

The Political Chess Game Inside the Ruling APC Ahead of the 2027 Election

By James Bwala

As Nigeria approaches its 2027 general elections, the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) finds itself enmeshed in a complex and delicate political chess game. Central to the unfolding drama is the strategic positioning around the presidential ticket, specifically the vice-presidential slot currently held by Kashim Shettima. The internal dynamics of the APC reveal a struggle that goes beyond mere individual ambitions; it encapsulates key issues of religious balancing, regional representation, and electoral strategy that will shape Nigeria's political landscape for years to come.



At the heart of the speculation is the assertion that somebody from Borno State, possibly from within the APC elites, is positioning himself to replace Kashim Shettima as the vice-presidential candidate in 2027. This notion arises from the broader uncertainty about whether President Bola Ahmed Tinubu will maintain his current running mate or opt for a change. The “odds are against him,” however, because such a maneuver faces significant structural disadvantages. Kashim Shettima, also a son of Borno State, wields considerable influence both within the state and among the party's northern Muslim bloc. Replacing him with another politician from Borno may offer little in terms of expanding the party's electoral appeal. Indeed, APC strategists often prioritize diversity in religious and regional representation to secure broad-based support across Nigeria's heterogeneous population. Hence, the potential replacement of Shettima with a fellow Borno politician does not promise the electoral breakthrough necessary to solidify Tinubu's hold on power. This realization draws attention to what could be described as “The Dilemma of President Tinubu.” In 2023, Tinubu and Shettima controversially ran on a Muslim-Muslim ticket—an unusual choice given Nigeria's sensitive religious fault lines between Christians and Muslims. While this decision sparked heated debate and even criticism, it ultimately led to electoral victory. Yet, as the 2027 election approaches, various pressure groups within and outside the APC argue for a more balanced ticket. Their advocacy centers on the idea that a Northern Christian running mate would restore religious equilibrium, thus broadening Tinubu's appeal especially in the volatile Middle Belt and southern Christian regions of Nigeria.

Faced with these conflicting interests, Tinubu faces two competing calculations. On one hand, retaining Shettima carries the advantage of continuity, loyalty, and preserving critical support among northern Muslims—a demographic central to APC's power base. On the other hand, sticking to the Muslim-Muslim ticket risks perpetuating opposition attacks about religious insensitivity and exclusion. In contrast, selecting a Northern Christian running mate could help correct this perceived imbalance, making the ticket more palatable to Christian voters and potentially diffusing some of the opposition's critiques. However, this choice carries the risk of alienating sections of the APC's northern Muslim political establishment, possibly sowing seeds of internal discord at a time when unity is paramount.

This dilemma cannot be viewed in isolation; it must be contextualized within the broader electoral challenge posed by the opposition. Figures such as Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi symbolize an alternative political narrative centered on inclusiveness, national unity, and dissatisfaction with the status quo. The opposition capitalizes on grievances related to perceived

exclusion and governance failures, crafting a compelling narrative to attract voters dissatisfied with the current administration. Within this context, a Catholic or Protestant vice-presidential candidate becomes more than a symbolic gesture; it is a strategic countermeasure designed to erode opposition gains. By including a Northern Christian partner on the ticket, Tinubu can blunt criticisms of the Muslim-Muslim ticket, strengthen appeal among Christian voters particularly in the Middle Belt, and challenge the opposition's framing of an intolerant political elite. The stakes of this political chess game extend beyond electoral calculations. Nigeria is a country marked by deep ethnic, religious, and regional cleavages that have historically threatened its unity. The choice of a vice-presidential candidate thus resonates with broader questions of inclusion and national identity.

A ticket perceived as unbalanced risks inflaming existing tensions and undermining efforts to build a cohesive Nigerian polity. Conversely, a genuinely inclusive ticket can send a powerful message of unity, bridge divides, and reinforce democratic legitimacy. It is therefore incumbent upon APC leaders to weigh not just electoral expediency but the long-term stability and integration of Nigeria.

Nevertheless, it is important to underline that much of this remains speculative. Despite persistent media reports and political chatter about possible changes to the APC ticket, no official confirmation has emerged from President Tinubu or the party. Nor have there been credible indications of serious factions or rifts within the APC leadership publicly articulated. This silence suggests a carefully managed political process still underway behind closed doors. The absence of formal announcements means that current narratives reflect ongoing power calculations and contestations rather than settled decisions. Given these complexities, the persuasive case is clear: The APC must approach its decision on the vice-presidential nominee with acute awareness of the multi-dimensional nature of Nigerian politics. Prioritizing short-term political convenience or ethnic and regional tokenism risks alienating vital constituencies or deepening societal fractures.

Instead, the party should pursue a strategy that balances religious representation, maintains party cohesion, and offers a platform that convincingly counters the opposition's narrative of exclusion. Such a move would not only enhance the APC's prospects in 2027 but would contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's democratic consolidation. Indeed, the political chess game inside the ruling APC ahead of the 2027 election reflects the intricate interplay of ambition, identity, and strategy. The positioning around Kashim Shettima's vice-presidential job symbolizes a broader contest over Nigeria's future direction. President Tinubu's dilemma—whether to preserve the continuity of a Muslim-Muslim ticket or embrace religious inclusivity by selecting a Northern Christian running mate—is emblematic of the challenges facing governance in a pluralistic nation. To effectively “balance up” against opposition figures like Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi, the APC must transcend narrow calculations and embrace a genuinely inclusive electoral coalition. Only through such a principled and strategic approach can the party hope to secure victory and sustain Nigeria's fragile unity in the years to come. The stakes are high, and the moves made now will resonate far beyond the 2027 ballot box.