



# MCC

# **MEDIA & COMMUNICATION CURRENTS**

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**A publication of the Department of Mass Communication,  
University of Maiduguri, Nigeria**

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Journal devoted to intellectual thinking, based on historical, epistemological, methodological, theoretical and technical/policy discourses and expositions on any aspect of media and communication.

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# **MEDIA & COMMUNICATION CURRENTS**

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

Media and Communication Currents is a journal devoted to intellectual thinking, based on historical, epistemological, methodological, theoretical, and technical/policy discourses and expositions on any aspect of media and communication. The journal provides an effective platform for dissemination of vital information to educators, students, practitioners, and the public on issues affecting communication and national development.

This volume of Media and Communication Currents has Seven articles that examined media and communication issues from different perspectives. The empirical work by Abubakar Abdullahi Suleiman and Mohammed Jibril Nasir examined Perception of the concept of Investigative Journalism among Media Practitioners in Abuja Nigeria.

Rhoda Oluchukwu Anidiobi et al looked at Perception of Bereketi Family Programme on Human Rights Radio among FCT and Nasarawa Residents.

Onifade Olawale Abayomi and Gado Valiya Nyachesa analysed Public Perception on the Significance of Jama'a Forum in Community Development in Niger State Nigeria.

Innocent, Kasarachi Hayford examined the Influence of Radio coverage of conditions in Nigerian Correctional Centres on Port Harcourt residents' perception of the treatment of inmates by authorities.

Gado Valiya Nyachesa and Onifade Olawale Abayomi examined Public Perception on the Potentials of Kabulu Music to Communicate Development among Members of Gbagyi Ethnic Group in Niger State, Nigeria.

Fatima Abubakre analysed Nigerian press coverage of anti-Muslim sentiments towards a 'Muslim-Muslim' ticket in the 2023 presidential elections.

Jude Melea Moses reviewed a book titled: Nigerian Media Narratives on Security and Human Rights in Parts of the North, edited by Abubakar Mu'azu Sharafa Dauda, Yahaya Abubakar .

This volume of Media and Communication Currents is another interesting collection of intellectual thoughts and contributions to media and communication scholarship.



**Professor Israel Wilson Udomisor**  
**Editor-in-Chief**

## Nigerian press coverage of anti-Muslim sentiments towards a 'Muslim-Muslim' ticket in the 2023 presidential elections

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### Abstract

*In the African context, study of anti-Muslim sentiments has received little attention, particularly regarding how they could impact on electoral outcomes. This article investigates how the Punch and the Daily Trust, two mainstream newspapers in the Nigerian Press, mediated the single-faith ticket of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the lead-up to the 2023 general elections. Based on content analysis of 123 news articles, the study finds that the Nigerian Press tends to engage in traditional news reporting that appeals to social and ethno-religious local identities. It is concluded that this has implications for stimulating and promoting societal prejudices, particularly when it comes to a discourse related to the electoral process.*

**Keywords:** Anti-muslim sentiment, Newspapers, APC, Nigeria Electoral outcome

### Introduction

There has been a lot of media attention and national discourse surrounding the single-faith ticket of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) political party in the run-up to the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. This has led to a lot of anti-Muslim sentiments and identity politics in Nigeria. Thus, there are concerns regarding the impact of this discourse on voter decisions. With the upcoming Nigerian elections, it is imperative that we examine the media's role in establishing a public discourse, given the fact that the media help raise awareness of the electoral process, providing information regarding voter registration, voting dates and locations, as well as providing platforms for candidates' communication and exposing intimidation, electoral violence and irregularities. Given the importance of debate and the robustness of competing ideas in public space, the media's ability to name and frame is essential to maintaining democracy. Part of campaign issues amplified by the media during the elections of 2015 was religion, where APC was branded an Islamist party by the then PDP-led federal government under Goodluck Jonathan who lost his re-election bid. This perspective was sold to the electorate and was particularly a strong campaign

point by the Southeast intelligentsia, who occupied top positions under the PDP-led federal government. The outcome of the 2015 elections showed that the APC did not perform so well in the Southeast and the South-south. The electoral outcomes of the 2019 polls show some improvement in voting patterns for the APC in this area.

How did the mainstream Nigerian media cover the single-faith ticket in the months leading up to the 2023 presidential election campaign in Nigeria? This is the focus of this study. The sample of the study was news articles ( $n = 123$ ) from two influential mainstream national dailies, the *Daily Trust* and the *The Punch*, relating to the 'Muslim-Muslim' ticket, which trended in the media after Kashim Shettima, a former Governor of Borno State, Northeast Nigeria, was named the substantive running mate of the APC presidential candidate for the 2023 elections.

The researcher selected the 'Muslim-Muslim ticket' coverage for analysis based on its implications for Nigeria's political culture. It is so due to the fact that anti-Muslim sentiments can be highly motivating and excite large-scale attitudes, especially in the southern part of the country, where a comfortable discourse is based on the hegemonic neoliberalism of modern western thought (Pierce, 2016). Since 1999 when the democratic system was restored, the question of how political parties could secure a significant majority in multi-ethnic societies like Nigeria has been studied extensively (Omotola, 2010; Egwemi, 2013; Babalola, 2020). Its implications are significant for societal stability. It is also crucial to the deepening of the democratic culture and economic development. One defining hallmark of politics in Nigeria is that, politicians usually mobilise voters along common identities such as ethnic group, region and religious faith. Loyalty to political party alone is insufficient for an election to be won, especially at the federal level.

Furthermore, they employ other identity categories from major religions like Christianity and Islam, which means that in order to win elections, politicians need to reach across religious and ethnic lines as much as possible. This presents a challenge to those who are running for the presidency in particular. This is particularly evident in the upcoming election of 2023, where both major parties, the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and main opposition party, Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), have, for exigency this time around, chosen Muslim candidates to serve as their respective standard bearers. This is not dissimilar to the political permutation in 1999 when two Christians, Olusegun Obasanjo for PDP and Olu Falae for Alliance for Democracy (AD), which were the two leading parties in Nigeria. The bone of contention is that a Christian candidate has been

excluded on the ballot paper of the APC even as a Vice-President, which upsets many Christians.

### **Nigerian politics and anti-Muslim sentiment**

Nigerian politics and public life are deeply rooted in the politics of identity, and identity is crucial for survival (Adebayo and Olonisakin, 2018). Achen and Bartels (2016, p.4) argue that elections seldom result in responsive governments because most people make their political choices based not on their policy preferences or ideologies, but on who are their social identities. In turn, those social identities shape how they think, what they believe, and to where they belong in the party system. Previous studies have shown that ethno-religious consideration plays a crucial role in elites' quest for political power, often determining the outcome of elections. As Babalola (2020) elucidates:

Ethnic and religious identities are particularly important to the political elite's calculations in who gets what and this is why politicians are always quick to use these primordial sentiments for mobilisation during elections (Babalola 2020, p.377).

In the past, political parties in Nigeria were formed based on regional interests. In the contemporary Nigeria, election competition necessarily requires politicians to reach out to as many people as possible across regional, religious, and ethnic divide in a bid to gain power at the federal level. For instance, the only way political parties could mobilise Muslim support in Northern Nigeria, which is predominantly Muslim, is by appealing to Islam, (Umar, 2013) the major religion here. This, along with the critical role played by proponents of Islamic law, has also shaped the democratic character of the state, particularly when it comes to secularism and human rights (Kendhammer, 2013; Obadare, 2004).

The debates over the use of the hijab in public institutions in the Southwest region (Abubakre, 2018) and the enforcing control of the *hisbah*, the Sharia police in the Northwest region, represent instances of perceived conflicts between the Constitution and a tendency for Muslims to be simultaneously portrayed both as 'disruptive' individuals, and as victims of democratic rights violations requiring state protection (Kendhammer, 2013). Thus, within a broad national context, the fundamental fault lines of religion and ethnicity in Nigeria emerge most vividly through anti-Muslim sentiments. In Obadare's view, one of the country's biggest challenges is forming an all-inclusive political community that has been hindered by religious divisions that follow the same trajectory as ethnic polarities.

There is a significant role for the Nigerian press in this mix because it has always been used from the earliest beginning by the political class to engage in

intra-class warfare (Oso, 2001) and to establish hegemony over the country's minorities. Nigerian journalists, as expected, are known for a divergent outlook in their coverage of political parties and politicians. This happens with a great deal of passion. This state of affairs do influence the way news discourse about the 2023 elections is constructed.

### Anti-Muslim sentiment and the Press

The southwest region is home to some of the country's most influential Press and media outlets. While the Press has been credited with promoting diverse range of views, they have also formed a principled resistance to political efforts to subvert them (*The Cable*, 2019). The reason for this can be traced to British colonialism. Lord Frederick Lugard, the first Governor General of the Southern and Northern Protectorates including the Colony now called Nigeria, was sympathetic to the Muslim north and "never took to the advanced and critical citizens of Lagos and its Yoruba surroundings" (Bourne 2015, p.4), which corresponds to the substantial Nigeria's southern part, and which is home to most first generation Western-educated nationalists like Herbert Macaulay.

The historically significant political development of Nigeria has been characterised by the fact that the predominantly Christian South has had a significant advantage over the predominantly Muslim north due to the influence of proselytising Christian missionaries through the Atlantic Euro-American culture, particularly in western education and political economy. The economic prosperity of the South has been built on the back of these advantages and this has allowed the South to invest extensively in the media industry. It dictates the pace of mainstream social discourse enabled by the press in the Lagos/Ibadan axis. The tendency for the Southern-dominated press to set the agenda on issues of national interest has been consequential for the predominantly Hausa-Fulani Muslim North.

Using rhetoric that consistently dehumanizes and disparages northern communities, culture, religion, and leadership (Yahaya, 1994, cited in Ibrahim, 1999, p.14) has resulted in misrepresentations of Hausa-Fulani Muslims by the powerful media of the south-west Yoruba region. For instance, it was the southwest Yoruba media which created the perception and maintained the hegemonic understanding that the Shehu Shagari's presidency was illegitimate. This dominant press did not accord President Shagari the respect that he deserved until his Christian opponent, Obafemi Awolowo, intervened (Agbaje, 1990) especially through his acceptance of the greatest honour of the Grand Commander of the Federal Republic (GCFR) from President Shagari who the former eulogised after the award. In this context, the mainstream press is,

hitherto, not viewed as neutral; rather, it is distrusted and viewed as carrying a hidden agenda, against the northern political establishment. In this case, negative religious sentiments cannot be excluded from the content of the news. Old opinion lingers on. This is vitally important for determining what constitutes an issue-based political campaign for the current election cycle.

While Christians have maintained their influence and dominance over the media industry, Muslims have also made inroads, but not as effectively. Liad Tella observed that fewer than fifteen percent of practicing journalists in Nigeria are Muslims (2014) despite the phenomenal growth of the media industry. In terms of contemporary media professionalism, there has been a marked difference in journalistic roles and performance. This varies by geographical location and readership in reporting critical issues like terrorism, civic protests, political violence and conflict (Amenaghawon, 2015; Demarest, Godefroidt and Langer, 2020).

### **Theoretical Framework**

As a discipline, the field of journalism has thrived on drawing from a variety of disciplines including sociology, political sciences, linguistics, gender studies, and so on, rather than drawing exclusively from its own tradition which is derived from journalistic practice. Indeed, journalism itself is often analysed from a sociological perspective. Due to this, the current study places a high value on historical/contextual perspectives. This article uses narrative theory and framing theory to analyse news coverage of the single-faith ticket, as journalism is a process of making sense of the world. News narratives and framing theories represent an interdisciplinary approach to media effects studies (Schulman, 1990; Majin, 2019), and have been used to complement well-known journalistic concepts such as agenda-setting and priming (Majin, 2019).

News narratives represent a holistic approach to communication phenomena without getting distracted by the technical nuances of the other three theories- agenda setting, framing and priming, which overlap somewhat inevitably (Majin 2019). The framing theory is also connected to news narratives that provide electorates with meanings in a way that is accessible and understandable, which helps to understand what is at stake (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). Both news narratives and the framing theories are potent tools for analysing journalistic practices.

While the traditional mainstream media still play a critical role in providing original information and guiding attention, it is predicated on the notion that conventional journalistic practice is essentially faithful and neutral (Anderson and Schudson, 2020), which is governed by the premise that facts can

be presented in a neutral manner. As a result, legacy media enjoy the general trust of the public to a significant degree. News released by such news outlets often reflects national policies. They show mainstream thinking in society. They support the presentation of alternative perspectives, whether positive or negative, through their news content. The capacity of journalists to utilise framing in organising and translating a complicated discourse into a comprehensive narrative should not be underestimated because it is an essential element of the democratic process (Schudson, 2008).

Despite some journalists being known for use of pseudo-facts in reporting, Nigeria's democratic process is not immune to post-election violence as a result of the prominence of various issues that are emphasized during campaigns and the framing of social differences by the media. Hence, when TV journalist, Rufai Oseni from Arise TV asked one political actor: 'Your party is fielding a Muslim-Muslim ticket; as a Christian, a born again Christian, defend that to me'<sup>1</sup> it is a question which is suffused with emotion, a value which is inherently reflected in journalistic products of news texts and broadcast contents.

It demonstrates how, in addition to setting agendas, journalism practitioners do frame issues in ways that are rooted in cultural patterns which can influence the way electorates perceive and respond to news about a single-faith ticket. This has significant practical implications for political campaigns. Thus, it is within the scope of this research that news narratives and framing are used to illustrate the contextuality of news coverage of the single-faith ticket.

## Method

Data for this research were obtained from the contents of two mainstream dailies, the *Daily Trust* and the *Punch*, analysed. The researcher selected the newspapers because of their influence and geographical reach in Nigeria's northern and southern parts (Adebanwi 2013, p.83). In this study, the following research questions were addressed in light of news narratives and framing theories: How has the 'Muslim-Muslim' ticket helped to conceptualize the 2023 election campaigns? How has the Nigerian press reflected the sentiments emanating from the single-faith ticket? The research questions were approached using a qualitative content analysis, a procedure that is notable for its flexibility (Schreier, 2014). With this method, the researcher focuses on the language of communication while paying attention to the content and context.

The researcher, assisted by a research assistant, compiled news reports about the 'Muslim-Muslim' ticket from the *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers'

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://twitter.com/mobilepunch/status/1565747250101452800>

websites. The data and their compilation process yielded a total of 123 news articles (36 from *Daily Trust* and 87 from the *Punch*), all of which were screened to ensure that they were fit for inclusion in the dataset<sup>2</sup>. Only the basic or straight news stories were considered for analysis. They serve as the unit of analysis. The analysis covers the period from May 15th, 2022, when speculations about the Muslim-Muslim ticket was rife, even before the two major political parties held their primaries.

The period of analysis spans up to August 15th, 2022 before which the Muslim-Muslim ticket had actually occurred. The rationale for these dates is because there have been humongous narratives built on the propriety or impropriety of a single-faith ticket. The argument was rife because of the fact that for the first time in Nigeria's 24 years of uninterrupted democracy, the two major political parties, the APC and the PDP, will field Muslims as presidential candidates. It also marks the second time that an incumbent president will not be on the ballot. Both these unique scenarios titillate the palates of journalists to advance all manner of conjectures, including zoning arrangement, ethnicity and religion. On this basis, the research focuses on tonality, framing and narrative structure of the news reports. Patterns directed at specific political representatives and their organizations were identified. The data gathered for the study and content categories are captured in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1: Number of articles compiled on the Muslim-Muslim ticket**

| <i>Newspaper</i>   | <i>Number of stories</i> |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Daily Trust</i> | 36                       |
| <i>Punch</i>       | 87                       |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>123</b>               |

**Source:** Researcher's computation of data from content analysis of the *Daily Trust* and the *Punch*.

<sup>2</sup> See Table 1.

**Table 2: Tone**

| Newspaper                    | Overall tone of story      |                        |                            |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
|                              | Predominantly negative (%) | Neutral/Ambivalent (%) | Predominantly positive (%) |
| <i>Daily Trust</i><br>(n=36) | 8.33                       | 69.44                  | 22.22                      |
| <i>Punch</i><br>(n=87)       | 52.8                       | 10.34                  | 36.78                      |

**Source:** Researcher's computation of data from content analysis of the *Daily Trust* and the *Punch*.

### Analysis 1: The Punch

More than half of the news articles published on the 'Muslim-Muslim' ticket in the *Punch* newspaper (n=87) had a negative slant. Forty-six articles (52.87%) were predominantly negative, portraying threats, disappointment and denial of support for the same-faith ticket of the ruling party, APC. In contrast, 32, representing 36.78%, showed a positive outlook, depicting hopefulness, conciliation and an optimism that it is good strategy to win the presidential election in 2023. The kernel of the argument in favour is that since Tinubu belongs to a minority religious group, Islam, in the South, it would not be strategic for him to pick his running mate from another minority group, a Christian in the North where the majority are Muslims. Nine articles (10.34%) were ambivalent and somewhat neutral. The researcher finds that the 'Muslim-Muslim ticket' is viewed negatively, and strongly associated with negative lexica such as 'slap on Christians', 'ill-advised', 'hidden agenda', while at the same time, headlines include 'Tinubu bows to northern governors' wish on Muslim-Muslim ticket.' Another headline is 'Muslim-Muslim ticket, direct attack on Christians- Ex-SGF, (ex-Secretary to the Government of the Federation),' a member of APC and an old ally of Tinubu who has calculated to be chosen as Vice-President.

In the first headline, the criticism that the North does not wish to relinquish political power is embedded. It also implies that even if it did, the southern Muslims would have to comply with the political conditions imposed by the North. It speaks to the Hausa-Fulani hegemony in the northern part of the country. The former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Babachir Lawal asserts as noted above that the 'Muslim-Muslim' ticket represents a confrontation and undermining of Christians. There was a strong sense of reactions in many stories and no hint of reconciliation. It is not uncommon to see such stories

appearing in the form of interviews with the clergy, accompanied by emotional titles such as: 'Christian-Christian ticket would have set Nigeria on fire- Clergyman Aiyedogbon' and 'Northern Christians will teach APC a lesson over Muslim-Muslim ticket- Prophet El-Buba'.

In addition, the 'Muslim-Muslim ticket' was interpreted strongly within the confines of APC intraparty politics, resulting in stiff opposition from disaffected party members. Various reports indicate tensions between politicians from ethnic minorities and ethnic majorities. This is especially the case in arguments between David Babachir Lawal, the former SGF, representing the Northern Christian minority and Abdullahi Ganduje, the Governor of Kano State, representing the Northern Muslim majority. Likewise, the 'Muslim-Muslim ticket' faced opposition from socio-ethnic pressure groups, including the Middle Belt Congress, the Southern Kaduna People's Union (SOKAPU), the Northern branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the North Central APC, as well as other Northern Christians in general. Some Northern minorities' feared isolation if they endorse the ticket.

According to Osaghae (1991), such agitations were the result of predominant ethnic groups undergoing a transformation from groups-in-themselves to groups-for-themselves in their quest to gain control of power at the federal level. The consequence of which sharpened 'the 'us' (majority) vs 'them' (minorities) dichotomy' forcing minorities into a largely protective nationalism (Osaghae, 1991, p.239). In the *Punch* newspaper, a positive view of the Muslim-Muslim ticket is part of a discourse that draws attention to the fact that focusing on the negative aspects of a single-faith ticket undermines the return of political power to the South in 2023. This argument is articulated as 'democracy is a game of numbers, and winning elections is 'key', emphasizing the inevitable selection of a Muslim northerner as the APC's running mate to ensure victory at the poll. This is so because the major opposition party PDP chose Atiku Abubakar from the Muslim North as its presidential candidate.

It should be noted that Tinubu, the APC presidential candidate is a central actor in the Muslim-Muslim ticket. Although news reports have legitimised sources critical of the APC and the Muslim-Muslim ticket, Tinubu himself is not portrayed as being Islamist. Instead, the *Punch* portrayed him as a capable, skilled politician capable of taking difficult decisions, creating the impression that he was an effective, skilled leader. The *Punch* of July 30, 2020 provides an illustration of this:

The presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, has an enviable reputation of winning most of his political contests.

Having this perspective is necessary for the newspaper to be viewed as impartial and balanced, even when factual evidence indicates that the newspaper is heavily critical of the Muslim-Muslim ticket. In contrast to this perspective, Tinubu's running mate Kashim Shettima, who is a northern Muslim, has been subjected to negative coverage. Consider the following pull-quote from the Punch:

The picking of former Governor of Borno State, Kashim Shettima, as presidential running mate of All Progressives Congress is a clear indication that Boko Haram and ISWAP activities of abducting our children from school will fully be resumed. The freed Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorist members from the Kuje custodial centre is a well planned attack by this government to manipulate the forthcoming 2023 general elections for the All Progressives Congress.

Essentially, this implies that northern Muslims are terrorists and that Nigerians will suffer the consequences if APC is re-elected to remain in power. Furthermore, it implies that the government will not conduct credible elections and will rely on non-democratic methods to subvert the will of the people. These types of sentence structures do more than attract negativity toward Shettima and his political party; they also disempower the Buhari government. Recontextualising events in this way is in the interest of the main opposition, PDP, and other political parties who wish to see the APC government removed from power in favour of politicians in their midst. Yet, the 'Muslim-Muslim ticket' raised more concerns regarding saving the APC from impending electoral defeat. Some Christian party members defecting to other parties after Shettima's announcement as running mate, rather confirms the fears of anti-Muslim sentiment

## Analysis 2: Daily Trust

The majority of the stories in the Daily Trust expressed neutrality or ambivalence (69.44%) toward the Muslim-Muslim ticket. This is so because there was often an inherent negative response which disproved claims against the single-faith ticket. If this scenario is not considered as outright positive, it indeed could be interpreted as tacit approval. As can be seen from Table 2, eight articles

(22.22%) were clearly positive, while in contrast, 3, representing 8.33%, were seen as negative towards the single faith ticket. It is noteworthy that unlike the Punch, as noted under it, the Muslim-Muslim ticket had already become a strong negative label against the APC even before the emergence of one from either of the two major political parties, there was not much of a Muslim-Muslim tag in the sample of the Daily Trust ( $n=36$ ). Instead, the newspaper employed the following lexicons: 'VP Slot,' 'Running Mates,' '2023,' '2023 Presidency,' and 'Tinubu/Shettima ticket.'

It was stressed in the Daily Trust, for example, that voters ignored the 'Christian-Christian ticket factor' to explain the victory of the main opposition party (PDP) in the July 2022 gubernatorial election in Osun State, Southwest Nigeria. It was suggested that disaffected members of the APC party defected because of the party's elites who lost the presidential primary to Tinubu rather than the Muslim-Muslim ticket as is commonly believed. For instance, a former Minister of Transport, Rotimi Amaechi, who contested the presidential primary, was accused of being high-handed (Edozie, 2022).

By putting a lie to certain claims, the *Daily Trust* negatively portrayed dissatisfied party members and other politicians who kicked against the 'Muslim-Muslim ticket' leaving a vital element unsaid, which is, according to the newspaper, that there was nothing wrong with the Muslim-Muslim ticket. These framings are demonstrated by headlines such as: 'VP Slot: How Babachir's panel recommended Shettima, 10 others' and 'Muslim-Muslim ticket: Atiku lied, he offered me VP slot in 2007 - Tinubu'. Additionally, Daily Trust fact-checked claims made by religious elites such as Mathew Kukah, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto, who linked the history of the Muslim-Muslim ticket to the time when the Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari, was a military leader. According to the paper, previous military regimes before Muhammadu Buhari's had the same faith ticket, proving that Bishop Kukah's claim that President Buhari as the first to introduce the same faith ticket was false (Clement, 2022).

Though the PDP's presidential candidate is a Hausa-Fulani Muslim, rather than focusing on the main opposition party's Muslim-Christian ticket, the Daily Trust focused on internal disputes within the party after a Muslim northerner was chosen. The paper also published headlines with an undertone of negativity against the PDP candidate in the 2023 elections. Such include: "VP Slot: Southern PDP divided as Wike's silence unsettles Atiku and others", and "VP Slot: Ayu's fate hanging as crisis over Okowa's selection worsens."

The negative coverage given to the PDP and its presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, contrasts with its favorable treatment of Shettima, the APC vice-

presidential candidate, who is regarded as a strong and acceptable candidate among northern politicians. Taking into consideration the North's voting strength, the *Daily Trust* emphasizes the rotation of political power to the South. For instance, the outlet quoted a well-placed source as saying:

Buhari is not averse to the candidature of Shettima. The former Borno governor has been one of the frontline supporters of the president. He brought serious votes in 2015 and 2019 for the success of the president not only in Borno but in other North-East states. Also, the three governors in the North East (Babagana Zulum of Borno, Mai Mala Buni of Yobe and Muhammed Inuwa of Gombe) are all sympathetic to Shettima's candidature (see, Mudashir and Martins, 2022).

As in the *Punch*, Tinubu is portrayed in the *Daily Trust* as a competent and unifying presidential candidate. Often, the positive tone is highlighted through interviews with key supporters of the party's presidential candidate, followed by headlines such as, 'Zoning, Not Muslim-Muslim Ticket, Will Determine 2023 Presidential Poll- Senator Adeyeye' and 'In 2023, Nigerians will vote for competence over sentiments- Shettima'. There were a limited number of stories in the *Daily Trust* that criticized the 'Muslim-Muslim ticket' in order to maintain its reputation as an organization that presented both sides of the debate fairly and in line with the ethics of the profession. An illustration for this is 'Muslim-Muslim ticket, plot to make Christians second class- New CAN President.'

### Discussion of Findings

As noted above, the *Punch* clearly tends to focus more on critical coverage of the Muslim-Muslim ticket than the *Daily Trust*. In its preponderant focus on Hausa-Fulani hegemony, the southern Nigerian press normalized the Muslim north as a sinister entity in a manner that is biased against the northern political establishment. A major factor contributing to this bias is Islamic fundamentalism, which is rooted in a fear that a predominantly Muslim north will begin to dominate a predominantly Christian south even though Christians have ruled the country for a more extended period since democracy was restored in 1999. The fact that violence is largely attributable to and associated with Muslims tends to loom large over contentious issues and contributes to distrust between the South and the North. These factors constitute the foundation for social divisions in the country. The *Punch* rather than dwell on the fact that the ruling APC zoned the presidential ticket in the 2023 general election to the South on the basis of equity, justice and fair play, raised a lot of dust and split the hair on the question of

Muslim-Muslim ticket as if it is a novelty that is strange to the Nigerian political terrain. The most adjudged free and fair election was conducted virtually on the same basis as the present one. MKO Abiola in 1993 as the presidential candidate of the Social Democratic Party like Tinubu was a Muslim from the Southwest. Also, Babagana Kingibe as the running mate to Abiola is also a Muslim from the same State, Borno, in the Northeast of Nigeria. This did not stop them from winning convincingly even in the state of their major opponent, Bashir Tofa of the National Republican Convention (NRC), who hailed from Kano State. To the optimists of the Muslim-Muslim ticket among the journalists with *Punch*, the time is now to remove the curse that worked against Awolowo in 1963, Abiola in 1993 and now in 2023 with an equal interval of thirty years in each case. The Northern Muslims have little to be blamed for in this circumstance because they had supported a Christian candidate, Olusegun Obasanjo from the Southwest in 1999 under the platform of the PDP whereas, that geopolitical zone voted for another candidate, Olu Falae of the AD/APP.

It is significant to note that the *Daily Trust* acknowledges and supports the elite pact between the North and the South and the shift in political power to the South. This explains why in the period covered in this analysis, the publication did not extend ethnic solidarity in its coverage of activities of Atiku Abubakar, a northern Muslim presidential candidate. Such a positive coverage would have been interpreted as a defence of northern interests and hegemony and a rubbish of the Northern Muslim APC concession of presidency to the South after a northerner had been in the saddle in the immediate past eight years.

The findings of this study challenges the moral basis of the argument by Obadare (2004) who contends that Islamic fundamentalism threatens the creation of a truly independent sphere for critical deliberation. This observation is one-sided because Obadare underplays the fact that such anti-Muslim sentiments have likewise affected the public sphere and that actors in the media industry either knowingly or inadvertently, play a major role in the development of these conflicting negative sentiments.

Based on the foregoing analysis, the 'Muslim-Muslim' ticket contributed to conceptualizing the 2023 election campaigns from multiple dimensions, including intraparty and interparty. It relates not only to the internal struggle for power by elites in the ruling political party, the APC, but extends also to the fact that both parties (the ruling APC and the main opposition PDP) jettisoned inclusivity so as to win electoral support. In reflecting the sentiments regarding the 'Muslim-Muslim' ticket, the *Punch* and the *Daily Trust* newspapers covered the Muslim-Muslim ticket in a habitual form of news reporting, with anti-Muslim sentiments being more prevalent in the *Punch*, which was a newspaper favoured

among the Christian South than in the Muslim North of Nigeria. Conversely, the northern-based *Daily Trust* newspaper has negligible anti-Muslim sentiments and, as expected, more understanding for the position taken largely in its geopolitical and ethno-religious milieu.

In terms of how this may affect journalistic practice, it points to the fact that individual news outlets are aware that they aim to appeal to the imminent social identities of their immediate environment to ensure that news remains relevant to readers and sustain their readership. This practice has implications for stimulating and promoting societal prejudices. It can exacerbate and perpetuate stereotypes that encourage political violence since it provides the groundwork for discussing the narratives associated with the Muslim-Muslim ticket in Nigeria's 2023 elections. As a result, this study posits that there is a close relationship between how news outlets appeal to and respond to the interests of their readers and how that affects their coverage of partisan sentiments to advance ideological and partisan interests.

## Conclusions

Anti-Muslim sentiments are a political issue, contested, and an integral component of the struggle to obtain political power. *Analysis of the 'Muslim-Muslim ticket' which is more predominant in the Punch, and lesser in the Daily Trust demonstrates how the Nigerian press engages in habitual forms of news reporting by appealing to the imminent social identities of their immediate surroundings to ensure that news remain relevant to their audiences. This is consequential for how the Nigerian press communicate the messages of political representatives and their parties to the public about the electoral process, as well as other important issues relating to the electoral process, which has a direct impact on the involvement and engagement of citizens in a democracy.*

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