
Implications of the Muslim-Muslim Political Ticket in Building Muslim-Christian Relation, Equitable Representation and Peaceful Co-Existence in Niger State

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Abstract

The main of the paper is to evaluate muslim- muslim political ticket in building inter faith relations and equitable political representation in Niger State. The paper adopted literature review design to access and discover information that are related and relevant to the paper. Christian-Muslim relations had been a global concern and both religions originated in Palestine. This relationship continues to widen apart, as time progressed under the caliphs, policies were made that were unfavorable to Christians in the process of spreading Islam. Presently, Christians and Muslims continue to manage peaceful co-existence despite differences and challenges. Historically, no Christian has served as governor under a democratic era in Niger State. The 2023 gubernatorial election under the ruling party, APC, had its election campaign slogan as "Sai Muslim-Muslim ticket," which definitely does not give room for any Christian for the seat of governor or deputy. This portrays an unequitable political representation in Niger State. Based on the practice, the paper recommended: building Muslim-Christian relationship in Niger State through recognition of every religion in the politics of the state, the political parties should over time, ensure that each religion should be involved in leadership roles based on qualification, for promoting peaceful coexistence in the state.

Keywords: muslim-muslim political ticket, muslim-christian relations, peaceful co-existence, implications

Introduction

The peace of every society depends largely on the relationships among its people. The essential need of every society is peace, and this peace is achieved through good relationships. Obviously, a society may not be experiencing war, but can still lack peace. According to Vesilind (2005: p. 43) peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, law, order, and good governance. Niger State is one of the states of North central geo-political zone in Nigeria. Agriculture and farming is her major economic source of living with three major religions: traditional religion, christainity and islam dominating the state. Ejeh

cited in Idakpo (2018) noted that the challenge of religious pluralism is manifested in various ways and varying degrees in all parts of Nigeria.

Islam and Christianity are the dominant religions practiced in Niger State, with Islam being more prevalent in northern and central areas and Christianity more prominent in southern and urban centres. A small proportion of the population continues to practice African traditional religions, often alongside the major faiths (NSBS, 2014). Islamic legal principles (Sharia) are applied in personal and family matters among Muslim adherents. In terms of education, there is a general concession that Christians are more educated than Muslims in the Northern part of Nigeria, as they give priority to education above other religions. This privilege has afforded Christians more opportunity in public service. Traditional religion with fewer adherents is more backward in education, so its presence is not often felt in politics and public services.

Niger State has experienced steady democratic rule for close to three decades now. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) had ruled for four tenures, two under Engr. Abdukadir Kure and two tenures under Babangida Aliyu. The gubernatorial election in 2015 brought in Abubakar Sani Bello under All Progressive Congress (APC) party, that ruled for two tenures and handed over to Mohammed Bago, an incumbent under the same party. Apart from Engr. Abdukadir Kure, who had a Christian as deputy, and all others that came after him had Muslims as their deputy, making the gubernatorial seat of Niger state a Muslim-Muslim ticket for about two decades. The last campaign toward the gubernatorial election in 2023 witnessed a loud demand for Muslim-Muslim tickets compared to others that do not make a specific demand for Muslim-Muslim tickets. This paper seeks to evaluate muslim-muslim political ticket and its implications for the relationship between muslims and christians and peaceful co-existence in Niger State. The paper is divided into three parts: the history of Niger State, an overview of muslim-christian relations, and the implications of the muslim-muslim political ticket on Muslims - Christians relations in Niger State.

Brief History of Niger State

Niger is one of the six states plus the Federal Capital Territory that make up the North-Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Niger got its name from the River Niger, (Meek 1960). It shares an international boundary with the Republic of Benin to the West and interstate boundaries with Kebbi and Zamfara States to the North, Kwara and Kogi States to the South, and Kaduna and the FCT to the East. The state capital is Minna. The state emerged from the former North-Western State as part of a national effort to enhance administrative efficiency, political inclusion, and balanced development (Niger State Government [NSG], 2023).

After Nigeria's independence in 1960, the territory remained within the Northern Region until its reconstitution as Niger State in 1976, with further territorial expansion in 1991 through the incorporation of Borgu Emirate areas

from Kwara State (NSG, 2023). The Nupe Province consisted of Abuja, Agaie, Bida, Kontagora, and Lapai emirates that became the southern part of the North-Western State and was created into a state on February 3, 1976 under the military regime of General Murtala Ramat Mohammed from the North Western region with nine Local Governments. By 1983, under Muhammadu Awwal Ibrahim as Governor, the Local Governments became eighteen. In 1991, under General Ibrahim Babangida, it became nineteen, and in 1996, under General Sani Abacha, it became twenty-five local Governments. The Local Governments are: Agaie, Agwara, Bida, Borgu, Bosso, Chanchaga, Edati, Gbako, Gurara, Katcha, Kontagora, Lapai, Lavun, Magama, Mariga, Mashegu, Mokwa, Munya, Paikoro, Rafi, Rijau, Shiroro, Sulejah, Tafa, Wushishi.

Niger State is divided into three political zones. Zone A covers Niger South, known as the Niger South Senatorial Zone/District, with eight local governments: Agaie, Bida, Edati, Gbako, Katcha, Lapai, Lavun, and Mokwa. Zone B covers Niger East, also known as the Niger East Senatorial Zone/District, comprising nine local governments: Bosso, Chanchaga, Gurara, Munya, Paikoro, Rafi, Shiroro, Suleja, and Tafa. Zone C covers Niger North, also known as the Niger North Senatorial Zone/District, comprising eight local governments: Agwara, Borgu, Kontagora, Magama, Mariga, Mashegu, Rijau, and Wushishi. (Niger State History, LGA and Senatorial Districts 2020).

According to Nigeria's 2009 Population and Housing Census, Niger State had a population of over six million (National Population Commission, 2009). The state is ethnically heterogeneous, hosting numerous indigenous groups. The major ethnic groups include the Nupe, Gbagyi, Hausa, Kambari, Kamuku, Borgu, Dibo, and Kadara peoples (ZODML, 2023). Islam and Christianity are the dominant religions practiced in Niger State, with Islam being more prevalent in northern and central areas and Christianity more prominent in southern and urban centres. A small proportion of the population continues to practice African traditional religions, often alongside the major faiths (NSBS, 2014). According to the Niger State Bureau of Statistics, the people of Niger State are predominantly Muslims and Christians with few Traditionalists and Atheists. However, Gusadi, a Christian respondents had stated that the estimation of the two faiths, that is, Islam and Christianity, is 50/50, is contestable.

Military and civilian governors had ruled Niger State since its creation as follows: Navy Commander Murtala Nyako from February 1976 to 1977 as military governor; Navy Commander Ebitu Ukiwe from 1977 to 1978 as military governor; Col. Ola Oni from 1978 to 1978 as military administrator with Alh. Mohd. Salawu Agaie as deputy; Mal. Mohammed Awwal Ibrahim was the first civilian governor from October 1979 to December 1983 with Idris Alhassan Kpaki as the first deputy, and Alh. Mahmudi Aliyu as second deputy; Col. David A. B. Mark from 1984 to 1986 as military governor; Lt. Col. Garba Ali Mohamed from 1986 to 1987 as military governor; Col. Muhammed Lawan Gwadabe from 1987 to 1992 as military governor with Alh. Jibo Garba as deputy, Dr. Musa

Muhammed Inuwa from 1992 to 1993, as the second civilian governor, with Alh. Musa Jibrin Wali as deputy; Col. Cletus K Emein from 1993 to 1996 as military administrator; C. P. Simeon O. Oduoye from 1996 to 1998 as military administrator; Col. Habibu Shuaibu from 1998 to 1999 as military administrator; Engr. A. A. Kure from 1999 to 2007 as third civilian governor with Dr. Shem Zagbayi Nuhu as deputy; Dr. Muazu Babangida Aliyu from 2007 to 2014 as fourth civilian governor with Alh. Ahmed Musa Ibeto as deputy; Alh. Abubakar Sani Bello, from 2015 to 2023, was the fifth civilian governor with Alh. Ahmed Muhammed Ketso as deputy, and Alh. Mohammed Umar Bago is the current civilian governor, with Comrade Yakubu Garba as his deputy.

From the history of Niger State, no Christian has served as governor except in a military regime. Similarly, only one Christian has served as a deputy in both military and civilian regimes. This practice is directly or indirectly affecting political representation and participation in governance, peaceful co-existence and relationship in the state.

Overview of Christian-Muslim Relations in Niger State

Christian-Muslim relation in Northern Nigeria is a complex interplay of history, religion, politics, identity, and socio-economic factors. According to Akande and Olawale, (2023), the Northern region is characterized by a long history of Islamic dominance from the medieval period, through the spread of Christianity during colonial and post-colonial periods, and ongoing efforts at coexistence and reconciliation.

Islam was introduced into Northern Nigeria through trans-Saharan trade networks and solidified politically and culturally with the Fulani Jihad and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in the early 19th century (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). On the other hand, Christianity's presence expanded significantly under British colonial rule beginning in the early 20th century through missionary activities and the establishment of churches and schools (Ottuh, 2014).

It is generally believed that Christianity began on the day of Pentecost, as led by Jesus' disciples, which occurred around 33 AD. Likewise, Islam, the religion of Muslims, was started by the Prophet Muhammad (SWA), who was born about 570 AD. (Boer 2006) Boer (2006) noted that the influences of Judaism and Christianity had been present in Arabia for many years, even before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. This made some thoughtful people reject polytheism and worship of Allah as the only God of heaven and earth. This means Christianity had contact with the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, before his birth. But since Prophet Muhammad started Islam, it would be proper to say Christian-Muslim relations started with the foundation of Islam religion.

Boer (2006) stated that the founder of Islam had contact with Christianity and Judaism in his journeys. The great annual feast in Mecca brought guests from

all of Arabia, including Christians and Jews. More to that was the presence of Christian slaves and prisoners in Mecca. Boer (2006) argues that when Muhammad instructed his followers to contact people of the Book for further clarification (Quran 10:97), it implies that he was of the same faith with them. Further, Boer (2003) argues that the Prophet of Islam views his newfound faith similarly to how Christianity was perceived when he faced opposition that led his followers to flee to Abyssinia, prophet Mohammed advised muslims of that time to seek refuge with Abyssinian Christians. In his early life and during the formation of Islam, Muhammad maintained good relations with Christians. His relationship with Christians is one of partnership; he views Christians as valuable resources for consultation and help. However, it is essential to note that Muhammad's knowledge of Christianity and Judaism stems from informants who had an imperfect understanding of these religions (Boer 2006).

Moreover, as the relationship between Muhammad and Christians progressed, after he conquered Medina and became politically established, a newly defined relationship was issued. Boer (2006) stated, that in his treatment of the Jews, Muhammad set a pattern which he was to follow in the future with Jews and Christians. Boer, (2006) averred that if the Jews and the Christians submitted to his political and military authority, they would not be disturbed provided they paid yearly tribute to him even though they did not have to embrace Islam. The reason for this was that they were people of the Book, that is, people with a revelation and therefore presumably monotheists (Boer 2006: p.50). The muslim-christian relation at this point was that in as much as a political enterprise of the Prophet is not tampered with, there will be peaceful coexistence.

In fact, Boer (2006; p. 53) stated that the Prophet permits Muslims to marry Christians and Jews Nonetheless, Murk (2006) noted that there were Jews who mocked Muhammad for his imperfection in the knowledge of the Torah and that they supported those who opposed the Prophet. Murk (2006: p. 54) also stated that there were differences between the Mecca surahs and Medina surahs, as the Prophet was more favorable to Jews and Christians at an early stage, with the hope of winning them, but when Jews and Christians opposed him, he became harsh in his approach to them. Karimi (2011) also stated that when Muhammad became a political and military leader in Medina, instructed his followers, "Whoever changes his Islamic religion, kill him" (Hadith Sahih al-Bukhari 9:84:57). Initially, the Prophet of Islam began by trusting and depending on Christians, but as he progresses in his newfound religion, the relationship continued to widen apart.

After the death of Prophet Muhammad, Islam was led by caliphs who were accepted by Islam as representatives of Allah on earth. Muslims, in general, are very proud of the history of the caliphate in Islam (Mark 2006: p. 89). There were four orthodox caliphs who expanded Islam beyond Arabia. During the time of Prophet Muhammad, Christians were to pay a yearly tribute and did not need to be converted to Islam. However, during the second caliph, that is, Umar, some rules were made, one of which was that Jews and Christians were restricted from

the Arabian country, and they were forced out of the country. Boer (2006) noted that some restrictions were later placed on Christians: "they were forbidden to marry Muslim women; they might not speak in an unfavorable way about Muhammad or the Quran; they were not permitted to display crosses, mourn their dead publicly or sound their church bells in such a way that Muslims would have to hear them; they would not build their houses higher than the Muslims, own thoroughbred horses, or drink wine in public, and they must not allow pigs to be seen. In many places, Christians (as also Jews) had to wear a distinctive dress so that anyone they met might see them as Jews or Christians. Whereas Christians and others could freely turn from their religion to Islam, anyone who turned from Islam to Christianity was put to death. Conversion was, therefore, strictly a one-way affair" (Boer 2006: p. 65). These practices by caliphs made the Muslim-Christian relations worse than the time of Prophet Muhammad.

On the other hand, Christians also contributed to the problem of Christian-Muslim relationships. This was through crusade, as Christians felt a need to go to Jerusalem as pilgrims, which was taken over by Muslims. Boer (2006) opined that the first crusade was made by civilians, and it was completely destroyed by Muslims. The second was by the military, (2006) which killed about 70,000 Muslims and Jews. Boer (2006) affirmed that the fear of Christian military power, which the Muslims saw as used in the interest of religion, continues to live in the minds of Muslims. Boer (2006: pp. 134-135) opines that perhaps the Crusades did more damage to Christianity in the twentieth century than as they did in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Murk (2006) sees the crusade of the 10th to 13th centuries as a very copy of Islamic holy jihad. They both had religious motivations, aimed at military conquest in the name of God, and granted participants some special kind of forgiveness for their sins. Nevertheless, Murk further noted that Muhammad and the Quran commanded holy jihad, but crusaders were an aberration for the Christian Church. Christianity and Islam, as the two largest religions in the world, have had several confrontations and have suffered attacks from one another. Islam shared common inspirations with Christianity and Judaism. Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, is a monotheistic religion that is an offshoot of Abrahamic religion.

In Niger State, Christians and Muslims share economic, educational, and cultural spaces, fostering everyday interaction and mutual accommodation. Interfaith families, market exchanges, and shared citizenship in civic institutions are examples of such coexistence as succinctly observed by Akande and Olawale (2023). As a matter of fact interreligious dialogue initiatives have emerged as key mechanisms for encouraging peaceful coexistence. Olowo, (2025) noted on interreligious councils in Northern Nigeria, how sustained dialogues between Christian and Muslim leaders help mitigate misunderstandings and reduce tensions by promoting mutual respect and education about the other faith's values. Mutual relationships between Christians and Muslims will go a long way to maintain peace observed and prosperity in Nigeria, particularly in Niger State. Boer (2013) observed that corruption has demonized the country, but Muslim-

Christian relations have bedeviled it. Nigeria belongs to Muslims as well as Christians. This made Onaiyekan (2013) see it as an Islamo-Christian nation. Both are to live together in one nation. Singh (2010) opines that Christian-Muslim contact, particularly in the last 100 years, shows conflict to be the primary effect, although conflict is not necessarily negative. Singh (2010) again affirmed that outcomes of conflict and exchange depend on the goals one nurtures and the belief about truth one subscribes to Ludwig (2008) stated that the agitation for the implementation of Sharia had brought about some developments, such as the establishment of Christian Pilgrims Welfare. This suggests that the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is improving, despite hurdles. Crain (2017) is optimistic that inter-religion relations can improve and that over time, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity had improved, and likewise, if other religions could recognize their common bonds and work together.

In Niger State, Christians and Muslims shared economic, educational, and cultural activities that foster everyday interaction and mutual cooperation. The level of co-existence is witnessed even families having different members of different faith and inter marriage between the 2 faiths as examples of such coexistence (Akande & Olawale, 2023). Interreligious dialogue initiatives emerged as key mechanisms for encouraging peaceful coexistence. Olowo, (2025) shows how sustained dialogues between Christian and Muslim leaders help mitigate misunderstandings and reduce tensions by promoting mutual respect and education about the other faith's values.

In the North there are documented history of clashes between Christian and Muslim communities in so many states. These clashes are triggered by political disputes, elections, controversial legal changes and faith related issues. These events have shaped interreligious perceptions across the region (Wikipedia; Aderole, 2023). Niger State itself has experienced many large-scale religious riots, isolated attacks on churches and other similar activities that has hindered peaceful co-existence and promoted different patterns of conflict and insecurity in the state (Wikipedia, 2025). Religious identity in the state is interwoven with ethnic and political identities, strengthening different aspects that can intensify interreligious tensions. Muslim and Christian may support with different political parties or local power structures, fostering competition over resources and political representation (Wilson Center, 2022). These conditions according to Aderole (2023) have been implicated not only in open conflict but also in structural tensions affecting Christian-Muslim relations (Wilson Center, 2022).

Implication of the Muslim-Muslim Political Ticket on Muslim-Christian Relations

Nigeria is a multi-religious state, dominated by three major religions: Islam, Christianity and Traditional religions. The emergence of Muslim-Muslim political tickets in elections has stirred significant debate over inclusion, political representation, peaceful co-existence and interreligious harmony. A *Muslim-Muslim ticket* refers to a political contest in which both the presidential (or

gubernatorial) candidate and running mate share the same Islamic faith (Wikipedia, 2025). It is worthy to note that the Nigerian Constitution does not explicitly prohibit same-faith tickets. The implications of departing from this informal convention are profound for Christian–Muslim relations (No name (2024)). Niger State reflects these dynamics. The state has a significant Muslim majority with a substantial Christian minority. Thus, developments around Muslim–Muslim tickets at national or regional levels have implications for relations, political participation, peaceful co-existence and perceptions of equity among religious communities.

The Muslim-Muslim political ticket entails as symbolic exclusion of christens from political power. Mainly Christian leaders, including those within the APC, argued that the ticket represented a form of political and socio-economic marginalization of Christians (Searches 2, 6, 12). These reactions could exacerbate existing societal tensions. Catholic Bishops Conference, (2022) explicitly characterized Muslim–Muslim tickets as insensitive to Nigeria’s diversity and warned about their potential to polarise religious communities. Muslim-muslim ticket negates competence and qualities in the political structure. Proponents of Muslim–Muslim tickets argued that competence, policy visions, and governance outcomes should take precedence over religious identities in the selection of candidate. This view highlights a broader tension of whether religion should play a substantive role in political representation or whether Nigeria’s secular constitution should mitigate religious considerations in ticket formation. Many Christians in the North are not convinced of same-faith tickets as symptomatic of deeper inequalities when set against historical patterns of representation (No Name, 2024).

In order to sustain peaceful coexistence, the issue of Muslim-Muslim political tickets should be considered. According to Linden and Thorp (2008) elections have been pivotal moments in the evolution of religious tensions and conflicts in Nigeria. This has been demonstrated over several decades by the nation's consistently tense atmosphere during elections. From the time of M.K. Abiola's presidential election in 1993 to the present, elections have not been without fear. This tension has always been on either religion or tribal crisis, as every religion and or tribe wants its contestants to win in elections. Interreligious collaboration should be promoted in Niger State for the growth and peace of the State.

One of the implications of the Muslim-Muslim ticket is that it affects the sense of belonging of the citizens. Niger State, should moderate its political affairs in accordance with its secular status. The political slogan "Muslim-Muslim Ticket" affects the sense of belonging in two ways: it informs Muslims that everything is about "we" and for "we"; on the other hand, it makes Christians feel rejected, denied, and discriminated against. Christians view same-faith tickets as indicators of their reduced influence in national and subnational governance, fueling mistrust and political disengaged (Searches 2, 6, 12). Gbonigi, (2000)

argues that "Nigerian Muslims strongly believe that Nigeria has to be led by a northern Muslim from the Hausa-Fulani". Kwashi (2004) supported Gbonigi's argument that Muslims see themselves as the *de jure* owners of certain places in the north. This played out in the last presidential and Niger State gubernatorial elections, where there was a strong demand for a Muslim-Muslim ticket. Political leadership should not be used to decimate other religions and tribes in the State. All citizens should have a sense of belonging and be given opportunities to participate in leadership development of the State.

A Muslim-Muslim ticket undermines the qualified and right candidates. The process of electing people to various positions of political leadership should be based on the personal merit, qualifications, capabilities, and suitability of the candidates, rather than their religious affiliation. The Muslim-Muslim ticket does not allow capable and qualified candidates to be sorted for, but only for those who are Muslims whether qualified or not. Though Muslims may seek a qualified and capable candidate, they are limited to a candidate who is a Muslim. It is essential to hold one's religious teachings and principles in high esteem; however, when it comes to political leadership, there should be a clear separation between the leadership and religion. Sarkissian (2012) opines that the relationship between religion and the State may affect the ability of religious groups to make positive contributions to the State.

The practice of a Muslim-Muslim political ticket affords limited experience. Muslims and Christians collaboration of religious experiences will promote and develop the State. Muslim-Muslim ticket hinders the contribution from the Christian side. Gwamna (2018) argues that when Islamic principles are not judiciously applied, they will have a negative impact. Further it is generally acknowledged that in Nigeria, Sharia has failed to work effectively as a result of the political under currents that informed its introduction and implementation. Muslims and Christians must know that they need each other to build a peaceful and successful society. This understanding comes through tolerating one another. According to Abubakar, (2023), Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) demonstrated a remarkable life of patience under provocation and honored treaties with non-Muslims for peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion

The paper discussed the muslim-muslim political ticket and Muslim-Christian relationship, which has not been without challenges since the inception of Christianity and Islam. The Prophet of Islam began on a positive note with Christians, but over time, the relationship continued to deteriorate. The relationship evolves from partnership to opposition during the caliphate. The history of Niger State reveals that the State was governed for decades under a democratic system by Muslim Governors and Deputy Governors. No Christians have ruled the State as governors apart from military governors, and only one deputy governor is a Christian. However, the recent agitation for a Muslim-

Muslim Ticket in Niger State publicly demonstrates discrimination against the Christian faith. Muslim-Muslim ticket negatively affects Christian-Muslim relations and the development of the State. It makes Muslims feel they are the only people who should have the right to the rulership of the State, while Christians feel neglected and sidelined. The concept hinders the State from getting the most qualified and suitable candidate for political leadership in the State. Leadership should not be limited to only Muslims but to everyone who is capable and qualified to ensure equal political representation, mutual co-existence among Christians and Muslims.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Building Muslim-Christian relationship in Niger State through recognition of every religion in the politics of the state,
2. The political parties should over time, ensure that each religion should be involved in leadership roles based on qualification, for promoting peaceful coexistence in the state.
3. Promoting interfaith and inter families ties that encourages peace co-existence and harmonious living together.

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