

INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN POLITICAL CHOICE: AN APPRAISAL OF THE SAME-FAITH PRESIDENTIAL TICKET OF THE APC IN THE 2023 ELECTION

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Abstract

This paper examines the influence of religion in political choice while appraising the 2023 presidential ticket of the All Progressive Congress (APC). Secondary method of data collection were employed in analyzing the reasons behind the adoption of the same faith ticket and why it generated so much apprehension among citizens in the country. The paper concludes that though morality has always been put forward in religious balance as it involves presidential candidates and their running mates, credence is not given to religious balance in the constitution of the country, therefore the paper recommends that Nigerians should live above religious politics and embrace competence, ability and capability in picking presidential candidates in subsequent elections. Again, Nigeria being a secular state should hold its secular character supreme as competences do not belong to one religion; in the wake of this fact there should be balances in the key leadership positions in the country across religions and regions.

Keywords: Influence, Religion, Morality, Same-Faith, Islamization.

Introduction

Religion is a veritable tool for political mobilization by politicians in Nigeria. Since independence in 1960, the politicization of religion in the country has created a necessary condition for democratic fermentation that put the collective State's survival at risk. Even in the First Republic, Nigerian political actors did not do enough to avert the danger of religious politics, hence the collapse of the first democratic experience in the country. Within this context, the stake for the highest Executive Office in Nigeria can be said to be dictated by religious preferences. Same-faith ticket occurred for the first time in Nigeria in the candidature of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) in 1979 as both the Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates of these parties were from the same religious faith (Christian). However, the ripples the same-faith ticket generated in the 2023 presidential election were absent as compared to the 1979 presidential election which had a same-faith candidacy. In the 1979 presidential election, Nigerians did not consider any reason

whatsoever to condemn same-faith candidacy as likened to 2023 presidential elections (Ogah, 2022). This however fingered in the progressive politicization of religion in the country. In the 1993 June 12 Presidential election, when the country was authoritatively turned into a two-party system by the military government of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB), the acclaimed winner of the election ran on a same-faith ticket under the platform of Social Democratic Party (SDP) where Nigerians queued to vote for this ticket without recourse to religious sentiment. Why then was the uproar with the All Progressive Congress' candidate choice in the 2023 presidential election?

The focus of this paper therefore is on the impact of religion and same-faith tickets on the preparation, prosecution, and aftermath of the 2023 presidential election. Special attention will be given to this voyage of findings, the apprehension of citizens against same-faith tickets; ultimately this study intends to make adequate recommendations on how to move the Nigerian State forward.

Statement of the Problem

Religion has become a veritable tool in Nigeria politics on who becomes the president and vice president of the country thus giving room for so much tension before, during, and after the election.

Significant of the Study

This paper seeks to shed light on the issues of Religion and same-faith ticket, the issues it generated, and whether it holds good for future elections in the country.

History of Presidential Elections in Nigeria

In Nigeria's First Republic, the same-faith ticket was not the defining mantra, and the same could be said of the Second and Third Republics respectively. Besides the First Republic was primarily a Parliamentary system of government, (a form of government where the leader of the political party with the highest number of seats in the Federal Legislative House automatically becomes the Prime Minister). This is a contrast to what is obtained in a presidential system of government where the candidate vying for the apex executive office in the land, campaigns and contest for the position. (Parliamentary system of government) in this context, the same-faith ticket was never problematic in both the Second and Third Republic despite some candidates vying for the apex seat in the country running on the same-faith ticket.

Furthermore, the issue of the same-faith ticket is not new to Nigerian politics, although it has never been a contentious issue. Hitherto Nigerian citizens have always seen the choice of Presidential candidates and their running mates as a political party affair. Not until recently, the issue of same-faith tickets became a topic for public debate, occasioned by the ethno-religious conflicts in some northern states of the country as typified by the Kaduna sharia riots of 2000, Bauchi riot in 2001 and the Boko-Haram terrorist and incessant banditries as evident in most part of the country (Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, 2001).

The history of the presidential election in Nigeria has always been characterized by ethnicity, regionalism and religious sentiment, though same-faith ticket has never taken centre stage. Although the Nigerian constitution is silent on religious balance in the country's highest political office (President and Vice President), the religious demography should morally necessitate equitable identity inclusion in the federal executive branch of government. Religious equivalency of executive offices at the state and local government levels is determined by the idiosyncrasies of the area in focus.

The Table below represents some selected leading political parties; their presidential and vice-presidential candidates and the year of the election.

Table 1: Selected Political Parties, President and Vice Presidential Candidates and Year of Election

Regimes	Year of Election	Political Party	Name of candidates and vice	Religious faith
Parliamentary Democracy	1963	Northern People Congress(NPC)/ National Council of Nigeria citizens	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa/Nnamdi Azikiwe	Muslim/Christian
Presidential Democracy	1979	National Party of)	Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari/ Alexander Ifeanyichukwu Ekwueme	Muslim/Christian Nigeria(NPN
Presidential Democracy (Annulled)	1993	Social Democratic Party(SDP)	Moshood Kashimawo Abiola Baba Gana Kingibe	Muslim/ Muslim
Presidential Democracy	1999	People Democratic Party(PDP)	Olusegun Obasanjo/ Atiku Abubakar	Christian/Muslim
Presidential Democracy	2003	People Democratic Party(PDP)	Olusegun Obasanjo/ Atiku Abubakar	Christian/Muslim
Presidential Democracy	2007	People Democratic Party(PDP)	Umaru MusaYar'Adua/ Goodluck Ebele Jonathan	Muslim/Christian
Presidential Democracy	2011	People Democratic Party(PDP)	Goodluck Ebele Jonathan/Namadi Sambo	Christian/Muslim
Presidential Democracy	2015	All People Congress (APC)	Muhammadu Buhari/ Oluyemi Osinbajo	Muslim/Christian
Presidential Democracy	2019	All People Congress (APC)	Muhammadu Buhari/ Oluyemi Oluleke Osinbajo	Muslim/Christian
Presidential Democracy	2023	All People Congress (APC)	<i>Bola Ahmed Tinubu/ Kashim Shettima</i>	Muslim/ Muslim

Source: authors Compilation, 2023

Looking at the Table above, it has always been a balanced religious ticket not until 1992 when the presidential and vice-presidential candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) ran on a same-faith ticket that did not see the light of the day as it was aborted by the military regime of then head of state, Retire General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. Only recently in the 2023 presidential election, the debate on same-faith ticket with the emergence of Bola Ahmed Tinubu as president and Kashim Shettima as Vice Presidential candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC) became a burning issue in the country's political space. It was seen as a political miscalculation that is mis-normal for a secular state like Nigeria. The focus here is on the symbolism of the choice of the ruling party APC because even though the constitution was silent on religion on who becomes the president and vice president of the country, the same constitution mandates inclusive sovereignty to promote national unity and command national loyalty! That won't happen by debasing Christianity and Christians! The choice of a Muslim-Muslim ticket by the APC was seen as a departure from an unwritten convention by which parties field both a Christian and a Muslim on every ticket (International Crisis Group, 2023). This development was widely condemned by the Christian community in Nigeria as an attempt to Islamize the country.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

An intellectual inquiry of note is worth being equipped with a theoretical framework or guide that will help share light and provide an explanatory direction in the process of investigation to this end the Rational Choice as propounded by Downs (1957) was employed in this paper, in an attempt to capture the actual dynamics inherent in this study. This theoretical framework of analysis was used to analyze the reason for the adoption of same-faith ticket by the candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC).

For rational choice theorists, cultural and historical events are unimportant to comprehending political action; instead, knowing the actors' objectives and assuming that they pursue them logically is adequate. Rational choice theorists aimed to apply significantly more a formal framework (including the use of mathematical notation) to all aspects of the realm of politics. Applying the rational choice theory to analyze Same-Faith Ticket, the APC's candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu in the face of inclusive sovereignty to promote national unity had options of picking a Christian running mate, but calculatedly opted for the same religion as his. Like the rational choice theory that considers mathematical calculation in picking among alternatives the Presidential candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC), duly considered his choice of running mate mathematically to ensure victory at the polls. Rationalizing the choice made, it is the mathematical choice for electioneering politics that is more of a number than morality considering the religious demography of the country. If the aim of a political party is to capture power in the election, it becomes necessary for the party to rationally take steps to achieve its goal. However immoral the calculation is viewed, it should be noted that people also leverage their own perceived definition of morality, no wonder John Rawls defends the theory of political morality that the political concept of justice is ultimately based on the common good of the individual rather than on the values one is expected to follow (Cheuk-Hang, 2016).

The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria's History

Religion has always provided legitimacy to kings. To guarantee the community's commitment, religious figures authorized the monarch's reign. Monarchs were revered as gods in several African communities as it were even in Europe. The Roman Catholic Church's recognition of the Divine Rights of Kings ensured monarchical absolutism (monarchs exercised power as they wanted). (Stump and Fieser,2003). The 17th and 18th centuries saw the end of monarchical absolutism, dissolving linkages involving state authority and religion, as well as heralding in-state supremacy, republicanism, secularism, along with humanism throughout Europe.

Nigeria's sociopolitical evolution has run counter to global tendencies. Religion has not been separated from governmental authority in Nigeria, nor has it bound politics for the benefit of everyone. Because Nigeria is a multi-religious nation, a struggle for governmental dominance between the two dominant religious ideologies in the country is unavoidable. In fact, it is not an overemphasis to say that religion was encrusted into the fundamentals of Nigeria's nationhood. Islam and Christianity have both made strong marks on the country's demography since their spread with the colonial era, plummeting the influence of indigenous spiritual systems to the periphery (Odunlade, 2023).

Nigeria's diverse religious topography underscores the long-standing susceptibility of its northern populations to Islam as well as trans-Sahara commerce, the accomplishments of the Christian missionary attempt in the southern part of the country. Although ancestral affiliation, as well as common ethnicity, are strongly related to the implementation of major global religions, religion and ethno-regional identity are intertwined and frequently reinforce each other. During this time, Islam` had been deeply embedded in the pre-colonial Hausa States for centuries. Several other northern groups embraced Islamism in the aftermath of Uthman Dan-Fodio's (1754-1817) nineteenth-century Islamic Jihad; during this period, parts of Northern and Central Nigeria were absorbed into the new caliphate, with the possible exception of the remaining along with considerably older Islamic kingdom of Borno, which continued to be most strongly significant rival to Sokoto's claim of representing all northern areas of Nigeria (Anderson, 2014).

The Nigerian Constitution and Same-Faith Ticket in General Elections

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Nation section. Section 10 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria forbids the Government of the Federation or a State to adopt any religion as the State Religion. This is a testament that Nigeria is a secular state that absolved religious tolerance across her territory. This provision of Section 10 has made many public commentators and scholars conclude that the constitution is holding Nigeria as a secular state. (Tobi,1999) is however different from the secularist perspective of the Nigerian state, stating that Nigeria is not a secular state and that the widespread belief that Section 10 of the 1999 Constitution declaring Nigeria to be a secular state is a wrong understanding of the section's provision. According to him, the term secular refers to things that are neither spiritual, ecclesiastical, nor religious in nature. Secularism, the noun form of the term secular, refers to the notion that the state, morals, education, and so on ought to be free of religious

influence. Section 10's goal is to prevent Nigeria from adopting either Christianity or Islam as a national religion. But this is not the same as secularism.

According to Nwabueze (1999), Section 10 of the 1999 Constitution is aimed at achieving religious balance in the country as well as averting a state of theocracy, which is governed by a well-established faith. From the foregoing, the position of the Nigeria Constitution is clear on the matter of same-faith ticket in that religion is not a yardstick to consider in picking Presidential and vice-presidential candidates for an election: Session 142. (1) affirms that

In an election whereby the preceding provisions of this Chapter apply, a candidate vying for the office of the President is not considered to have been validly picked, except if he nominates a candidate from the same political affiliation as his deputy for his candidature to be complete, the person chosen as deputy will occupy the office of Vice-President. The candidate in question shall be judged to have been lawfully elected to the office of Vice-President if the person running for President who recommended him as such is legitimately elected as President in conformity with the aforementioned constitutional requirements.

The presidential candidate of All Progress Congress (APC) worked "in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the ground that his prerogative right to pick a running-mate is guaranteed in the Nigeria Constitution. In lieu of the provision of the Nigeria Constitution, the issue of same-faith ticket is not constitutionally wrong because religion is not given credence to; it in Nigerian Constitution. Qualification for the office of president or vice-president is strictly spelt out in the Nigeria Constitution. Section 131 of the Nigeria Constitution states that the candidate for the office of the president and vice president respectively must be a citizen by birth and would have attained the age of 30 years as stipulated by the Acts of Parliament signed in law on May 31st, 2018. The candidate vying for such office must be a member of a political party and is sponsored by that political party, having received an education up to the school certificate level or its equivalent. Such a candidate must be of sound mind and must not have been convicted within the period of 10 years for an offence involving dishonesty or contravention of the code of conduct, and finally would have evidence of tax payment for three (3) years immediately preceding the year of election.

The Challenges/ Apprehension of Same-Faith Ticket

Since the return of Nigeria to democracy in 1999, the country has managed to keep religious intervention in politics at the barest minimum. At the country's highest level of government (office of the president and vice president), the different regimes that have emerged have successfully managed the religion in the both highest offices of the federation until the 2023 election that saw the emergence of a Muslim-Muslim ticket from the ruling party APC. Its emergence of course brought the uproar of inclusivity and fairness. Creating the apprehension that the country could easily be manipulated into becoming a religious nation where a particular religion will dominate the other, thereby plunging the country into a theocratic nation.

Furthermore, with different religious intolerance that the country has witnessed in recent times and some apprehensive statements from some notable office holders in the country, it is not a distance search to understand the uneasy some Nigerians have become with same-faith tickets. Considering the statement attributed to former Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Governor Alhaji Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, where he stated that “every conversation on Muslims to walk away from religious law in favour of secularism would be vain” (Ogbu, 2014:3). And also, the statement of former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Mohammed Nurudeen, stating that “Nigeria is one of the most Christian-populated Islamic nations in the world” the (The Guardian Online newspaper, August 23, 2012), plus the fact that Nigeria has been a registered member of the organization of Islamic countries (OIC) since 1986. These developments together with the Islamization thesis can be fingered in the heat from the same-faith ticket from the All Progressive Party in the 2023 presidential election.

Same-Faith Ticket Implications for Post-Election

Regionalism or religious sentiments towards voting a preferred candidate for an elective position in 2023 will have a historical impact on Nigeria's post-election stabilization. What this development holds for Nigeria in the future is part of what is getting some Nigerians worried about this development. Underestimating the importance of religious inclusiveness in a sensitive and religiously sentimental country like Nigeria poses a national security risk. Because religion and politics are inextricably linked. Any 'politically preferred' religion is presumed to inevitably gain both political and economic benefit compared to the other, thus generating an apparent feeling of marginalization or horizontal disparities. A development that has been seen to fuel violence in politics. Fervently motivated post-election grievances will not only make the incoming president unpopular but will also present him with concerns of legitimacy and trust deficit, perhaps causing more splits and disintegration. In such a scenario, altruistic initiatives would be politicized, and complex issues such as the Boko Haram militant group, farmer-herder contention, violent banditry, separatist agitations, resource nationalism, as well as numerous other issues will not just become common but may also go unresolved.

With the current reality of the same-faith ticket becoming a reality for the first time, one will observe that the election that brought in the presidential candidate of the APC were votes from Muslim-dominated states from the north and the southwest. Anxiety is frequent in Christian groups, particularly in northern Nigeria. Moreover, the 'Islamization' theory will gain traction, as will political spiritualities and Pentecostal republicanism. If the governing body does not tackle the Boko Haram and Fulani militant issues compassionately, the inability will be interpreted as 'evidence' of the integrating Islam plan of action, particularly as Vice President Kashim Shettima was accused of having links with the Boko Haram in the past.

Kidnappings and confrontations between livestock farmers and herders in southern Nigeria will be seen as jihad, prompting hysterical reactions which will attack the culprits' identity rather than their crimes. As a result, separatist aspirations and resource nationalism may develop, pushing the country even farther over the edge. Arend Lijphart's proposals on power-sharing will be critical in harmonizing religious participation in government.

Eliminating Fulani bandit activity and winning the trust of Christian communities in the northern as well as southern areas must also be critical in rebuilding trust.

Religion and Politics in Nigeria's Way Forward

The elected President must see Nigeria beyond any religion; he must make sure to run a government that is free of religious interference or embrace religious inclusivity in forming his cabinet. Appointment of ministers must be made to balance up the disparity that has evolved. Furthermore, Nigeria must as a matter of urgency be delisted as a member of an organization of Islamic Country (OIC), and a constitutional amendment is necessary where any form of religious law will be deleted. This is to ensure that no state of the federation is allowed to operate any form of religious law in whatever form and only the Nigeria justice system as approved should be the criteria for dispensation of justice.

Nigeria government should as a matter of urgency stop sponsoring any religious pilgrimage. State funds should not be used in religious activities. Also, the country should put a ban on going to religious gatherings for campaigns as was witnessed in the last presidential election. It is good that credence should be given to the capability, stability and competence of the man standing for an elective position without recourse to his religious affiliation. This has to be delegated to NGOs and government agencies to start a campaign that can change Nigerians' orientation.

Finally, Nigeria being a secular state should hold its secular character supreme as competences do not belong to one religion; in the wake of this fact there should be balances in the key leadership positions in the country across religions and regions.

Conclusion

The 2023 Presidential elections have been held and concluded, even though the nation was divided along religious and ethnic lines, what is sacrosanct is that the place of the Nigeria constitution on the issue of same-faith ticket. This paper recommends that if Nigeria must live above religious politics, credence must be given to the competence ability and stability of the candidate and not his religious affiliation.

Furthermore, the current administration which is a beneficiary of the same-faith ticket must do all within the ambit of the law to make sure religious crisis and religious infighting statements are curbed.

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