Media Representation of Muslim-Muslim Tickets in Nigeria's Presidential Elections: Insights from Government and Private Newspaper Editorials

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Original research paper

This research adopted mixed methods (content analysis, Oral Interviews, and focus group discussions) to investigate the editorials of government and private newspapers on the Muslim-Muslim tickets (MMT) of All-Progressives Congress in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. Anchoring on Agenda-setting and Framing theories, the article focused on the frequency of editorials, direction of framing language, opinion of the government and public, mechanics of graphology, prominence, and consequence. The period covered was from the beginning of purchase of nomination forms (June, 2022) to election-day (February 25, 2023). Vanguard (private) and Daily Times (government) were selected through multi-stage sampling. Vanguard represented the opinion of private newspapers while Daily Times represented government's opinion. The population of study was 546: Vanguard (273), Daily Times (273). The actual sample size for each newspaper was further determined through purposive sampling. Riffle's Composite Weeks/Months sampling was also considered, and the editions sorted using random and quota methods. 4 editions of each newspaper were retrieved each week to give 16 copies per month and 144 over the period. Data were presented on tables using simple percentages. Findings showed that Vanguard overtly criticised MMT and set more agenda (74 editorials) while Daily Times supported MMT and published fewer editorials (68). The number of the citizens against MMT was greater than the number that supported it. The major consequences of MMT were religious, ethnic, and political. The paper recommended that newspapers should set an unbiased editorial agenda on political issues, and discourage government divisive practices like MMT.

Keywords: Muslim-Muslim tickets, editorial, framing, agenda-setting.

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Introduction

The Nigerian political and social environments are always peaceful and quiet except during election periods. Elections are the bane of Nigeria's tranquility, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. This is because Nigeria's elections are greatly influenced by her religious, cultural, and political diversities. Her multiparty system and party sentiments also mar her elections which, in return, thwart her acclaimed unity in diversity. Since independence, political parties have been formed along tribal, ethnic and religious lines (Onyenekwe & Okpara, 2023). The 2023 presidential election witnessed a flagrant display of party politics, unnecessary ethnic considerations and religious jingoism. The above phenomena

were reflected in the nomination of candidates, sale of nomination forms, primary elections, and choice of running-mates. There were also reported cases of threats and intimidation of voters and candidates, rigging, and malpractice in election results. These and more graced Nigeria's 8th presidential poll in the 24th year of her fourth republic.

In addition, intra and inter party crises heightened, and heated up the polity. Fasan (2022) reported that party members were now *"pulling each other in different directions, hurling accusations and counter-accusations…"* (Joe-Akunne et al., 2022). Another endemic problem that characterised the election was the general state of insecurity in the country.

Kllings of all kinds, abductions, arson and gun-running were on the increase during the period. According to Crisis Group Africa Report (2022), "election preparations are speeding amid growing concerns about public safety due to the activities of armed groups in swathes of the country. Insecurity is widespread, with significant death tolls in many states." Furthermore, there was untold general hardship and economic quagmire in the country. This increased the desire of the citizens to have a change of government and the removal of the incumbent political party in power (i.e. APC).

Eighteen political parties registered for the election but only four were prominent: The All-Progressives Congress (APC) was the party in power. Bola Tinubu was its flag-bearer. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar was the candidate for People's Democratic Party (PDP). Peter Obi was of the Labour Party (LP) while Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso belonged to the New Nigerian People's Party (NNPP). The emergence of these flag-bearers was full of both intra-party and inter-party conflicts. For instance, the aggrieved members grossly accused the APC and the PDP of hijacking and selling their nomination forms to the highest bidder rather than on merit.

The electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), was also heavily criticised for unscrupulously allowing the nomination forms at exorbitant rates. The tickets were sold at 100 million naira (APC), 40 million naira (PDP), 30 million naira (NNPP) and 15 million naira (LP). Edeme (2022) alleged that "this amount being placed for getting nomination form is an invitation for corruption. Anybody who has the capacity to mobilise such money would equally develop greater capacity to steal in multiple folds to recover the money."

Furthermore, another economic angle lampooned by critics was that INEC boss, Prof Mahmood Yakubu, told the Senate Committee on Appropriation that he had mapped out an unbelievable amount of 305 billion naira for the poll alone. The irony was that this was when the inflationary trends in the country were abnormally high. Fasan (2022) exposed that "this is a time most Nigerians are lamenting the high cost of living and many graduates are jobless and labour unions are on prolonged strikes on account of the government's failure to meet its obligation or provide basic demands of modern governance."

Another critical problem that bedraggled the 2023 presidential election was the APC's Muslim-Muslim ticket (MMT) Many dismissed it as anti-religious tolerance because both the presidential candidate and his running-mate were Muslims (Abia, 2023). This was equally against the APC constitution [See Article 7(x)]. The Christians in the APC regarded MMT as a neglect to and exclusion of their membership and religion from the political fold in their own country. MMT also received a nudge of disapproval from human rights groups and the media. For instance, Fasan (2022) shouldered that "every well-meaning and patriotic Nigerian must remain outraged by the utter insensitivity … of the calculated decision that belittles Christianity and puts religious harmony and internal cohesion at greater risk in Nigeria."

The Concept of Editorial: The editorial is an article representing the opinion of a newspaper on a given current issue of public interest (Singh, 2006; Firstone, 2020). This opinion is different from other opinionated articles in newspapers such as columns, letters to the editors, and commentaries. In many countries, such as Nigeria, editorials are not attributed to an individual reporter alone, but rather a collective opinion of the entire newspaper organization – usually the editorial board – even when the editorial is written by only one editor.

The editorials investigated in this study represented the opinions of Vanguard and Daily Times on Muslim-Muslim tickets in the 2023 presidential election. Editorials are more persuasive than ever during election periods. Although editorials are expected to be balanced, they may tilt towards a certain direction of viewpoint such as positive, negative or neutral. This is usually directly or indirectly towards a candidate, political party, or policy (Firstone, 2020).

Same-Religion Tickets and Muslim-Muslim Tickets

Same-religion ticket (SRT) is a situation in a multi-religious state like Nigeria where a presidential candidate and his running-mate are drawn from the same religion while ignoring party members from the other religion. During the 2023 presidential election, there were eighteen political parties and over 250 ethnic groups. A non-tribal party was expected to welcome and register as many qualified members as possible across the ethnic groups.

Therefore, same-religion or same-tribe tickets parlance represents a practice where a party chooses its presidential candidate and his running-mate from the members of the same religion or tribe ignoring members from the other religion(s) or ethnic groups. It was expected that a political party would recognize both the majority and minority interests during its choice of the duo to run for the presidency.

It would be unacceptable and undemocratic to run Muslim-Muslim or Christian-Christian in Nigeria. Abia (2023) dismissed Muslim-Muslim tickets as "a compendium of controversial pairing." The APC's MMT was a same-religion ticket. It was a controversial pairing indeed where the presidential candidate, Bola Tinubu, ignoring the APC members from the Christian fold, picked a fellow Moslem, Kashim Shettima, as his running-mate.

Brief History of Same-Religion Tickets in Nigeria's Elections

In 1979, Nigeria's second republic, same-religion ticket was practiced. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba Christian of Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), selected Philip Umeadi (a Christian from the South-East). Nnamdi Azikiwe of the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) was a Christian from the South-East. He paired with Ishaya Audu, a Hausa Christian from the North. Both the UPN and NPP lost the presidency to the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) of Shehu Shagari (a Northern Muslim) and his running-mate, Alex Ekwueme (a Christian from the East). Simply put, the same-religion ticket project was defeated by the mixed-religion tickets in 1979.

In 1993, MKO Abiola, of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) formed a duo with Babagana Kingibe, a fellow Muslim. Though this same-faith combination allegedly won the election against Alhaji Tofa's National Republican Convention (NRC), its eventual annulment by Gen Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB) proved that, in Nigeria, same-religion tickets had not really worked.

Religious Backgrounds of Presidential Candidates and Their Running-Mates (First Republic - Date)

SN	Republic	Candidate	Religion	Vice	Religion	Tenure
1	First	Nnamdi Azikiwe	Xtianity	Tafawa Balewa	Islam	1963-1966
2	Second	Shehu Shagari	Islam	Alex Ekwueme	Xtianity	1979-1983
3	Third	MKO Abiola	Islam	Babagana Kingibe	Xtianity	1993 (Annulled)
4	Fourth i	Olusegun Obasanjo	Xtianity	Atiku Ababakar	Islam	1999-2007
5	Fourth ii	Musa Yar'Adua	Islam	Goodluck Jonathan	Xtianity	2007-2011
6	Fourth iii	Goodluck Jonathan	Xtianity	Mallam Sambo	Islam	2011-2215
7	Fourth iv	Muhammadu Buhari	Islam	Yemi Osibanjo	Xtianity	2015-2023
8	Fourth v	Bola Tinubu	Islam	Kashim Shettima	Islam	2023-?

(NB: Xtianity = Christianity).

Nigeria's Constitutions and Same-Religion Ticket

The constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria have been silent over same-religion tickets. From the Independence Constitution of 1960 to the Fourth Republic, there have been a series of constitutions with so many abrogations, amendments, and alterations, yet attention or consideration has never been given to same-faith tickets (Law Nigeria Admin, 2020). Regrettably, even the 2022 Electoral Law drawn in preparation for the 2023 general elections was silent on same-religion pairing. As Papagianni (nd) rightly pointed out, *"power sharing is a prevalent tool for conflict resolution"*, and yet there is no provision for power sharing formulas and representation ratios in the written laws of the eighteen political parties that registered for the 2023 presidential election.

The age-long absence of and silence over power sharing arrangements in the constitutions of Nigeria, and those of the political parties, is the bane of equitable representation of the two major religions (Islam and Christianity) – even the various ethnic groups in the country.

Peaceful elections seem difficult to achieve in Nigeria. APC constitution promises to *"guarantee equal opportunity for all mutual and peaceful co-existence, respect, understanding, elimination of all forms of discrimination, and social injustice among Nigerians"* (APC Constitution, Preamble, paragraph 3). However, this is a mere declaration of empty vow, impracticable assurance of hope for power alternation, and a feigned concern for equity and equal representation.

The absence of power sharing in Nigeria's political culture and legal documents leads to endemic intra and inter party crises and dominance of some groups over others. Critics severally accuse major parties and ethnic groups of undue intimidation of the minorities by refusing to *"play a strong role in organizing intergroup cooperation"* (Demarest & Langer, 2008; Orji, 2008).

Common sense teaches that by dividing political power among the conflicting groups, the danger and possibility of party dominance, ethnic hegemony and religious jingoism may be obliterated. This will certainly introduce, for the first

time in Nigeria, internal cohesion, party tolerance, and ethno-religious balancing.

Reasons Behind APC's Muslim-Muslim Tickets

According to Bola Tinubu, his choice of a fellow Muslim, Kashim Shettima, was due to the latter's competence, which was believed would enable Tinubu win the election. Majeed (2022) reveals Tinubu's reason thus:

"I offer a confession. I selected Shettima thinking more about who would help me govern. Picking a Christian running-mate would have been politically easier. But the easy way is rarely the right one. He is a brilliant man with superior intellectual capacity. He is studious and duty – oriented … Shattima fully understands the vital difference between governance and politics."

Based on morality and not constitutionality, APC's MMT got a kick of rejection by many, since Nigeria's constitutions have no provisions for or against it. However, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for ethnic balancing and federal character, tribe-sensitive doctrines that seek to redress the bias and imbalance in power sharing, resource allocation, and other representations.

Ugbechie (2022), alongside others, disagreed with Tinubu's MMT choice. He accused Tinubu of indirectly implying that there was no Christian in APC who had similar or better qualities than Shettima. In his meeting with the leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Tinubu further explained his reason for opting for same-religion representation. He admitted that "a politician's formula and strategy are all designed to win elections" (Mgboh, 2022).

To Tinubu, elections were not all about sentiments but winning. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) refused to give MMT a nod of approval. The International Crisis Group (ICG), on its part, accused most African politicians (including Tinubu) of having "the mindset of winning at all cost." For his statements, Tinubu received scurrilous remarks for trying to win "at all cost" by attaching more importance and value to winning elections than the consequences of winning by all available means. He preferred electoral victory to national peace. Oyewole (2023) accused him of endangering the tranquility and unity of a collapsing nation in order to achieve his selfish ambition.

Binary Opinions of Christians and Muslims on Muslim-Muslim Tickets

Christians were divided in their opinions on Muslim-Muslim Tickets (MMT). A greater percent of Nigeria Christians all over the world expected that since Buhari was a Muslim and his Vice (Yemi Osibanjo) a Christian, the next presidential candidate and his running-mate would be a Christian and a

Moslem respectively. This alternation was also expected across the other 17 parties. In his observation, Chime (2022) declared that due the ill intention of MMT, many peace-loving Muslims and APC members rejected it.

Oyewole (2023) reported that, Yakubu Garba, Chairman, Christian Support Group in the APC (Kwara State), opined that Tinubu should have known better that his Muslim-Muslim marriage failed while his Muslim-Christian marriage worked. Therefore, Garba suggested that Tinubu should have borrowed a leaf from his connubial history, and compared it with his presidential pairing.

Similarly, Christian leaders in the APC dismissed MMT as "a flagrant violation of the party's constitutional provision" because "Nigeria is a multi-religious and constitutional democracy and not a theocracy.…." (Omorogwe, 2022). Northern Christian APC youths also expressed their unanimous grievances against MMT. Edeh (2022) quipped that, the arrangement "portrays insensitivity to the Christians in the nation." It was also a betrayal of trust and oneness. In the Southern part of the country, some Christian critics defined MMT as "beclouded in partisanship and deception".

However, it was both surprising and ironic that, whereas some Muslim APC members opposed MMT, many Christian members of the same party supported it with passion. It was different strokes for different folks (Iloanusi, 2022; Elusoji, 2022). Other presidential candidates and their running mates stood against Tinubu and his MMT. They saw it as Tinubu's tragic-flaw and then used it, among other weaknesses, to campaign against him. (Nwabughiogu et al., 2023; Nwaokolo, 2023).

Influence of Religion on Nigeria's Elections

Onyenekwe and Okpara (2023) studied 2021 online editions of ThisDay, Punch, and Guardian to "ascertain how religion is influencing the discourse around the forthcoming 2023 presidential election in Nigeria within a ten … month period". Owing to the fact that the election date remained about two years ahead, the result showed very low reportage "throughout the first quarter of the year …" as "there was only one headline on religious discourse on the 2023 presidential election." However, the headline challenged Christians ahead of time to prepare to produce the next president. The work of Onyenekwe and Okpara (2023) served as a prediction of the current furore caused by the MMT in the country.

Newspaper Coverage of Nigeria's Elections

Researchers (e.g. Ahmad et al., 2022; Nwaoboli & Abiodun, 2023), studied the various roles played by both government

and private newspapers in Nigeria's elections. They discovered that media ownership could negatively or positively influence objectivity in news reportage in Nigeria. For instance, Daily Times chose to be selective, or laconically taciturn by refusing to set an objective political agenda on MMT in particular and other political issues surrounding the 2023 presidential polls.

Private newspapers (e.g. Vanguard) set a more objective agenda, and discouraged MMT more than Daily Times. Nwaoboli and Abiodun (2023) examined the Vanguard online coverage of the 2023 presidential election based on tone and frame categories. They found that Vanguard gave "high prominence to the … election campaigns as 136 reports are on its website between January 1 and 26, 2023." This was also equivalent to the present research because Vanguard's prominence to and coverage of MMT was higher than that of Daily Times.

Furthermore, Ahmad et al. (2022) studied the role of the media in promoting and or demoting peaceful polls in the 2023 presidential election. They discovered that the Punch and many other newspapers were able to predict the effects of MMT in the 2023 polls. The scholars revealed that important figures of the party had already started quitting, even before the election day. The act of leaving the APC by prominent members was a telltale sign that major crises would soon not only rock the party but also diffuse to the entire polity.

Muslim-Muslim Tickets and Intra-Party Crisis

APC's Muslim-Muslim ticket strategy spread tension from within the party to the entire nation. Joe-Akunne et al. (2022), Onyenekwe and Okpara (2023) discovered the relationship between intra party autocracy and electoral tensions in Nigeria. They found out that MMT, like other negative political tactics, had caused aggrieved politicians to cross over "to opposition political parties on account of alleged unfair and undemocratic treatments by their original parties" (Joe-Akunne et al., 2022). Therefore, intra-party exploitations and superiority complex syndrome among Nigerian parties usually led to electoral crises.

Finally, information is a very important commodity especially during elections. It guides voters, among other functions, for proper voting choices and decisions. Therefore, as watchdogs, how did both government and private newspapers cover, set agenda, frame, direct, portray, or represent Muslim-Muslim tickets in 2023? This paper investigated the thematic preoccupation of the editorials on MMT, evaluate their prominence in terms of mechanics of graphology, ascertain the slant of government and private newspapers, determine public opinion and consequences of MMT.

Theoretical Framework

Framing: This is the process by which the media, especially print, uses media frames in news narratives. According to Marra and Myer (2020), a frame is a field of meaning, a code or sign suggesting a given meaning or interpretation. Frames can be positive (e.g. constructive, e.g. praise, support, acceptance, optimism, etc); or negative (e.g. attack, blame, criticism, rejection, pessimism, etc).

Hope, peace, solution, morality are a few examples of positive frames. Blame, attack, fear, denial and conflict are some negative journalistic frames (Ayatanyo, 2022; Scheufele, 1999; Scheufele & Tewskbury, 2007). Journalistic framing proposes that media framing is based on the assumption that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. This influences the reader's choice of meaning making and message interpretation. Among other aims, this article therefore examined the frames used in the newspaper narratives of MMT to discover how this impacted the electorate and society.

Dysfunctions of the Framing theory

Many researchers (e.g. Wogu, 2008, pp.13-20; Syeda, 2022; Asogwa, 2023) agreed that framing alters the process of opinion formation in the audience's mind. This process indirectly persuades the reader to lose his thoughts to the manipulative ingenuity and social power of the reporter. This is why Arowolo (2017) argued that framing takes the reader's mind away from other issues and concentrates it on the matter at hand, as the narrator dictates or orders. Kolawole (2021) quoted in Olasile (2023) averred that although framing describes "the power of journalists to choose what they discuss and how", reader perception may align or oppose a given media frame. However, these dysfunctions did not negatively affect the results of this current study.

Agenda-setting: This framework attaches importance and prominence to certain issues of public interest by repeatedly presenting the issue (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2004). In the print media, the reader or researcher tries to investigate agenda-setting by studying the way the following are handled: frequency, prominence and placement of report, direction and tone of report, nature of headlines, etc. The foregoing were what this study partially investigated on the editorials of Vanguard and Daily Times concerning APC's Muslim-Muslim tickets. This is why the agenda setting paradigm was germane to this article.

The Weakness of Agenda Setting Theory

The problem with agenda setting is selectivity and gate-keeping. This is because it selects what to present to the reader and what to hide from him. As a gate-keeper, agenda setting guards the narrative entrance to control what goes in

and out of the text. The logic is that what is hidden (by going out of the text) may be what the audience needs while what is presented (by going into the text) may be what the audience does not need.

The Relevance of the Framing and Agenda Setting Theories to the Study

Despite the weaknesses of framing and agenda setting, they were highly relevant to the study. For example, framing, an element of narrative (and narrativity), is a framework that relies on textual communication, and newspaper reports are textual narratives. In addition, in Vanguard and Daily Times editorial narratives on MMT, the researchers highlighted certain issues, codes, and expressions, and then placed them within a given field of meaning to focus the attention of the reader towards that direction.

Furthermore, framing offered the researcher the opportunity to use his judgment to explore the salient themes and aspects of the perceived realities from the newspaper editorials.

Agenda setting deals mostly with the prominence and salience of textual news reports. Using this theory, the researcher was able to investigate the prominence and salience that the newspapers attached to the editorials on Muslim Muslim ticket.

Methods

The mixed methods - content analysis, oral interviews, and focus group discussions - were adopted for this study. The method enhanced a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions, allowing an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon investigated. However, there were inherently increased complexities that led to higher costs and longer timelines than in other single methods. For example, discussions and interviews on MMT were held in batches with 100 research participants in randomly select locations in the Eastern part of Nigeria such as Onitsha (Anambra State), Owerri (Imo State), and Nsukka (Enugu State).

Both primary data (oral interviews and focus group discussions) and Secondary data (newspapers and other works) were employed in the study. Although interviewer bias and interviewee memory distortion impacted negatively on the results of the interviews, the oral interviews aided the researchers to ascertain the public opinion on MMT. The secondary data, on the other hand, had issues with accuracy, relevance, and reliability. They were also prone to errors and biases. However, they were equally readily available, and did not pose any problem in collection.

In addition, the secondary data collected for this current study aided the researchers by providing access to large datasets and a wider range of variables than might be feasible to collect independently. 100 respondents were orally interviewed alongside focus group discussions on different days. The data collected from the interviews were quantified on a table with a four-point Likert scale.

The coding-sheet was used for data collection for the qualitative analysis. It helped to categorise and interpret data, and it ensured consistency and reliability in the analysis of the data gathered. The coding of the data was done by two separate research assistants. To measure the level of internal consistency among the collected data, a reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha. This yielded a coefficient of 0.6 which was deemed acceptable.

The multistage sampling was used to select the population of the study and the actual sample size. This sampling technique simplified data collection by breaking down the sampling process into manageable stages, making it more feasible and less expensive than other methods. Vanguard and Daily Times were selected using purposive sampling because each met the required characteristics for the study: Vanguard represented the slant of private newspapers while Daily Times represented government's opinion. Editorials that focused on issues concerning the 2023 election were selected. The qualifications for selection were that the editorials must report ethnicity, tribalism, religion, party politics, strategies, morality, peaceful process, and conduct.

The population of study was **546** online editions of Vanguard (**273**) and Daily Times (**273**) published between June 1, 2022 and February 25, 2023. Furthermore, Riffle's Composite Weeks/Months was adopted and the editions of the newspapers were sorted according to months and then weeks (Amannah et al., 2016). At this stage, random sampling was used to select **4** copies of each newspaper per week. This gave a total of **16** copies per month and **144** editions over the period studied (i.e. 16 copies x 9 months).

Data Presentation and Discussions

Research Aim 1: To identify the thematic preoccupation in the editorials

Table 1: Themes and Editorial Frequency

SN	FOCAL ISSUES	VANGUARD	DAILY TIMES	TOTAL	PERCENT
1	Ethnic Issues	10	5	15	10.6

2	Party Politics issues	7	5	12	8.5
3	Religious Issues	25	3	28	19.7
4	Moral Issues	2	2	4	2.8
5	Strategic Issues	25	33	58	40.8
6	Peaceful Conduct/Process	5	20	25	17.6
	TOTAL	**74**	**68**	**142**	**100.0**

The table above shows that private newspapers published **74(52.1%)** on Muslim-Muslim tickets than government newspapers **68**(**47.9%**). These findings were close to those of Onyenekwe and Okpara (2023) whose findings indicated that Vanguard was **53.4%** and Guardian **43.9%**. However, the difference was that Onyenekwe and Okpara (2023) failed to include government newspapers in their analysis.

Discussions

The implication of this finding was that private newspapers set more agenda on MMT thereby exposing the issues surrounding MMT. On the other hand, government newspapers fail to live up to expectations by lagging behind in their agenda-setting function. The electorate and entire citizenry were kept in the dark concerning the political issues over the period.

In addition, the table indicates that MMT had both religious and strategic undertones. However, Daily Times refused to accept that MMT triggered religious tension in the country. It rather saw MMT as a strategy to win the election. On the other hand, Vanguard believed that MMT was more of a religious strategy than a winning strategy.

Many critics believe that religious issues have halways meddled with national elections in Nigeria, and this affects the peaceful conduct and electoral results. For example, Umeanolue (2020) investigated "the influence of religion on Nigerian politics especially in post-independence Nigeria." He discovered both negative and positive influences. He, therefore, concluded that "religion could be a dangerous factor in an electoral process", if not well managed.

Umenolue (2020), citing Nmah (2004), averred that the positive aspect of religion in politics was the inculcation of moral values especially during elections. However, Nmah (2004) disagreed with him on that point. He therefore argued that, contrary to the proposition of Umenolue (2020), religion itself could destroy the political process of a country except that the people wished to misuse it. He went ahead to state that religion rather taught the moral principles that deterred adherents from misapplying its teachings and causing chaos in the process.

Research Aim 2: To Reveal the Prominence (Mechanics of Graphology) Given to Editorial Headlines of MMT Stories

Table 2: Mechanics of Graphology

SN	ITEM	VANGUARD	DAILY TIMES	TOTAL	PERCENT
1	Bold	**7**	5	12	8.5
2	**N**ot Bold	11	13	24	16.9
3	Upper Case	X	X	X	X
4	Lower Case	56	50	106	**7**4.6
5	Italics	X	X	X	X
	TOTAL	**74**	**68**	**142**	**100.0**

Both Vanguard and Daily Times do not use capital letters in the titles of their editorials. Each preferred lower case characters **(74.6%). 8.5%** represented bold characters while **16.9%** were not bold at all. This was similar to the findings of Asogwa (2023).

Discussions

The total absence of capital letters (upper case characters) in the headlines was an indication that the editorials failed to attract the attention of many readers. Again, only a few headlines were reported in bold letters representing 8.5%

while 91.5% of the headlines were not bold at all. This did not only hide the affected headlines during flipping, but also reduced readership.

Furthermore, capital letters, though they attract better attention, occupy much space in headlines more than small characters. The newspaper is a space-conscious medium and efforts must be made to conserve space. On the other hand, lower case characters do not consume as much space as capital letters but do not attract the readers' attention as upper

case characters. Ironically, research has proven that "scientific testing from the 20th century onward has generally indicated that all caps text is less legible and readable than lower-case text. In addition, switching to all caps may make text appear hectoring and obnoxious …" (Nielsen, 2005).

Research Aim 3: To Ascertain the stand of government and private media on MMT through framing and slant

SN	FRAMING DIRECTION/OPINION	VANGUARD	TIMES	TOTAL	PERCENT
1	Favourable and Positive	14	40	54	38.0
2	Unfavourable and Negative	45	19	64	45.1
3	Neutral	18	6	24	16.9
	TOTAL	**77**	**65**	**142**	**100.0**

Discussions

From the above presentation, Vanguard was more unfavourable and negative to MMT than Daily Times. The implication was that, while Daily Times supported MMT, Vanguard attacked the policy as well as blame the leadership

of APC for initiating and adopting MMT - a destroyer of national cohesion and religious tolerance. Vanguard was more neutral and objective than the Daily Times that refused to speak out against a widely rejected political permutation.

Research Aim 4A: Determining public opinion on MMT

Table 4: Respondents Demographic Information

GENDER	FREQUENCY
Male	32
Female	68
TOTAL	**100**

AGE (Above 18 yrs)	
Youth	20
Adult	80
TOTAL	**100**

OCCUPATION	
Student	20
Civil Servant	30
Business	40
Artisan	8
Jobless	2
TOTAL	**100**

EDUCATION	
Secondary	60
Tertiary	35
Others	5
TOTAL	**100**

RELIGION					
Islam	13				
Christianity	80				
ATR	7				
TOTAL	**100**				
REGION					
North	10				
West	5				
East	74				
South-South	11				
TOTAL	**100**				
POLITICAL PARTY					
APC	9				
PDP	18				
LP	63				
YPP	10				
Others	0				
TOTAL	**100**				

Discussions

Table 4A presents the demographic information of the 100 research participants such as their gender, age, occupation, education level, religion, region, and political party. Many of the respondents were adult females, business people, and secondary school graduates. Furthermore, a greater number of the participants were Christians. Although the focus groups and the interviewees were made up of respondents from different tribes, Igbos were greater in number probably due to the fact that the exercise was conducted in Igbo land.

Finally, the population that belonged to the Labour Party (LP) was higher than those who were members of other parties put together. The implication of this was that the Labour Party had the largest membership and followership (especially in the East). This strong support for the LP and its candidate, Peter Obi, was probably due to the fact that the South-easterners had been wishing to produce the next president of Nigeria in 2023, and this was their opportunity. To the non-Igbos who identified as LP members, they seemed tired of the general hardship the nation was practically thrown into and, therefore, they needed a change of leadership and political party.

Table 4B: Participant Response and Public Opinion

OPINION POSITIVE IMPACT	A	SA	D	SD	TOTAL
(1). MMT was a peaceful political strategy	2	5	30	63	**100**
(2). It was a welcome policy that united the APC to other parties	2	5	33	60	**100**
(3). APC's "victory" in the election was an indication that the MMT was a functional winning strategy	5	10	30	55	**100**
TOTAL	**9**	**20**	**93**	**178**	**300**
NEGATIVE IMPACT **(4). It** was a divisive tactic that cut the unity cord that held the nation together	40	50	6	4	**100**

(5). It induced political, religious, ethnic, and sociocultural crises in APC and the polity	30	60	7	3	**100**
(6). It led to mass defection in which APC lost personalities	34	56	5	5	**100**
(7). It introduced political apathy and killed active participation	40	50	8	2	**100**
(8). MMT was against APC constitution, Article 7(x)	30	50	12	8	**100**
TOTAL	**174**	**266**	**38**	**22**	**500**

Key: A= Agree; **SA** = Strongly Agree; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree

100 participants were asked eight questions of four-point Likert scales. For questions 1 - 3, the benefits of MMT were tested. The responses were negative because the respondents **disagreed** (93) and **strongly disagreed (178)** that the MMT was a peaceful political strategy. The responses also indicated that the MMT was not a welcome policy that united the APC to other parties. Furthermore, they disagreed that the APC's "victory" in the election was an indication that the MMT was a functional winning strategy. In all, 271 (90%) voters **rejected** that MMT was a welcome, peaceful, winning strategy while 29 (10%) respondents **accepted** it. Therefore, MMT had more demerits than merits.

Questions 4- 8, tested the consequences of MMT, and a greater number of the respondents (174) **agreed** and (266)

strongly agreed that MMT was a divisive tactic that cut the unity cord that held the nation together, induced political, religious, ethnic, and sociocultural crises in the APC and the entire polity. Others accepted that MMT led to mass defection in which APC lost personalities, introduced political apathy, and killed active participation. In addition, they argued that the MMT was against the party's constitution as well as federal laws. The total number of **acceptance** was 440 (**88%** acceptance of negative impact). Only 38 and 22 **disagreed** and **strongly disagreed** respectively. Therefore, total **rejection** was 60 (**22%** rejection of negative impact).

Research Aim 5: To Determine the Consequences of Muslim-Muslim tickets

Table 5: Consequences of MMT

SN	CONSEQUENCES	VANGUARD	DAILY TIMES	TOTAL	PERCENT
1	Moral	4	9	13	9.8
2	Ethnic	20	10	30	22.7
3	Political	18	10	28	21.2
4	Social	2	4	6	4.5
5	Religious	30	13	43	32.6
6	Neutral	2	10	12	9.1
	TOTAL	**76**	**56**	**132**	**100.0**

Discussion

The information above presents the highest aftermath of Muslim-Muslim tickets as religious 43(32.6%). This is followed by ethnic 30(22.7%) and political conflicts 28(21.2%).

Nigeria, before the advent of MMT, had never been at peace in terms of religious tolerance. Religious fanatics in high and low places displayed outright hatred against members from the other religion. The APC government, rather than discourage religious fanaticism, decided to join the fanatics to perpetrate chaos and religious jingoism through MMT. This is a huge irony.

Discussion of Findings

The implication of the findings on the editorial frequency and themes was that Vanguard (private newspaper) framed more issues and set more agenda on MMT than Daily Times (government newspaper). In other words, the government chose to keep its citizens and the electorate in the dark on the matters concerning MMT, politics, and religion. This could be summarised as an attempt to frustrate public opinion, education, and exposure.

Furthermore, while Daily Times saw MMT more as a strategy to win the election, Vanguard viewed it as both a strategy and a religious issue. Nwaoboli and Abiodun (2023) agreed in their own findings that the 2023 election was full of political strategies – which included Muslim-Muslim tickets. Therefore, the inability of the government to visualise the binary effects of MMT portrayed its calculated myopism, bias, indifference, and insensitivity.

The question now is: Was it the MMT strategy that gave APC "victory" at the polls? Do election failures in Nigeria occur due to poor political policies and candidacy, unqualified candidates, and or poorly managed political advertising and campaigns? Conversely, do election success and victory in Nigeria come as a result of competent candidacy, qualified

and honest candidates, and most persuasive political advertising and campaigns? The answers to the above questions depend largely on certain mediating factors and intervening variables.

Nigeria's elections are characterised by corruption and malpractices of all kinds such as thuggery, rigging, falsification of results, etc. These and more electoral misappropriations usually mar the chances of supposedly qualified, most popular, and widely accepted candidates and parties. Invariably, the same electoral corruption can also ascribe victory to the wrong candidates or parties. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) came under heavy suspicion and criticism concerning its alleged electoral wrongdoings at different stages such as pre, during, and post voting periods. The culmination of all the malpractices was the announcement of fake results in favour of the APC, the party in power (Vanguard, 2024, September 28).

Concerning the prominence given to graphology in the editorials, both Vanguard and Daily Times did not use capital letters in any of their editorial headlines. The implication of this was that most of the readers with sight problems could not freely read the small-letter editorial headlines. Although uppercase editorial headlines took up much space, their conspicuous nature attracted the reader's attention and made reading easier than when small characters were used.

In addition, all-caps text could be used for emphasis, to convey a sense of urgency and importance. Therefore, these

benefits (urgency, emphasis, and importance) were lacking in the Vanguard and Daily Times editorials because of the absence of uppercase headlines. Additionally, the small letters used in the headlines were not bold or thick. Capital letters and bold letters (no matter their characters) are used for emphasis and attention attraction.

On the issue of the framing language used in the editorial headlines, Vanguard was more unfavorable and negative, but less neutral than Daily Times which was more favourable, positive, supportive and more neutral. What this implied was that the APC-led administration purposely promoted and encouraged Muslim-Muslim nomination for the presidential candidate (Ahmed Bola Tinubu) and his vice (Kashim Shettima).

The consequences of MMT were numerous and impacted negatively on the religious, ethnic, political, social, and moral lives of the citizens, especially the electorate and political activists. It also led to intra-party tensions and ethnic and religious brouhahas in the nation. In addition, MMT caused mass defection from APC to other "more tolerable parties" (Ahmad, 2022). The decamping was not only by aggrieved Christian members of the party but also disgruntled Muslims who defended religious tolerance, national cohesion, federal character, equity, justice, and fair play.

While Daily Times downplayed the consequences of same-faith tickets, Vanguard, through powerful agenda setting, made it pronounced, prominent, and glaring. In their own studies, Paden (2015), Demarest et al, (2020), and Adamo (2023) discovered that the APC-led government was fully in support of MMT no matter the party's pretentious ignorance.

Critics (Paden, 2015; Adamo, 2023) argued that the government's seeming and feigned ignorance of the adverse consequences of Muslim-Muslim tickets was due to the fact that the president, Muhammadu Buhari, was a Muslim and also from the ruling party, APC. Therefore, he desired that power should remain within his religion.

Conclusion

This paper found out that there were a total of 142 editorials in the newspaper samples (that is, Vanguard 74; Daily Times 68). In addition, 74.6% of the editorial captions was cast in lowercase characters making it almost impossible to notice. Daily Times was more laconic, favourable and positive (supportive) to Muslim-Muslim tickets than Vanguard. Muslim-Muslim tickets had more religious implications followed by political, ethnic, social or moral impacts on the citizens.

Recommendations

This paper recommended as follows:

1). Reporters, whether in private or government newspapers, should carry out their agenda setting function without reservations, as well as defend the ethics of their profession by being balanced, objective, and unbiased.

2). Nigerian newspaper editorials should be framed and directed to discourage ethnicity, religious bigotry, and dangerous political decisions such as MMT.

3). Newspaper organizations, especially government-owned dailies, should avoid bias and imbalance in their editorials. They should not fail to abide by ethical and moral standards as they frame and set agenda on topical issues such as MMT.

4). In addition, newspapers should allow readers to make decisions on their own without employing propaganda, misinformation, and indirect persuasions that tend to bend readers towards editorial slant or directions. Government newspapers in Nigeria believe that, lies, provided they are big enough and are regularly repeated, can at least be partly believed by the gullible readers. This should stop forthwith.

5). Newspaper editorials should not only be written using small letters. There should be a mixture (not juxtaposition) of the upper and lower case characters on certain titles and issues to attract better attention.

6). To obtain unbiased responses during oral interviews and focus group discussions, journalists should not intimidate or influence the respondents or participants through facial expressions and other nonverbal cues.

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