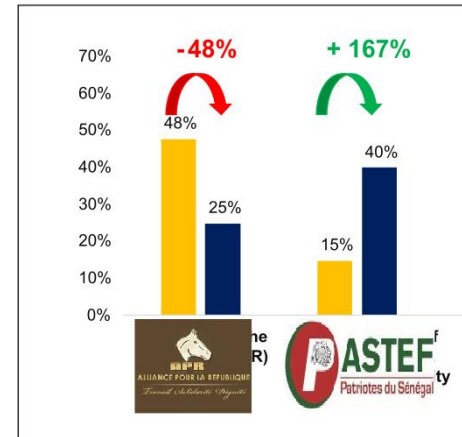
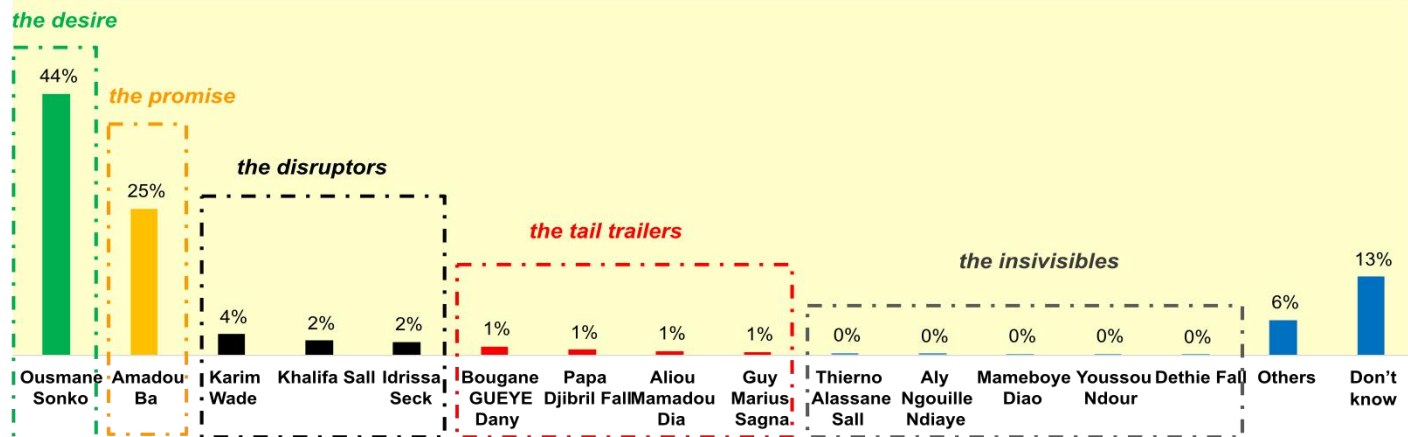
Prediction by STREAM Insight (Feb. 2023)

Sample size = 4,000
Methodology = F2F Quant Survey
2 states per geopolitical zone + FCT
Voters eligibility representative



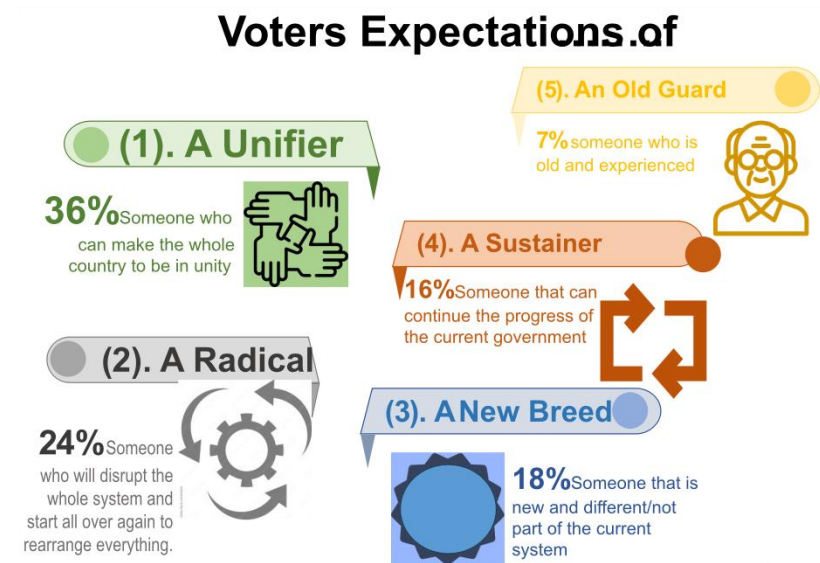
Poll/ Organization	Field Date	Predicted Leader	Topline Findings
Poll 1	Jan–Feb 2024	Amadou Ba (ruling coalition)	Ba 37%, Faye 33%, others 30%
Poll 2	Mid–March 2024	Neck-and-neck race	Faye 36%, Ba 35%, undecided 20%
Poll 3	Late March 2024	Faye leading slightly	Faye 42%, Ba 38%, others 20%





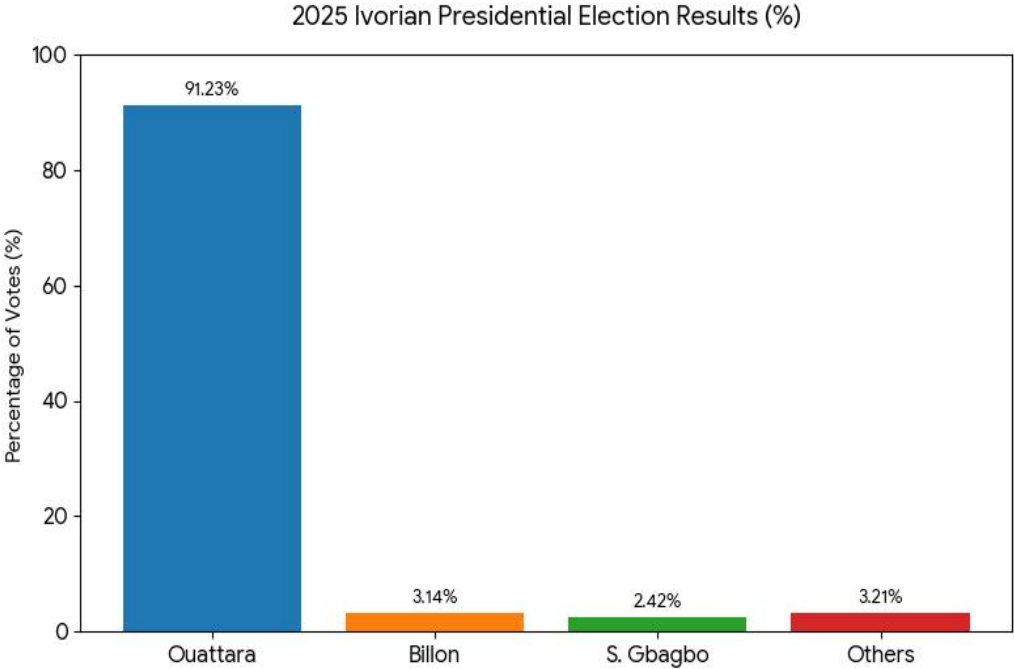
	First Choice	Second Choice				
		Khalifa Sall	Idrissa Seck	Ousmane Sonko	Amadou Ba	Karim Wade
Khalifa Sall	2%		5%	49%	25%	16%
Idrissa Seck	2%	6%		25%	60%	5%
Ousmane Sonko	44%	10%	4%		23%	33%
Amadou Ba	25%	10%	8%	54%		16%
Karim Wade	4%	3%	2%	65%	26%	

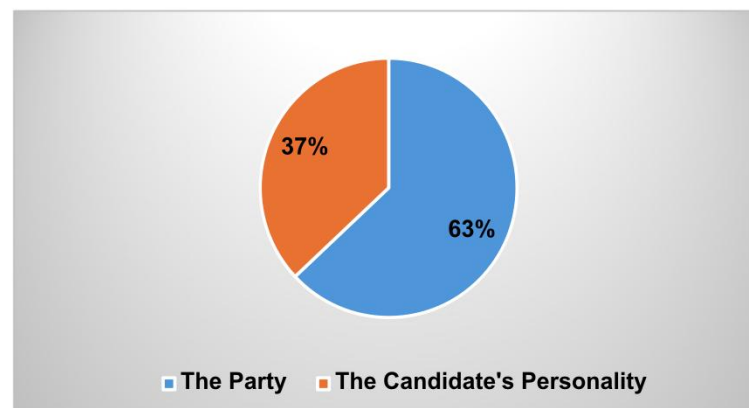
Supporters' Mindset vs Oppositions' Mindset





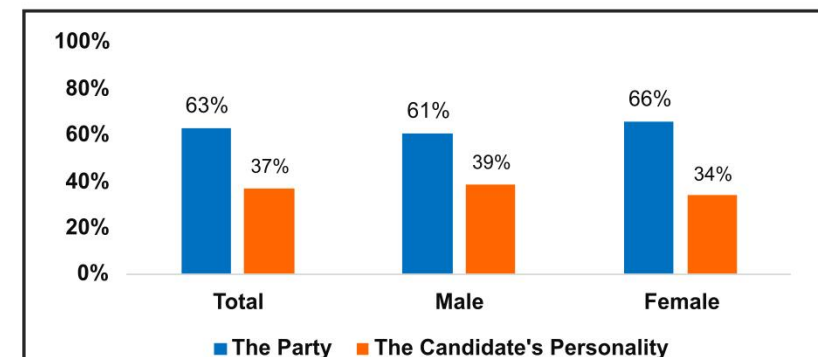
Polling Organization	Date (2024-2025)	Predicted Leader	Topline Estimate
Poll 1	Nov–Dec 2024	Tidjane Thiam (PDCI)	Thiam 38%, Koné 33%, Gbagbo 22%
Poll 2	Jan 2025	Tiémoko Meyliet Koné (RHDP)	Koné 41%, Thiam 36%, Gbagbo 17%
Poll 3	Feb 2025	Thiam	Thiam 45%, Koné 32%, Gbagbo 15%
Poll 4	March 2025 (final pre-vote)	Neck-and-neck	Koné 39%, Thiam 38%, Gbagbo 19%
Poll 5	February 2025	Gbagbo (regional strongholds)	Gbagbo leading only in western zones (up to 45%)





	The Party	The Candidate's Personality
18 – 29 years	60%	40%
30 – 39 years	63%	37%
40 – 49 years	64%	36%
50 – 59 years	69%	31%
60 years & above	66%	34%

	The Party	The Candidate's Personality
Region 1	81%	19%
Region 2	61%	39%
Region 3	66%	34%
Region 4	54%	46%
Region 5	57%	43%



Digital Noise ≠ Public Opinion

Twitter is not **Nigeria**.

Facebook is not **Kenya**.

TikTok is not **Angola**.

Digital noise in Africa is not public opinion.

Why does
a **tool**
that **sees**
everything

miss
so much?



1. The Rapid Tech Shift



AI, NLP, digital exhaust
are reshaping research



Social listening viewed
as public mood



Online polling
rising fast



2. Why Algorithms **Fail**



Sentiment suggested
overwhelming support



Digital activity
signaled **dominance**



Rural offline voters
flipped the race



3.

The Promise



4.

Africa's Complex Terrain



Unequal internet penetration



Multilingual communication



Offline political mobilisation



Cultural factors



Religious inputs



Political party



Opposition Unity or Fragmentation



Security Environment



Voter Turnout and Demographics



5.

Flaws in Sampling Frame and Voting Representation



Census Data

The total population in scope



Voting Demographics

Who can vote mostly based on citizenship and age



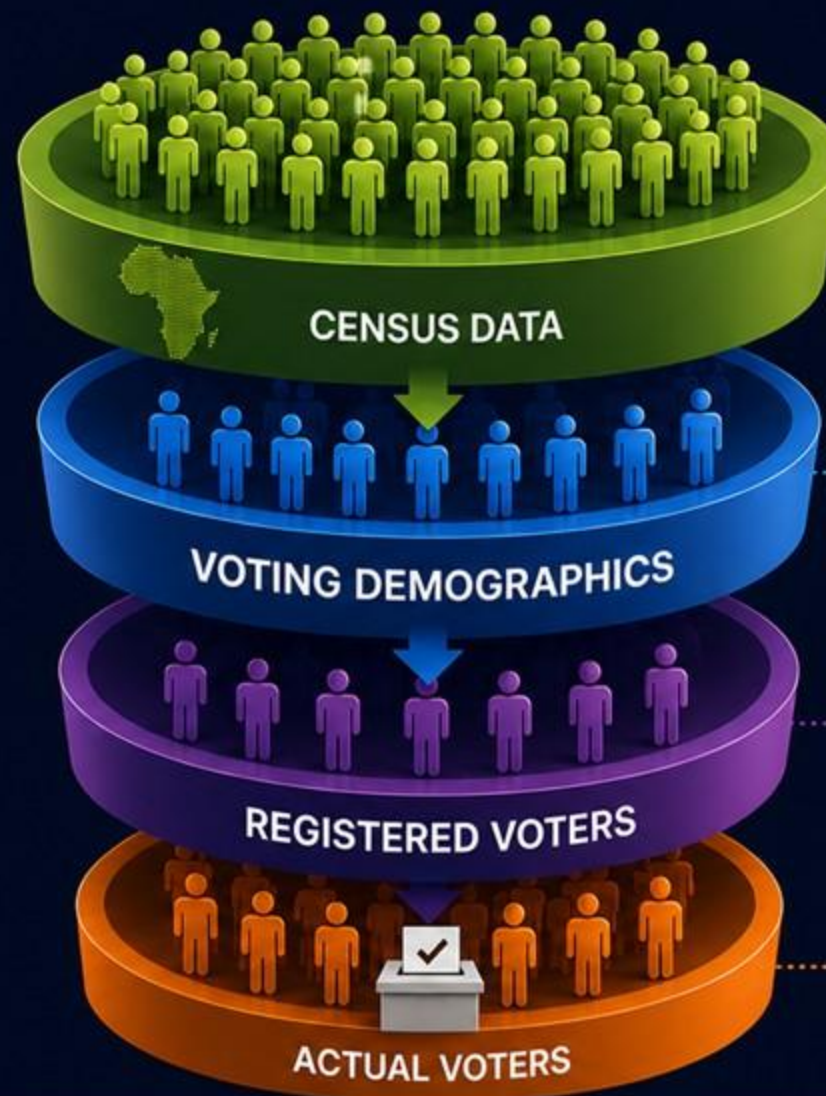
Registered Voters

Those who have registered to vote



Actual Voters

Those who turned out and cast their votes



OUTDATED

Outdated or inaccurate population estimates.



EXCLUSION BIAS

Rules or data gaps exclude eligible voters (rural, youth, women, etc.).



REGISTRATION GAPS

Not everyone eligible gets registered.



TURNOUT LOSS

Multiple barriers reduce voter turnout.

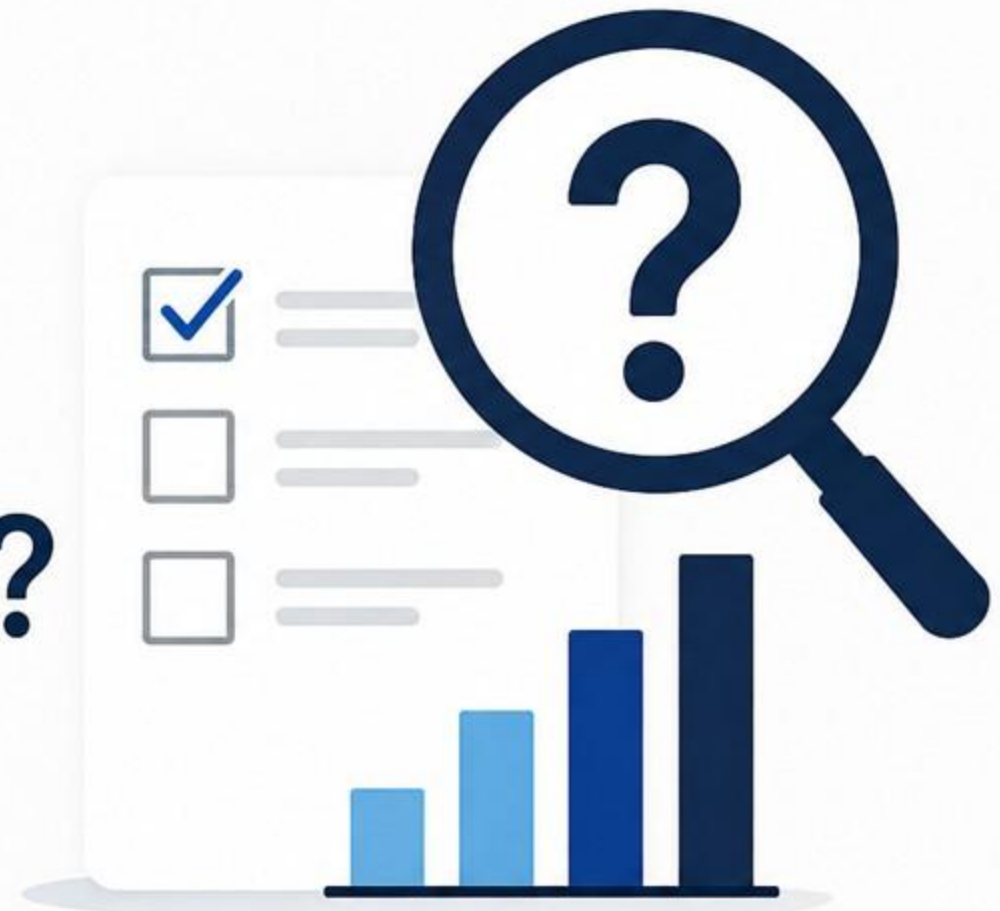


RESULT: DISTORTED REPRESENTATION, MISLEADING INSIGHTS, FLAWED OUTCOMES.

Errors compound at every stage—amplifying bias and distorting reality.

Are you asking the right questions ?

- Which political party would you like to win the next election? (X)
- Which political party do you think will win the next election? (X)
- “Who influences your decision to vote?”



How many actual votes are the percentages translating to?



- Will your client get the highest number of votes nationwide?
- Will your client win at least 25% of the votes in at least two-thirds of the states and the FCT.

Prediction Model for Actual Vote Count in an Election

Region	% Votes Party A is Predicted to win in 2027	Number of Registered Voters (2023)	Possible Vote Counts for Party A in 2027	Turn-Out Rate (2023)	Predicted Vote Counts for Party A in 2027
Region 1	34%	5,921,370	2,013,266	30.15%	607,000
Region 2	38%	2,172,056	825,381	29.84%	246,294
Region 3	17%	1,926,870	327,568	26.71%	87,493
Region 4	48%	3,516,719	1,688,025	31.03%	523,794
Region 5	50%	4,335,208	2,167,604	32.33%	700,786
Region 6	47%	2,032,041	955,059	29.81%	284,703
Region 7	65%	2,351,298	1,528,344	40.78%	623,259
Total		22,255,562	9,505,247		3,073,329

THE HYBRID RESEARCH MODEL

Technology-Driven Methods:

- Digital analytics
- Mobile research
- AI-assisted modelling
- Machine learning

Human-Centred Methods:

- Face-to-face interviews
- FGDs
- IDIs
- Ethnography
- Vox Pop
- Contextual interpretation
- Local expertise
- Community intelligence

Representativeness remains the foundation of credibility.

Bias Correction in African AI Research



ALGORITHMS ARE NOT NEUTRAL.

AI reflects the assumptions embedded within:

- training data
- platform structures
- and model design

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR AFRICA



If African data is underrepresented, AI systems will inherit **structural blind spots**.

AFRICA MUST INVEST IN:



Local language models



African datasets



Culturally aware NLP systems



Human-in-the-loop verification



HUMAN OVERSIGHT IS NOT A WEAKNESS. IT IS A SAFEGUARD.

TRANSPARENCY MATTERS GREATLY.

Researchers must openly communicate:



Sampling limitations



Weighting assumptions



Digital exclusion risks



Model constraints



Otherwise, AI may create an **illusion of precision**.
A beautifully designed dashboard can still produce deeply flawed conclusions.



“

**HYBRID METHODS ARE NOT A TEMPORARY COMPROMISE.
FOR AFRICA, THEY ARE A NECESSITY.**

”

FUTURE OF AFRICAN ELECTION RESEARCH

The future of election research in Africa is both **data-driven** and **deeply human**.

“
**Algorithms see data.
But Africa's elections
are written in people.**
”



TECHNOLOGY & DATA



AI will improve.



Predictive analytics will become more sophisticated.



Africa's digital footprint will continue expanding.



Computational intelligence will evolve.



HUMAN UNDERSTANDING



Elections are **emotional** events.



Elections are **cultural** events.



Elections are **historical** events.



Human insight remains central.



THE FUTURE CHALLENGE:

How do we combine computational intelligence with human understanding?
Not replacing researchers, but empowering them.

In Conclusion...



ALGORITHMS ARE TOOLS.

- Algorithms are **tools**.
- Data is **important**.
- AI is **transformative**.



BUT NONE OF THESE SHOULD REPLACE:

- **context**,
- **empathy**,
- **field intelligence**,
- and **human judgment**.



AS RESEARCHERS,

our responsibility is **not simply to predict outcomes**.
Our responsibility is to **understand societies**.
To **hear voices** others overlook.
To **represent populations** others ignore.



AND TO ENSURE THAT AFRICA IS NOT MERELY
ANALISED THROUGH FOREIGN COMPUTATIONAL LENSES —
BUT UNDERSTOOD ON ITS OWN REALITY.

LET US
EMBRACE AI.

BUT LET US NOT
EXCHANGE REALITY
WITH AUTOMATION.

BECAUSE BEYOND THE ALGORITHM...

LIES AFRICA.



AND AFRICA MUST STILL BE UNDERSTOOD
BY **LISTENING TO ITS PEOPLE.**

BEYOND THE ALGORITHM LIES **THE REALITY OF AFRICA** — AND AFRICA MUST BE UNDERSTOOD ON ITS **OWN REALITY.**



THANK YOU

FOR LISTENING





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...from insight to foresight