

Religious Diversity, APC 2023 Same Faith Presidential Ticket and Social Cohesion in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is a pluralistic and multicultural society with people of diverse ethnic origins and different religions. The nation grapples with social upheavals that have threatened its existence. Religious divide in the country has also been seen to cause political tensions between Christians and Muslims in the country. Using secondary method of data collection, the paper found that, though during the 1993 presidential election, SDP presidential candidate and the running mate were both Muslims but, since the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999, the major political parties have been careful in the nomination of their presidential candidates and running mates coming from the same faith, given the polarization of religion in the country. However, during the 2023 presidential election, the ruling All Progressive Congress presented Ahmed Bola Tinubu a Muslim from the south and Kashim Shettima a Muslim from the north. This arrangement sparked lots of agitations among the Christian APC members and the Christian community in the country at large. Though the ruling APC disclosed that it was not an intentional act to demean the Christian population in the country but a strategy towards winning the election. This implication equally reflected on the pattern of vote. It was found that, some states that were controlled by APC governors with dominant Christians, voted for other political parties with mix ticket than APC hence, the citizens are more divided on the basis of religion than ever before. **Keywords:** Religious Diversity, Same Faith, APC, Presidential Ticket, Nigeria.

Introduction

Religion has a significant impact on global politics today. According to Durkheim, religion serves a functional role, but according to Marxists, it serves a dysfunctional role, particularly in societies with multiple religions. Religion can be both integrative and disintegrative; it can stabilize and destabilize, igniting hatred and strife within society. It is also not overstated to say that religion plays a major role in the conflicts that have been documented worldwide. In Nigeria, religion is accountable for almost all social tensions. Aside from political unrest and economic hardship, one of the biggest issues facing our nation today is the increasing frequency of confrontational religious crises that take the form of riots, which are caused by parochialism or outright sentionism (Eyeruroma & Allison, 2021).

According to a 2018 estimate in The World Fact-book by the CIA, the population in Nigeria is estimated to be 53.5% Muslim, 45.9% Christian (10.6% Roman Catholic and 35.3% protestant

and other Christian), and 0.6% as other. Owing to the diverse range of interests and viewpoints present in the Nigerian nation, it became imperative to create common social strata among the constituent units of Nigerian society. The 1946 Constitution of Sir Arthur Richards included the concept of "Unity in diversity" as a result of this specific phenomenon, which forced the country's colonial government to do so before reaching independence (Eyeruroma & Allison, 2021). This particular Constitution was designed to support the various branches of the government while accounting for their differences in customs, ideologies, and degrees of development. The 1999 Constitution serves as the supreme law of Nigeria as it exists now.

It is assumed that Nigerian citizens' rights are protected by this Constitution, regardless of their tribe, belief, creed, or religion. But while religion should offer spiritual support, it has created a history of political conflict and intrigue worldwide, especially in Nigeria. It is performing a dis-integrative role of mutual suspicion rather than fostering social cohesion, or an integrative role among the people. In Nigeria's most recent presidential election of 2023, the All Progressive Congress (APC) nominated a Muslim candidate from the south, Ahmed Bola Tinubu, for president, and a Muslim candidate from the north, Kashim Shetima, for vice president. Though the party leadership considered it as a tactic to win the 2023 presidential election, but several APC Christian Chieftains reacted negatively to the decision, which undermined social cohesiveness in the party and the nation at large. However, it is the light of the above that this paper, interrogates religious diversity, social cohesion and the APC 2023 same faith presidential ticket in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

The concepts to clarify in this paper are; Religious diversity, Same Faith Ticket and social cohesion.

Religion Diversity

First, what is religion? A sociologist Durkheim (1915) described religion as “things that surpass the limits of our knowledge, a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them”. Some associate religion with places of worship (a synagogue or church), others with a practice (confession or meditation), and still others with a concept that guides their daily lives (like dharma or sin). Contributing to the debate on religion, Yesufu (2016) sees religion as the service and worship of God or gods. Mbatl (cited in Ilesanmi, 2014) emphasized that religion is a strong element in the traditional backgrounds that exerts the greatest influence upon the thinking and feelings of the people concerned. Emoghene & Okolie (2020) interprets religion as a barrier to human self-actualization. There is no doubt that religion can be seen in this light when it has been turned into an ideological tool as Karl Marx sees it as the opium of the people.

On the other hand, religious diversity is a social phenomenon in which two or more clearly defined religions exist simultaneously within a region or society. Religious monism is the opposite of religious diversity. Religious monism is the idea that there is only one underlying cause or answer to an issue or theological question.

Same Faith Ticket

The political arrangement known as the "Same Faith" ticket refers to a situation in which a party's vice presidential and presidential candidates share the same religious background. Given that Muslims and Christians make up about equal parts of the population and that there has historically been ethnic and religious violence in Nigeria, political tickets of this kind are a unique and contentious topic in the country's politics. The APC's 2023 Muslim-Muslim (same faith) ticket has drawn criticism for upending the nation's religious harmony and balance as well as praise for progressive policies that put competence and merit ahead of religious feelings.

The concept of the Same Faith ticket in Nigerian politics is rooted in the nation's complex socio-political history, which has often intersected with religious dynamics. The nation is roughly divided between its predominantly Muslim northern regions and largely Christian southern regions, each with distinct political aspirations and interests. The tensions arising from this religious divide have occasionally led political parties to adopt a cross religion ticket for the nation's unity and stability.

Social Cohesion

The concept of social cohesion has been defined in a number of ways. Some define social cohesiveness as the ties or connections that exist amongst neighbors, particularly in the setting of a heterogeneous society (Schmeets, 2012). Others define it as the nature of the relationships that exist between and among the people and groups that they are a part of (Schmeets, 2012). For others, it is the quality of connections between and among individuals and groups to which they belong (Marc et al., 2012). According to the OECD Development Centre (2011), a society that strives for the welfare of all of its members while reducing inequalities and preventing marginalization is said to be socially cohesive. According to the OECD, there are three main components to its characterization: promoting cohesion by creating networks of relationships, trust, and identification among various groups; combating discrimination, exclusion, and excessive inequality; and facilitating upward social mobility. According to this definition, social cohesiveness refers to a society's ability to prioritize the well-being of its constituents while simultaneously fostering inclusion among various groups and minimizing disparities.

For the purpose of this paper, and within the context of the Nigerian society, social cohesion is the willingness of Nigerians to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper. A socially cohesive society encourages participation, social inclusion of all groups, minimizes disparities, and avoids marginalizations. A non-cohesive society on the other hand is at the risk of increased social vices and conflicts due to perceived exclusion, marginalizations and disconnection from the social contract (The Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey Report, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

In discussing social issues of this magnitude, different theories can be used for a succinct analysis however, this paper adopted the social integration theory. The concept of social integration refers to the ways that different groups come together to form a whole in society. It also refers to cases where minority groups become part of mainstream society or when groups of individuals come together to make a cohesive whole. The concept of social integration was introduced in the late nineteenth century by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1951).

Durkheim's theory of social integration helps to explain the rise of security issues in the modern world. Durkheim argued that social integration, or the degree to which individuals are connected to and feel a part of their society, is crucial for social order and stability. When social integration is weak, individuals may feel disconnected and alienated, leading to social unrest and insecurity. This can manifest in various forms, such as terrorism, communal or religion conflict and cyber-attacks, which threaten the stability and security of societies. Hence, Durkheim's theory, suggest that the rise of security issues in the modern world can be attributed, at least in part, to the weakening of social integration.

In a similar line of thought, Brissette, Cohen, & Seeman (2000), argued that, social integration is the degree to which individuals participate in a wide range of social roles and relationships. They posit that, social integration is a multi-dimensional concept thought to include a behavioral component and a cognitive component. The behavioral aspect consists of an individual's active engagement in a range of social activities and relationships, and the cognitive aspect refers to the extent to which an individual feels connected to the community and can identify with their social roles (Brissette et al., 2000). Therefore, increased social integration in terms of politics, religion and economic inclusion helps reduce conflict in society, and it can help us feel more connected to our community.

Nigeria's Political Development and Religion Diversity

When British colonial rulers established control over different regions, each with its own distinct ethnic and religious composition, Nigeria's political evolution towards nationhood got underway. A notable development during this time was the union of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914, which resulted in the creation of Nigeria. Due to the fact that the south had a majority of Christians and the north had a majority of Muslims, this union brought together areas with quite different religious majorities. The colonial government extensively exploited regional and religious distinctions throughout the colonial era in order to keep power.

This encouraged Nigerians to identify with their respective religions and regions. Consequently, these differences continued and became profoundly ingrained in the political discourse when Nigeria got independence in 1960. Nigeria experienced political unrest, military takeovers, and ethnic conflicts in the years right after it gained independence. The Nigerian Civil War began in 1967 as a result of the southeast region's attempt to secede, led by Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu of Biafra. Tensions between the religions and the region were further heightened and intensified by this battle, which lasted until 1970.

Nigerian politics entered a new phase in 1979 with the return to democratic rule, but the legacy of religious and regional conflicts persisted. In an attempt to gain national acceptance and tackle the dual issues of religion and region in Nigeria, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) put up Shehu Shagari, a Muslim from the north, as their presidential candidate in the years that followed, his running mate was Alex Ekwueme, a Christian from the south. This was done as a tactic to win the election as well as to include other areas and religions. In Nigerian history, the 1993 presidential election stands out as one of the most significant. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) candidate Moshood Abiola, was a Muslim from the southwest, he was joined by another Muslim, Babagana Kingibe, who was from the north. Although the ticket considered regional diversity, it was unable to account for the country's religious diversity. They won the election, incidentally, because Nigerians desired an end to the protracted military rule, regardless of the

candidates' religious beliefs. However, the military annulled the results, which sparked massive demonstrations and political unrest.

Nigeria struggled with military dictatorship, political unrest, and economic difficulties in the 1980s and 1990s. Religious and regional identities persisted in shaping the political scene. When Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999, religious and regional diversity were accommodated in the political sphere. Political parties carefully considered their choices of candidates, by ensuring that the complex web of religious and regional allegiances in the country was well taking into consideration. These happened among the major political parties during the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 presidential elections but, during the 2023 presidential election, the ruling political party in the country (APC) could not take into account the diversity in religion though they took into cognizance regionalism in the country. Though the reason advanced by the ruling APC was for the purpose of winning the election, but the reaction that greeted the choice even among some APC Christian Chieftains, was educative to the detriment of social cohesion in the country Emoghene & Okolie (2020).

According to Eurofund and Siftung (2014), there are three main domains of social cohesiveness which are relevant to our analysis;

Connectedness: This involves Identification, Trust in institutions, and perceptions of fairness.

Social relations: This involves social networks, trust in people, and acceptance of diversity, and

Focus on the common: Focus on the common involves solidarity and helpfulness, respect for social rules, and civic participation among the populace.

The 2023 General Election and the All Progressive Congress Same Faith Presidential Ticket

After the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) granted an extension, the APC finally settled on June 6–8 for its presidential primary. With the party leadership seemingly determined to impose a consensus candidate as its nominee for president, the run-up to the presidential primaries was full of mysteries and doubts. On June 6, the party's then-chairman, Senator Abdullahi Adamu, revealed to the party's members the consensus candidate, whom he named as Senator Ahmad Lawan, the senator from Yobe State in northeastern Nigeria. The announcement caused a great deal of controversy among rival candidates and internal strife within the party's National Working Committee (NWC). Nonetheless, Lawan's announcement as the consensus candidate was rejected by President Muhammadu Buhari (Majeed, 2022). Following that, the party's primaries were held, and the 23 candidates for president who passed the screening process went on to give their campaign speeches. Voting then took place all night on Tuesday, June 7, with the results being revealed midday on Wednesday, June 8. The announced result was:

S/N	NAME	SCORE
1.	Ahmed Bola Tinubu	1,271
2.	Amed Lawan	152
3.	Ahmed Sani Yerima	4
4	Ben Ayade	37
5.	Dave Umahi	38
6.	Emeka Nwajiuba	1
7.	Ike-obasiMokelu	0
8.	Ogbonnaya Onu	1

9.	Rotimi Amaechi	316
10.	Rochas Okorochoa	0
11.	Tunde Bakare	0
12.	Tein Jack Rich	0
13.	Yemi Osibanjo	235
14.	Yahaya Bello	47

Source: INEC (2022), compiled by the Authors

As the election was about to start, a number of candidates withdrew their candidature in support of Ahmed Bola Tinubu. For instance, Godswill Akpabio, Ajayi Boroffice, Dimeji Bankole, Kayode Fayemi, Ibikunle Amosun, and Uju Kennedy Ohanenye, the only female candidate. Mr. Felix was the only candidate who withdrew from the race in support of Vice President Yemi Osinbajo. He noted that a Tinubu candidacy would result in a potential Muslim/Muslim ticket, he warned against it (Majeed, 2022). Consequently, Ahmed Bola Tinubu, a Muslim from the southwest, won the primary election as shown in the table above.

After the primary election and the emergence of Ahmed Bola Tinubu as the candidate of the ruling APC, the next task before the commencement of campaign was the choice of the vice-presidential candidate (running mate). Many spectators and political analysts envisaged that, the candidate was going to pick a northern Christian as his running mate but instead, Tinubu decided to nominate Kashim Shettima a northern Muslim from Borno state. Though there were agitations from many quarters, the candidate and his supporters' sited competency and strategy as the reasons for the choice. Hence, many Christian APC members and leaders were aggrieved (Majeed, 2022).

According to a communique issued at the end of its meeting held in Abuja, the APC Christian leaders declared that, "The APC party constitution preamble states that it "will guarantee equal opportunity for all, mutual and peaceful co-existence, respect and understanding, eliminating all forms of discrimination and social injustice among Nigerian." The communique, which was signed by the duo of Professor Doknan Sheni and Professor Saidu Ibrahim, read: "The meeting noted with concern the resignation of some high-profile Christians from the APC across the states of the federation, as a consequence, with more to follow unless concerted efforts are made to redeem our party from hate mongers and those who seek to exploit religion to perpetuate their self-interests as opposed to the national interest." The communique further stated that "as Christians within the APC, we cannot, in all fairness to our consciences and faith go to our various constituencies to campaign for a Muslim-Muslim ticket." The APC Christian leaders also argued that Nigeria is a multi-religious and constitutional democracy and not a theocracy with religion as a major national fault line which cannot be whimsically manipulated without dire political consequences on our peaceful co-existence as a people (Ignatius, 2023)

Also, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Plateau State Chapter declared that the presidential candidate of the APC would not enjoy its support during the 2023 general elections. Speaking with newsmen in Jos, the State Chairman of CAN, Reverend Father Polycarp Lubo said "the decision to run the Muslim-Muslim ticket by the APC depicted the insensitivity of the party and its presidential candidate to the Christians in the North and the entire country". Lubo, who said the decision of the party to fly such a ticket was wrong, contended that the arrangement cannot unite the country and promote the desire unity, saying the decision by the APC has further deepened the mistrust among Nigerians (Majeed, 2022). Also, a former governorship candidate

in Rivers State, under the defunct Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and chieftain of the APC, Prince Tonye Princewill resigned his membership of the party. Princewill in a letter dated July 12, 2022, addressed to the chairman of the party in his Ward 3, Royal Ward, Buguma City, Asari Toru Local Government Area, Rivers State said he could not, in good conscience defend the APC presidential candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu's choice of a fellow Muslim, Kashim Shettima as his vice presidential candidate (Ignatius, 2023).

Notably, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), representing all Christian denominations in the country, emerged as a vocal opponent of the Muslim-Muslim ticket. CAN issued a stern warning to leading political parties against contemplating Christian/Christian or Muslim/Muslim presidential tickets in 2023, asserting that such a development could jeopardize Nigeria's precarious peace and unity. Joseph Bade Daramola, CAN's National Secretary, emphasized that Nigeria was not yet mature enough to navigate these sensitive issues that could inflame religious sentiments and provoke conflicts. The National Secretary further urged political parties to uphold the principle of power-sharing and rotation among the country's six geopolitical zones and between Christians and Muslims. In the same vein, former President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian, declared his unwillingness to support any party that fielded a Muslim-Muslim or Christian-Christian ticket in 2023, describing such an arrangement as insensitive and unfair to the diverse Nigerian populace. Former President Obasanjo advised Tinubu to reconsider his choice of Shettima as a running mate and instead select someone from a different religion to balance the ticket (Ignatius, 2023).

However, supporters of the Muslim-Muslim (same faith) ticket, rejected these accusations, claiming they were baseless and driven by political and personal agendas. They charged that CAN and Obasanjo were biased and political in support of Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate of the PDP and a Muslim, who chose South East Christian Peter Obi as his running mate before abandoning the party to run for president with the Labor Party. Muslim-Muslim ticket proponents challenged CAN and Obasanjo to clarify their reasons for not opposing the Abiola-Kingibe ticket in 1993 (Chima, 2022). The APC leaders in the North-West zone who are mostly Muslims, thrown their weight behind the emergence of Senator Kashim Shettima as the running mate of the party's presidential candidate in the 2023 presidential election, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu. They disclosed their position in a statement signed by its zonal secretary, Alhaji Musa Mailafiya Mada and made available to journalists in Kaduna. The statement read: "Prominent among issues raised at the meeting was the emergence of Senator Kashim Shettima as the running mate of the party's presidential candidate, Bola Tinubu and how the zone should position itself in ensuring victory for the party at all levels" (Ignatius, 2023).

The governor of Gombe State, Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya, concurred, calling Shettima's selection as the APC's vice presidential candidate in the general elections of 2023 a brilliant move that will ease the party's path to success in the presidential contest. In the meantime, Nigerians were urged to embrace national unity in diversity, national integration, and cohesion despite their differences by Bamidele Faparusi, the Director-general of NUMBAT, an independent political support group for Bola Ahmed Tinubu. The group, which worked together with other patriotic citizens across religious and ethnic divides said it supported Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the APC presidential candidate, because of his detribalized and religiously tolerant attitude. In another development, a former Deputy National Publicity Secretary of APC, Honourable Yekini Nabena, said Nigerians should be more worried about the PDP's disregard of power shift to the South than the single faith ticket choice of the APC. These and many more

divisive tendencies characterized the political space in Nigeria after the ruling APC presidential candidate Bola Ahmed Tinubu settled for Kashim Shettima as his running mate towards the 2023 presidential election (Bankole, 2022).

Implications for Social Cohesion

Nigeria as noted earlier, is a pluralistic and multicultural society with people of diverse ethnic origins and who identify with different religions. The country grapples with the twin evils of high levels of poverty and unemployment. It has also had to grapple with social upheavals that have threatened the existence of the Nigerian state. These social upheavals have been manifested in the creation of several regional interest groups, each protesting against perceived marginalization and agitating for self-actualization and self-government. This includes creation of such groups as IPOB, MASSOB, Niger Delta Avengers, OPC, Egbesu Boys and Arewa Youths. Also are, religious groups such as Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and Muslim Society of Nigeria. Many of these groups emerged in the 80s and 90s and most of which claim to be aimed at fighting the menace of injustice of marginalization, disparity and the many ills which they perceive to be against their collective will. The religious divide in the country has also been seen to cause tensions between the two major religions in the country (Christian and Muslims). Religious crises have often rocked parts of the country and have over the years placed significant strain on social cohesion to the point of near collapse.

In view of the above, it is obvious that with the same faith ticket of the APC, some of her (APC) dominated states which are dominantly Christians, could not vote for the party during the 2023 presidential election as shown below;

S/N	State	APC Vote	PDP Vote	LP Vote	NNPP
1.	Cross Rivers	130,520	95,425	179,917	1,644
2.	Ebonyi	42,402	13,503	259,738	2,661
3.	Imo	66,406	30,234	360,495	1,552
4.	Kaduna	399,293	554,360	294,494	92,969
5.	Lagos	572,606	75,750	582,454	8, 442
6.	Nasarawa	172,922	147,093	191,361	12,715
7.	Plateau	307,195	243,808	466,272	8,869
8.	FCT	90,902	74,194	281,717	4,517

Source: INEC, Compiled by the Authors.

These views as seen above, relates with the analysis of Eurofund and Siftung (2014), which aligns with connectedness a domain of social cohesion, that involves the fact that, when people feel identified, and can trust the institutions in the society, and also perceived some levels of fairness, the matter of social cohesion will not be in jeopardy. This clearly showed that, the Nigerian state is now more divided along religious line than ever before, suggesting that the ticket is a symptom of the country's political systems failure to produce credible leaders capable of representing the diversity and aspirations of Nigerians. Another implication of the APC same faith presidential ticket is that, it reflects the growing political maturity and sophistication of Nigerian politics. In addition, it shows that Nigerians prioritize the competence and character of their leaders over religious backgrounds and also, it signals a declining influence of religion in

Nigerian politics, as more Nigerians acknowledge the pitfalls of intertwining religion and politics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident that the unequal power distribution model, religious narrow-mindedness, biased admission to public office and political appointments, and ethnic minorities' fear of being marginalized by sizable ethnic blocs are the main causes of Nigeria's social upheavals. Ethnicity is the primary source of marginalization and self-existence agitations, and passionate commitment to the linguistic and cultural distinctions between members of various ethnic groups is the main driver of ethnic rivalry. Citizens prioritize their ethnic and religious interests over those of the country because of this sentimental commitment and sense of allegiance to their community. Durkheim argued that social integration, or the degree to which individuals are connected to and feel a part of their society, is crucial for social order and stability. When social integration is weak, individuals may feel disconnected and alienated, leading to social unrest and insecurity.

It is sufficient to say that, in the context of any country, social cohesiveness cannot flourish in the absence of a defining national identity and a national interest that takes precedence over all other considerations. Therefore, the key to creating a socially cohesive Nigerian society is to give national identity and "oneness" a sincere focus. Building a free society where people can pursue shared objectives regardless of their racial, religious, or cultural convictions necessitates a purposeful plan.

Therefore, more work should be done by the government and other leaders to encourage an inclusive society. Conflict may worsen if the government doesn't support measures that maintain unity at all times. Once more, major political parties and their supporters should recognize the value of social integration and, as such, choose carefully who gets what, when, and how to maintain social cohesiveness among the various societal segments, whether they be racially, religiously, or geographically based.

Since perceptions play a major role in how attitudes regarding the nation's social divisions are formed, the government should communicate its policies and activities to all social groups instead of relying on opinion leaders and opposition groups to do so. Furthermore, receiving benefits from government initiatives and programs have to be equitable and not biased. There should be no room for religion on forms that are important to the country.

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