



RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA: THREAT TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Akila, Esther Katampe¹

Department of Political Science
Federal University Lafia, Nasarawa State

Abstract

Poverty, death, underdevelopment, and crisis as well as a host of other societal challenges have no religion, rather the players-in the society do. Political and religious lifestyle have featured severally in Nigeria's economic development, whether in the context of Christianity or Islam. The prevalent religions practice in Nigeria include Christianity, Islam, and traditional worshippers. The two major religion – Christianity and Islam have played vital roles in the disposition and development of the country, depending on the level of manipulation they received. This paper is focusing on the political manipulation and the impact on development. The paper uses secularism theory to analyze how religious manipulation affect the development of Nigeria. In conclusion, the paper recommends the shifting from the umbrella of religion to the acceptance of the existence of humanity first, respect for human relation that sees the good and gains of each other which will harness the resources of each region irrespective of its religious practice for greater development.

Keywords: Religion, Politics, Bigotry, Threat, National development.

Abstrait

La pauvreté, la mort, le sous-développement et la crise ainsi qu'une foule d'autres défis sociétaux n'ont pas de religion, mais les acteurs de la société en ont. Le mode de vie politique et religieux a figuré à plusieurs reprises dans le développement économique du Nigéria, que ce soit dans le contexte du christianisme ou de l'islam. Les religions répandues au Nigéria comprennent le christianisme, l'islam et les fidèles traditionnels. Les deux religions principales – le christianisme et l'islam ont joué un rôle vital dans la disposition et le développement du pays, selon le niveau de manipulation qu'elles ont subi. Cet article se concentre sur la manipulation politique et l'impact sur le développement. L'article utilise la théorie de la laïcité pour analyser comment la manipulation religieuse affecte le développement du Nigeria. En conclusion, le document recommande le passage du parapluie de la religion à l'acceptation de l'existence de l'humanité d'abord, le respect de la relation humaine qui voit le bien et les gains de l'autre qui exploitera les ressources de chaque région indépendamment de sa pratique religieuse pour plus grand développement.

Mots-clés : religion, politique, sectarisme, menace, développement national.

¹ **Address of Corresponding Author:** Akila, Esther Katampe, Department of Political Science, Federal University Lafia, Nasarawa State. E-mail-estyherself@yahoo.com; Phone: 08036058776



Introduction

Nigeria holds political and economic prominence in Africa. A major oil producer with a population of about 180 million (2015) and more than 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria is home to millions of Christians, Muslims, and adherents of indigenous religions. With complicated relations between Christians and Muslims in the Northern and central regions of the country, Nigeria is one of the world's major laboratories for the study of religious-based conflict and reconciliation. —Muslim and indigenous religious structures are integral to the formation of the modern Nigerian state and society (Vaughan, 2016, p. 1)

The sojourn of religion into Nigeria met traditional mode of worship being practiced differently at all regions. This is where conversions started with teaching and practicing of how to read and write. The Christian missionaries are accused of paving the path for colonial masters. Islam had a sweep of Northern Nigeria with Sokoto Jihad establishing the Islamic rites and dealings. The groaning of the Nigerian level of development hangs on the religious beliefs of the populace, this is shown in the kind of education, politics played around the various regions. Since the colonial masters left Nigeria, the leadership tussle has been dragged around the three major groups in the country, and the different religious faith. regions who share different faith. The problems of religious intolerance have continued to grow in Nigeria, most crisis with different outlooks ends up settling on the basis of religious differences.

The paper examined the impact of religious and political bigotry on national development. Specifically, efforts are made to see how religious conflicts impact on development. Most of the conflicts happen alongside the destruction of environment and the loss of human life. The paper uses secondary data such as journals, texts and internet materials.

The political, economic and social development undergone in Nigeria cannot be separated from the religious background of the people. The paradigm of measuring the political awareness of each region in Nigeria must be traced to their religious exposition. Notwithstanding, there are elections in Nigeria that crisscrossed the religious scepter. For instance, the election of 1993 of Moshood Kashimawo Olawole Abiola and Bashir Tofa was one of its kind. Although, Abiola won across all the states thus becoming one of the most accepted elections that Nigeria witnessed without ethnic nor religious bias. Since then, political elections in Nigeria have either suffered from ethnic or religious bias accusation.

The politicization of religion by the state has shown an unending crisis scenario, especially in states where there exists high intolerance in the sharp divide within the dominant regions. Until there is wide acceptance and consideration of the different faith, elections in Nigeria depending on stands for candidature and/ or seek elective office will continue to have the colouration of religion. There will continue to be suspicion, and hence, great features of an endangered society.

Conceptual Clarification

No doubt, religion is ubiquitous. Nevertheless, attempting to offer a definition of religion which captures all and only what are taken to be religion is notoriously difficult. Central to some religions is a personal God and other spiritual entities; for other religions, there is no God or spirits at all. Some religions view the eternal, personal existence of the individual in an afterlife as paramount to understanding; Ultimate Reality and much more important than temporary earthly existence. Others see what we do in *this* life as fundamental, with little if any



consideration of the hereafter. Other differences among the religions abound. But as diverse as region is, several components seem to be central to the world religions: it is a system of beliefs, the breaking in of a transcendent reality, and human attitudes of ultimate concern, meaning, and purpose. Given these three elements, the following perhaps captures what most take to be the essence of the concept of religion: —a religion involves a system of beliefs and practices primarily centered around a transcendent Reality, either personal or impersonal, which provides ultimate meaning and purpose to life (Meister, 2009, p. 6). Religion as man's intuition of the sacred and ultimate reality, and his expression of that awareness in concrete life. (Ejizu (1993, p.1).

Politics like religion, means different things to different people; but with specific agreement on some features. According to Laswell's famous definition, politics is "the process of who gets what, when, and how." The society depends on the sharing formula the leadership adopts to enjoy resources when bias indices are employed; it often results in serious conflict.

According to David Easton, politics is —the authoritative allocation of values in the society. Ojukwu, (2003, p. 12) defined politics as all activities that are directly or indirectly associated with the emergence, consolidation and the use of power. These definitions point to the interest that exist in the society, not minding the religious background of the players. Religion is quick to determine how politics is directed in most cases in Nigeria.

On the other hand, development, can be viewed in two directions: as a state or a continuous process. Development is not a purely economic stance but also a multidimensional process involving reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system. In a national context, development encompasses the whole aspects of development. It includes, social, economic, and political development. Bigotry is a word that defines the activities of a bigot, The Webster's Dictionary defines it as the state of mind of a bigot; also, acts or beliefs, characteristics of a bigot. A bigot is a person who obstinately or intolerantly devote to his or her own opinion and prejudices; especially one who treats or regard the members of a group (as a racial or ethnic group) with hatred and intolerance.

The population in the different religion will continue to grow as long as the propagation of the different gospel received adherents. If the population grows without tolerance of each other, there will be no harmony; in the face of perpetual conflicts-humanity will lose existence to the protection of religion. According to Ejenobo (1993, p. 21.) —one is forced to ask whether religion is meant to be a destructive element in the life of a developing nation. What should be the relationship between religion and politics? Can the two be married together for the socio-economic and political growth of a nation? Or should they be separated since religion has been perceived in certain quarters as a destructive factor in the political evolution of this country.

The multifarious nature of religion makes it difficult to know why the believers of some religion never accept or tolerate others. This alone has resulted into so many deadly conflicts in Nigeria, such that people have died in great numbers. The reality remains that Africa and Africans have divided lines in religion but are also connected at different ends that makes life meet their growth and development.

To achieve greater development, the understanding and acceptance of interreligious traditions must be emphasized to allow the values inherent in each religion to be exhibited in political system. (Frans 2001. pg. 320. Africa is a continent where 40 percent of the people are Muslims; 40 percent are Christians (14,5% Catholics) and 20 percent are adherents of



Indigenous Religions. Unfortunately, religious extremism is growing, both in Islam and in Christianity, but dual allegiance (syncretism) appears to be the religious orientation of the majority; and Christianity is growing fast but Islam grows faster. There is a real battle raging between Islam and Christianity to win the hearts of the 'untouched', but Indigenous Religions has remained the foundation of most people's everyday lives.

Theoretical Framework

This paper uses secularism theory to analyze the expectations of how the Nigerian society can live and accept each other's religion without suspicion. Secondary method of data collection was employed. This include books, journals and internet materials, where useful information about the necessities of peaceful coexistence, were accessed.

Secularism theory called for diverse dimensions. In the context of this paper, the opinion of Philips (2011 p. 6) on Secularism is adopted. On the basis political philosophy, Phillips addresses the relationship between religion and the state: and advocated the separation of religion from the state. Secularism, as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is the "indifference to, or rejection or exclusion of, religion and religious considerations." As a philosophy, secularism seeks to interpret life on principles taken solely from the material world, without recourse to religion. In political terms, secularism is the principle of the separation of government institutions and persons mandated to represent the state from religious institutions and religious dignitaries (the attainment of such is termed secularity).

Under a brief definition, Secularism means that governments should remain neutral on the matter of religion and should not enforce nor prohibit the free exercise of religion, leaving religious choice to the liberty of the people. One manifestation of secularism is asserting the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, or, in a state declared to be neutral on matters of belief, from the imposition by government of religion or religious practices upon its people. Another manifestation of secularism is the view that public activities and decisions, especially political ones, should be uninfluenced by religious beliefs or practices.

To separate religion, the state is to allow the expression and freedom of people in the society without picking offence in their way of life. There should be strict adherence to the rights of individuals rather than beliefs. The criticisms of this theory are that, secularism seeks to exclude all religion from having a say in the public debates or a place in public life. Another criticism is that secularism seem to take side with Christianity as being the most persecuted religion (Philips, 2011, pp. 13 -14).

Brief history of religious conflicts in Nigeria.

According to Gwamna, (2010), the quest for political space and influence, competition for scarce resources and conflict of values have expressed themselves even in religious conflicts. The 1970s marked a watershed in Nigeria in terms of conflict proliferation, following the collapse of oil boom years. The 1980s sparked off the Maitasine riot in Kano as intrareligious conflict among Muslims which later spread to other northern cities. The death toll and general carnage in the Maitasine riot introduced the very violent and brutal execution of religious conflicts later in Nigeria. However, it was the 1987 Kafanchan religious riot which introduced a dangerous dimension of religious crisis between Christians and Muslims; this was referred to as the civilian equivalent of a coup d'état. The Kafanchan riot shook the foundation of inter religious peace in Kaduna State and some parts of northern Nigeria.



In the 1990s there was another phase of conflict. It started at Bauchi (1991), Kano (1991, 1994), and Zangon-Kataf (1992). In the conflicts, sophisticated weapons, and hired machineries from neighboring countries were used. Most analysts see the long military presence in Nigeria as responsible for the brutality exhibited in religious crisis. The recent radicalization of religion through violent killings and ethnic crisis using sophisticated weapons, points to the negative hangover of the Nigerian polity.

The new millennium started on a violent note in respect of religious experience in Nigeria. Most of these crises have been sharia related, with Kaduna and Tafawa Balewa crisis of 2000 and 2001, being the most devastating ones. The 2001 Jos September crisis was also a religious conflict which took on other factors of ethnicity and raised it to dangerous dimensions. It resulted to loss of lives and property. Religion also played a major role in the November 2008 crisis in Jos. The crisis created tension in the entire Middle Belt region, including Kaduna, which became the hottest boiling point of religious crisis, even up to 2018.

The Nigerian situation strikes common chord with Vaughan (2016, p. 17), who opined that —the history of the communities in this West African region is characterized by interwoven religious, social, and political strands that reflect entrenched hierarchies of power integrated into communal, kinship, gender, and class identities and conditioned by spatial and demographic factors. In this dynamic process, Nigeria's formidable Muslim and Christian structures are at the center of the country's history, expanding Nigeria's chronology to fully incorporate the critical religious, social, and political developments of the turbulent nineteenth century into the processes of Nigerian state formation. The critical foundation in the making of modern Nigeria was constructed on the convergence of two monumental world religious movements that transformed the Nigerian region, starting in the nineteenth century. These were the celebrated Islamic reformist movement that established the Sokoto Caliphate in the Hausa region of Northern Nigeria and the Christian evangelical missionary movement that gave impetus to the social transformation of coastal southwest Nigeria, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although shaped by regional and global forces, these religious movements had enduring consequences for the diverse peoples of the Nigeria because they were also products of the internal dynamics among the local communities.

Usman Dan Fodio was looked upon for both religious and political direction. He approved the giving of political power to only those who will rule in accordance with Islamic laws and injunctions. Such principles formed the habit of the northern religious leaders, to the extent that those who succeeded Usman Dan Fodio traded more stringently along these paths. The activities in the northern region in politics has a direct link to the religious leadership. Most conflictual cases are preferred to be addressed from the Emir's palace (Kukah 1993 p.13). Being the basis for the foundation of the caliphate, the role of religion in political competition remains unrivalled. The realization of its potency led the ruling elite to cast political opposition in religious terms. Those who were outside the orbit of the Nigerian People Congress (NPC) were considered as outcast; in demonic idioms, they were traitors. The religious ideals of the caliphate had become incarnated within the NPC and its political manifesto. They were accused of departing from God.

The religious leadership in the west and eastern regions had little or minute influence on the politics, the decentralized system in operation particularly in the eastern region made it difficult



to super impose any decision on conflictual political matters and otherwise. The ability to challenge the authorities was prevalent.

Interplay of religion and politics

The past three decades in Nigeria have witnessed diverse conflicts, some, of the very violent type. From political to economic conflicts, Nigeria has been characterized by communal conflicts often times with ethnic and religious underpinning. While politically motivated, even economic crisis could easily be understood and explained based on religious crisis. Religion, and ethnicity have emerged as the constantly used elements that fuel, and is fueling crisis in Nigeria. Religious ideologies and commitments are indisputably central factors in the escalation of violence and evil around the world (Kimball, 2008, p. 4)

Today religious competition between Christians and Muslims is without doubt a single and most significant political challenging issue in Nigeria. It has become a major factor of political identity. Nigeria has witnessed more religiously rooted crisis than any kind, whether political, ethnic or economic. Elite manipulation and quest for political power has often triggered the populace against each other. Religious fundamentalism has denied any form of prowess in the entire political setting of the country.

The manipulation of the populace is better stated by Usman (1987, p. 21) who argued that, —controlling the action of a person or group without that person or group knowing the goals, purpose, and method of that control, and without even being aware that a form of control is being exercised on them at all, constitute manipulations. The particular aspect of social and political reality to be obscured and mystified depends on the purpose of the manipulation. It also depends on the structure of the economy and society within which the manipulation is taking place. In the case of manipulation of religion in Nigeria, the purpose of could be found in the functioning of the classes who do this manipulation. Nobody denies that the class responsible is the intermediary bourgeoisie.

As manipulation becomes very easy to carry out with the level of illiteracy the people are exposed to, the people follow based on the cover of Christian or Muslim not capacity. The intrusion of Islamic sect, Boko Haram, into the government of Nigeria confirmed the extent to which region seek to influence politics and governance in the country. It poses so much threat that belittled, the capacity of the state. What are their beliefs and demand? This brings us to the drawing board that amidst religious differences. there exist also intra religious differences. This notwithstanding, the stern of conflicts in Nigerian politics, has a base in the use of religion by politicians to instigate support\ voting. Considering the picking of candidates that will represent political parties, religious consideration becomes necessary in states with dual faith dominance. The picking of same religious faith advocates for a particular post in election might pose tension in the polity as it's the case in Kaduna state 2019 APC candidates.

In fact, political settings have become religiously diverse; we find that religious leaders, especially those who represent long-dominant religious majorities, have often discouraged religious tolerance. This context characterizes liberal democracy in hopes of preserving or gaining a privileged place for their religious institutions. Religious leaders believe that they would be better off if they promote the growth and influence of their own religious institutions by encouraging civic engagement, respect for religious freedom, and separation of religion from state authority than by seeking cultural and political dominance. In this way, Christian



and Muslim religious leaders have contributed positively to the prospects for liberal democracy (Dowd 2015, p. 2,3)

The Effects of Religious Conflicts on Development in Nigeria

The various religious crisis in Nigeria have left negative imprints on the polity. These crises have caused the death of several people with great dreams and visions. It has led to loss of property and disruption of socio-economic life of the Nigerian citizens. This is in addition to threatening the security of lives. The religious crisis in Nigeria have left enduring legacies of tension, insecurity, mutual suspicions, arms buildup and negative inter-religious relationships. Investors relocating out of the country; to mention the critical ones.

Since the 1980s when religious crisis heightened in Nigeria, people had relocated to where they consider safe areas. These relocations, based on ethnic and religious borderlines, have serious security implications on the country. This is because battle lines are already being drawn for potential war in times of crisis. Today, many cities are patterned along Christian-Muslim divides in Nigeria (Gwamna 2011 p. 11). This has serious implication on development. As Gwamna observed, these dislocations and relocations have created socioeconomic problems as some are thrown out of their jobs. Some of these settlements have also become a haven of idle hands who constitutes potential bands of armed robbers and other social vices. The continuous escalation of religious crisis in Nigeria is gradually creating and conditioning people to harbor bitterness and grievances against each other, which has the potential danger of bursting into serious civil war. The obvious spill over or hangover effects of these crisis have also been the weaponization of the Nigerian state. It is a fact today that where religious crisis has occurred, a lot of arms have been stockpiled as a measure to either checkmate potential —opponents or as deterrents to opposing religious foes in the future. This scenario has serious security implications for the peaceful coexistence of Nigerians.

Recommendations

- i). The secular nature of the Nigerian state is rarely known and understood by the citizenry; to first accept the secularization is to go a long way in the premise of reducing the tension, hate and intolerance of other religions. There must be a level playing ground from all the sects who enjoy the patronage of government to carry out unjust act against each other.
- ii). Politicians must be faced with the punishments and indictment in any attempt of using incisive speeches against other religion, there must be strict monitoring of the activities of such politicians.
- iii). Religious leaders must reiterate the importance of accepting other religion by their worshippers. Instances where religious leaders are the once instigating their worshippers to call them names must be totally rejected. They should be peace promoters not otherwise.

Conclusion

The systematic use of religion to manipulate the people at the expense of the existence of Nigeria as an entity, must be disaccustomed with all vigor. Poverty, hunger and death do not consider religion to strike. Religious and political harmony is paramount to the harnessing of



the country's natural resources for development. Nigeria has witnessed devastating religious induced political clashes that have impacted negatively on its development. It is important, therefore, to know that peaceful coexistence goes along with development. The country must accept its differences and get to use it to its advantage. The low level of national integration must be addressed frankly, and paths that can help towards religious peace and political harmony be followed for the overall development of the country

References

- Dowd, R. A (2015) *Christianity, Islam and Liberal Democracy lessons from Sub-Saharan Africa*: New York, Oxford University Press.
- Ejenobo, D. T. (1993) Religious Leaders as Political Actors: The Example of Israelite Prophets:
in Religion and Politics in Nigeria: *Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions*.
- Ejizu, C. I. (1993) Religion and Politics in Nigeria: The Perspective of the Indigenous Religious: Religion and Politics in Nigeria: *Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions*.
- Frans, W. (2007) *Seeds of Conflict in a Haven of Peace*: New York, Rodopi Amsterdam
- Gwamna, D. J. (2010) *Religion and Politics in Nigeria*: Jos, African Christian Textbooks Bukuru
- Kukah, M. H. (1993). *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*: Spectrum books Limited Ibadan, Nigeria.
- Meister, C. (2009). *Introducing Philosophy of Religion*: New York, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group
- Ojukwu. C.C, and Alumona. I. M (20015). *Comparative Politics: An African View*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.
- Robert, A. D. [2015]. *Christianity, Islam and Liberal Democracy- Lessons from SubSaharan: Africa*- Oxford, Oxford Press.
- Philips, G. (2011). *Introduction to Secularism: National Secular Society*, London, 25 Red Lion Square.
- Usman, Y. B (1987) *The manipulation of Religion in Nigeria 1977-1987*: Kaduna, Vanguard Printers and Publishers
- Vaughan, O. (2016). *Religious Cultures of Africa and African Diaspora People*: Duke University Press.