

Effect of Religion on Politics in Yorubaland, Nigeria

Adékòyà Elizabeth Oláníkè

lizoladek@yahoo.com

and

Ọ̀ṣòbà Bóláńlé Kíkélomọ

Bolanleosoba001@gmail.com

Department of Yorùbá Language

Adéníran Ògúnsànyà College of Education

Ọ̀tò-Ìjànínkin, Lagos

Abstract

Nigerian politics is replete with lots of abnormalities and upheavals because the country's political leaders, past and present, have dragged religion and ethnicity into politics in their quests for leadership in the country. It is a known fact that since independence, more than two-third of the country's existence has been spent by military junta. Boko Haram insurgence in the country that has claimed more than 20,000 lives of innocent citizens and the state agencies are politically motivated. This study adopted descriptive and quantitative approach to this issue. Two hundred (200) copies of questionnaire were administered to politicians and religious adherents in Nigeria. Purposive random sampling technique was adopted because of the homogenous nature of

the constituency. Three research hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance using Chi-square statistical tool to analyse the data collected. Based on the findings, it was discovered that both Christianity and Islam have a stint in Nigeria politics. This study, among others, recommends that the desire of gaining political power must be based on the ability to perform with good moral standard.

Key words: Religion, Polity, Sustainability, National Development.

Introduction

There is an incontrovertible connection between religion and politics while the actual role that religion plays in politics has remained debatable, the nexus between the two concepts has been established for long (Falana, 2010). Religion does not make people good or bad. On the contrary, it is being used as an instrument of oppression and deceit in Yorubaland, Nigeria. It appears that Yorubaland, Nigerians have resigned themselves to fate and this is possibly further compounded by poverty, illiteracy, and lack of political education on the part of majority. This position is further aggravated by the general perception that politics is a dirty game and that only people who can deceive, manipulate, and greedily accumulate wealth are meant to participate (Egbewole and Etudaiye, 2011).

The number of religious people in Yorubaland in Nigeria run into millions, yet the level of insecurity, destruction of lives and properties and crimes committed in God's name is overwhelming. Therefore, the need for political stability in Yorubaland, Nigeria cannot be overemphasised.

A major variable in the Yorubaland, Nigeria polity is the relationship between religion and politics which some consider as inseparable, while some support the notion of separation of religion from politics, so that the former will not imbibe the corruption inherent in the latter.

Generally speaking there is a common fallacy that religion and politics are two different fields of social activity. This leads observers sometimes to speak of the politicisation of religion, and aver that it is against the original intent of the founder of religion, or God himself (Van der veer, 1996).

All over the country, religion plays an important role in the daily lives of her citizens, the way we interact with one another, our choice of dressing, food, and politics are mostly affected by religion. In other words, religion and politics are intertwined and it empowers man to function in his society by contesting for a political position so as to contribute his ideology to Yorubaland, Nigeria's population of over 180 million is divided nearly equally between Christians and Muslims.

The importance of this division is well illustrated by the fact that religion, not nationality, is the way in which

most Yoruba and indeed Nigerians choose to identify themselves; though not in all cases. Thus, the domains of religion, secularism and politics are becoming increasingly intermingled in both overt and covert ways. Invariably, sectarian politics is inherently problematic (Tar and Shettima, 2010). Thus, there is a need to look at the effects of religion on politics in Yorubaland since independence. In addition, the study intends to find out how religion can bring sustainable rational development. It concludes by agitating for religious tolerance and the hinging of politics on moral codes.

Religion has been an indispensable phenomenon in Yorubaland and Nigeria in particular. It has become an important factor in political discourse. The influence of religion is not only limited to politics but its power influences virtually all other facets of life. Political power affects economic prosperity, social relation, educational advancement, and the psyche of the society. There are three dominant religions namely: Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). All these religions and their ideologies allow for interaction between religion and politics. The traditional religion of a society is a systematic reflection of their socio-cultural orientation, history and legacies on elemental forces, which in turn produces a belief in a supreme cosmic power that created heaven and earth. Thus, traditional politics of the people has a strong

linkage to belief in theocracy. To the Yoruba's Oba (king), the political leader of the people, is only holding his office in trust for Olódùmarè (the Supreme Being). More so, before an oba is selected or appointed, as the case may be, the ifa oracle must be adequately consulted for spiritual approval. Therefore, politics and religion in traditional society are intertwined and have direct influence on each other. This is still the situation, even at the close of the 20th century (Iaguda, 2008)

Islamisation of politics in Yorubaland

The philosophy of Islam could be seen as a complete way of life for Muslims. Islam has always been closely attached to politics in Yorubaland, Nigeria, especially in the Muslim dominated north. As alluded above, the British government duly recognised this fact in their dealing with the northern Islamic societies and explored it to legitimise their colonial rule in the region. Oyegbile and Abdulrafiu (2009) observed that after the 1914 amalgamation of Yorubaland, Nigeria and emergence of indigenous national politics, Islam has effectively represented a source of ethnic identity, group unity, political mobilization, demobilisation, regime legitimisation and de-legitimisation in the country. As a result of this, the northern Hausa-Fulani therefore see themselves as the off-springs of the Sheikh Uthman dan Fodio, representing the epitome of the Islamic

holy jihad and a product of an enviable Islamic socio-cultural history.

Based on this, the popular Hausa Muslim cleric, Sheikh Abubaka Gumi, asserted that Islam has a cultural and religious affinity with its members, thereby providing many common cultural elements that united the people of the region who become adherents together (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Ihedirika, 2011 and Okune, 2011) thereby empowering them to be politically cohesive and formidable and using same for political mobilisation. It is popularly held that the northerners were absolutely being held in contempt because of their unique historical, religious, cultural and political antecedents (Akaeze, 2009). Thus, Islam has since been conceived to be synonymous with the north in the political matrix of the entity called Nigeria.

Also, Islam as a way of life, dictates and governs the totality of life of Muslim from cradle to grave. Consequently, his political interest, economic considerations, social values and interaction are often given Islamic interpretations based on the holy Quran, prophetic practices and other source of law recognised in Islam. These virtues are expected to permeate the socio-political structure of any Islamic state. In fact, Prophet Mohammed was the spiritual as well as the political leader of his people during his lifetime. After his death, the caliphs emerged and still held on to the same principles. Regardless of the nature

of the society, islam encourages muslims to hold on to its principles by allowing the holy Quran and the Sunnah to be their guide. From the discussion above, it will not be out of place for us to say that Islam allows for a spiritual relationship between religion and politics.

Similarly, viewing it from an islamic perspective, we can suggest that Islam is a way of life which dictates the political ideology and practice in any Islamic society. The ideals of Islam are good and are meant to guide political conducts however, the practices of such ideals are usually influenced by the socio-cultural institutions in the society, including politics. For many Muslims, Islam is believed to be relevant and integral to politics, law, education, social life and economy. These are not viewed as secular institution or areas of life but as aspects of the Islamic religion. Thus, religion and society are interrelated.

Christianity and Politics in Yorubaland

Politically, Christians' consciousness has sparked some interest in the country's political terrain orchestrated by Islam' challenge. These situations have become most pronounced as a result of the recurring religious crises fermented by the adherents of Islam especially against the northern Christian minorities. Onapajo (2012) avers that the need to hold tenaciously to the politicisation in Yorubaland, was also informed by the desire to uphold the

historical dominance of the educational and economic spheres by the Christians, particularly in the southern part of the country, as the employment of Christianity for political ends started with the northern Christians in the era of regional politics. Ojo (2007) further observes that due to the increased perception of discrimination and gross dissatisfaction with the 'Islamic reign of the NPC-led government under the leadership of Ahmadu Bello by Christians, they mobilised themselves to challenge the rule. The Christians decided to form themselves along different political groups. Ojo (2007) went further to observe that the first attempt by the Christians in this direction was the establishment of the Northern Yorubaland non-muslim league following a motion raised in 1949 on the floor of the northern house of assembly for the restriction of the activities of the Christian missionaries (Rasmussen, 1990; Uchendu, 2004; Ojo, 2007 and Owuamanam, 2009).

This Christian league with the strong backing of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and the Sudan Union Mission (SUM), Christian missions developed and designed administrative and organisational framework for the formation of the Middle Zone League (MZL) as a political party with the major agenda of reducing the strength of the "Islamic expansionist movements" in the north. With the Middle Zone League (MZL) facing some difficulties and deficiencies, there was a merger between MZL and the

Biom Progressive Union in 1955 to form the United Middle-belt Congress (UMBC) as they had a common ideological and political philosophy and religious interest (Owuamanam et al., 2009). As consequences, much of the political intrigues that reigned during the period were centered on this mutual maneuvering among these different political parties.

Laguda (2008) argues that Christians in Yorubaland would rather not get involved in politics but the fact remains that Jesus Christ did not discourage political participation for the faithful. However, Laguda's argument is unconvincing due to the fact that there are many Christians who are involved in politics and that have won political seats as governors, senators and honourable members. In Judaism, which provided background to Christianity, the God of Israel, Yahweh, is the God of war (Josh. 6:20), economy (Exod. 16), obedience and moral virtues (Num. 21:4-8), Yahweh is all in all in the Judaic traditional thought, religion and politics. In the apostolic age, the church witnessed an effective interplay between religion and politics and where such interaction tended towards negative ends, the apostles often adopted Christian's principles to solve the problem.

Perhaps, the most significant interaction between religion and politics in church history was witnessed during the Constantine and the post-Constantine era,

where the emperor used machinery of the state to promote Christianity. Thus, religion became politicised and politics also marred the progress of the church during this period. Jesus teaching and Pauline theology encourage political process and respect for those in political offices. Since they are representative of God (Matt. 22:17-20)

Hence, from the outset of the three main religions in Yorubaland Nigeria, politics and religion have effectively complemented each other.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to:

- i. find the effects of religion on politics in Yorubaland, Nigeria;
- ii. find out how religion can bring sustainable development to our politics in Yorubaland; and
- iii. examine how national development can be sustained through politics in Yorubaland.

The following research hypotheses were formulated for the study.

- i. Religion has no significant effect on politics in Yorubaland, Nigeria.
- ii. Religion has no significant effect on Yorubaland political development sustainability.

- iii. Sustainability of national development will not significantly be achieved through politics in Yorubaland, Nigeria.

The research was a descriptive type which adopted the quantitative method. A sample of two hundred (200) respondents was used for the study which included religious bodies and party constituencies. Five Islamic societies, five Christian organisations and five political parties were randomly selected. For Islamic society Ahmadiyyah Muslim Society of Nigeria, Ansar-Un-Deen society of Nigeria, Nawar-ul Deen Society of Nigeria, Fathiu-Quareeb Society of Nigeria and Nasrul-Ilah Fathi Society of Nigeria formed part of the sample. For Christian organisation: Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Christ Apostolic Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Catholic Church, and Anglican Communion were selected. For political party: All Progressives Congress, People's Democratic Party, National Conscience Party, All Progressives Grand Alliance and Labour Party. A purposive random sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents from each of the three categories because of the homogeneous nature of the subject in focus. This was done to ensure that the respondents were members of the religious bodies and political parties. A self-administered questionnaire of fifteen items was used with the four-point rating scale of "Agree" (A), "Strongly Agree" (SA), "Strongly

Disagree” (SD) and “Disagree” (D). The responses were collected and analysed using the chi-square statistical tool.

Results and Analysis

Table 1: Summary of effect of religion on politics in Yorubaland

S/N	A+SA	D+SD	N	SL	DF	X ² cal	X ² tab	Decision
1	119	81	200					
2	110	90	200					
3	99	101	200	0.05	12	8.539	21.026	Accepted
4	121	79	200					
5	100	100	200					
Total	549	451	1000					

From the Table above, since the x^2 calculated value of 8.539 is lower than the x^2 critical value of 21.026 at 0.05 level of significance, we accept the null hypothesis which states that religion has no significant effect on politics in Nigeria since independence.

Table 2: Summary of effect of religion on Yorubaland political development sustainability

S/N	A+SA	D+SD	N	SL	DF	X ² cal	X ² tab	Decision
6	48	152	200					
7	147	53	200					
8	170	30	200	0.05	12	278.58	21.026	Rejected
9	90	110	200					
10	182	18	200					
Total	637	363	1000					

From Table 2 above, since the x^2 calculated value of 278.58 is greater than the x^2 critical value of 21.026 at 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis which states that religion has no significant effect on Yorubaland political development sustainability is rejected.

Table 3: Summary of sustainability of national development and politics in Yorubaland

S/N	A+SA	D+SD	N	SL	DF	X ² cal	X ² tab	Decision
11	32	168	200					
12	171	29	200					
13	147	53	200	0.05	12	251.81	21.026	Rejected
14	110	90	200					
15	70	130	200					
Total	530	470	1000					

From the Table above, since the x^2 calculated value of 251.81 is greater than the x^2 critical value of 21.026 at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis which state that sustainability of national development will not significantly be achieved through politics in yorubaland is rejected.

Discussion of findings

Based on the findings of this study, hypothesis one which states that religion has no significant effect on politics in yorubaland, Nigeria is accepted. This is not supported by the assertion of Tar and Shettima (2010) that all over the

country, religion plays an important role in the daily lives of her citizens. The way we interact with one another, our choice of dressing, food, and politics are mostly affected by religion.

The hypothesis two which states that religion has no significant effect on the political development sustainability is rejected. This is corroborated by the assertion of Oyegbile and Abdulrafiu (2009) who observed that after the 1914 amalgamation of Yorubaland, and emergence of indigenous national politics, Islam has effectively represented a source of ethnic identity, group unity, political mobilisation, de-mobilisation, regime legitimisation and de-legitimation in the country. This assertion is supported by (Akaeze, 2009) that the northerners were absolutely being held in contempt because of their unique historical, religious, cultural and political antecedents.

Conclusion

Religion has been used and is still being used to induce violence and has caused stunted growth to our stability and sustainable national development. Respect for mother earth produces piety promoting reverence for natural laws. Those engaged in Boko Haram sects are the people of Allah; they should not destroy and be destroyed. All these are sources of peace building consciousness and sustainable

development. The relationship between religion and politics in any society should be mutual, and if properly managed, it could bring about tranquility and development. On the other hand, if the relationship is not properly managed, it could generate conflict. This is because religion is about gaining political power for personal reasons. Since these are mutually and exclusively related, there is constant need for symbolic relationship. Hence, religion can either bring conflict or peace, development or destruction, growth or retardation, stability or instability, security or insecurity. It depends on how it is made use of along with politics. The mixing of both religion and politics is not a problem, but the level of moral standard, patriotism towards the country and proper understanding of religion are the determining factor.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The government should give more power to the national religious advisory board and the Nigeria inter-religious council in promoting inter-religious dialogue and religious tolerance through organising seminars and workshop for religious adherents which will help in building sustainable national and political development.

- ii. The basis of gaining political power must be based on religious identity in Yorubaland.
- iii. Religious leader should act as watchdogs to political offices holders by guiding them against unacceptable practices that can jeopardise political development, not meddling with politics.
- iv. The government should stop using public fund to sponsor people to pilgrimage. Instead, the fund apportion to it should be diverted to create employment for the teeming youth, improve our educational institutions and to alleviate poverty in the society.
- v. There should be a fixed tenure or period for rotational gubernatorial and other political offices in Yorubaland and Nigeria as a whole.
- vi. Religious organisation and political parties should advice and counsel their members to enforce the tenets of their faith and political philosophy.
- vii. It is necessary that all religious groups should preach and practice peace and peaceful coexistence in our communities.

References

- Akaeze, A. (2009). From Maitatsine to Boko Haram, *News Watch* (Lagos), 28 October.

- Falana, F. (2010). A Public Lecture Delivered at the 51st Birthday Anniversary of Rt. Rev Alfred Adewale Martins, Catholic Bishop of Abeokuta, Ogun State on Saturday June 5, 2010.
- Human Rights Watch (2005). Revenge in the name of Religion: The Cycle of Violence in Plateau and Kano States. Human Right Watch Report, 17 (8a), 7-10
- Ihedirika, E.N. (2011). Nigeria Military and Security: A Paper Presented by the Chief of Army staff at Defence College, Jaji-Kaduna.
- Laguda, A. (2008). Religion, 'politics and political forces in democratic Nigeria: *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 2 (5), February, 2008.
- Ojo, M. (2007). Pentecostal Movements, Islam and the Contest for Public Space in Northern Nigeria, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18(2), 172-188.
- Okune, P.E. (2011). Insecurity of Man: A Paper Presented at an Induction Course for Newly Recruited Military Officers in Nigeria. Abuja.
- Onapajo, H. (2012). Politics for God: Religion, Politics and Conflict in Democratic Nigeria. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4 (9), January 2012.
- Owuamanam, J; Francis, F. & Shobiye, H. (2009). The Rise, Threat and Fall of Boko Haram, In: *Saturday Punch* (Lagos), 1 August, 2-3.
- Oyegbile, O. and Abdulrafiu, L. (2009). Shielding Patrons of Boko Haram, In: *Tell* (Lagos), 17 August, 67-71.

Rasmussen, L. (1990). *Religion and Property in Northern Nigeria*. Copenhagen: Academic Press.

Tar, U. and Shettima, A.G. (2010). Discussion Paper 49, Endangered Democracy? The Struggle over Secularism and its Implications for Politics and Democracy in Nigeria. Nordiska Afrikainstitute, Uppsala P. 5.

The Holy Bible. King James Version.

Uchendu, E. (2004). Religion and Nation-Building in Nigeria. *Nigeria Heritage*, 13, 132-144.

Van der Veer. P. (1996). The Ruined Center Religion and Ojass Politics in India. *Journal of International Affairs* 50 (1) 254-277.