

## **RELIGION, POLITICS AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: IMPACT AND WAY FORWARD**

Olayera, Michael Oluwaleke

### **Abstract**

Religion and politics have been the bane of security in Nigeria since independence. The level of violence and social unrest reached an alarming rate by the turn out of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The crisis from religious conflicts, herdsmen strike, inter-ethnic rivalry, ritual killings to kidnapping; the nation had recorded numerous loss of lives and properties, as well as, impoverishment and social disharmony. In spite of the numerous worship centers sited all over the nation, security had been merely a day dream and one wonders what religious leaders are preaching in the churches and the mosques. It is noted that without security, progress will be hampered. This article is an attempt to dig into the relationship and interactions between religion and security, as well as, between religion and politics. The extent to which religion had helped the nation's security is also examined. Impacts of religion both on politics and the nation's security are being examined. Phenomenological and descriptive methods were employed in carrying out the research. The paper revealed that insecurity has negatively affected economic prosperity of the individuals and the nation at large. For peace and security to reign, the government should deal with insecurity decisively and be just in its dealing with national issues.

**Keywords:** Insecurity, Politics, Religion, Violence

### **Introduction**

Humans have been found to be political animals; they play politics in their domestic, official, local and national affairs. Remove politics from humans, they seem idle, docile and uninteresting. Religion on the other hand, is what humans live by right from creation, birth to grave. The Africans, perhaps more than any other groups are found to be distinctively religious. Hence, traditional African society in the sub-Saharan Africa, especially, Nigeria had developed pantheon of gods and goddesses as agents of the supreme God- *Olodumare*. Nigeria, a highly religious state with a huge number of religious worship centers, is yet to gain her freedom from religiously condemned crimes and problems. The three broad religious bodies that exist in Nigeria- Traditional religion, Islam and Christianity are all regarded as peace loving. Only a few individuals in Nigeria would not associate themselves with any form of religion, and these few are highly condemned by their immediate society. Yet, the increase in religious centers has in no way reduced crime rate, violence and insecurity in the country, despite the priority given to peace in the dictate of these religions which are clearly stated in the Holy Books and ethics guiding the religions. The Islamic greetings- *Salaam a laekun*, which means Peace be unto you which is an indications of the religion being a peaceful one. Also, 'As-Salam' – Peace is one of the 99 names of Allah, the supreme God in Islam.

Christianity on the other hand did not ignore the place of peaceful living as Jesus is regarded as the “Prince of Peace”. Traditional religion is not left out of the peace preaching religions in Nigeria. In spite of numerous religious adherents in Nigeria, peace and security has eluded the nation which has affected the growth of the nation.

Nigeria’s political scene is not left out of the quest for peace; politics in Nigeria is regarded as a ‘dirty game’ depicting the insincerity and untruthfulness behind the political scenes. Despite the fact that individuals at the corridors of power are adherents of one religion or the other, the teachings and dictates of these religions did not reflect in the governance of the nation. Political exercises such as elections and political negotiations are yet to attain the stage of fairness; electoral process for instance, had at various times been graced with violence, rigging, inanimate and underage voting and many other electoral crimes.

The situation of Nigeria clearly depict that the religious level of a state does not totally guarantee its sanity and stability despite the fact that religion has an undisputable role in shaping the society. Religion has been politicized for personal ambition. The situation now is that the existence of Nigeria as a nation has been put to question.

### **The Concept of Religion**

Akeusola, *et al* (2013) asserts that true religion is to acquaint man with God, as well as, with himself and the rest of the universe. Man is a religious being and he believes in the existence of a more superior power which must have been behind the creation of the world and the phenomena in it. Pre-colonial Nigeria which included independent communities had indigenous religions which were peculiar to each state. God to most pre-colonial Nigeria communities was unapproachable for man and therefore, developed a pantheon of gods which were regarded as *Orisa* (deities) who were specially blessed by the supreme God as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and Man. Religion in pre-colonial Nigeria is also built on the fact that God is involved in all activities of man and therefore must be referenced. All forms of relationship activities were believed to be god guided; for instance, cases of theft, quarrels, infidelity and so on were taken to the shrine to be settled where certain procedures were embarked on to fish out the perpetrator of evil within a time frame.

Numerous events that took place after involving the gods in the justice system were mostly unpleasant to the individual(s) who were regarded as the perpetrator of the crimes. Such events heightened the community’s believe in the existence of God and his ability to melt out punishment to offenders. These acts had overtime curbed crimes and social vices in pre-colonial Nigerian communities; the case is the same for *Ogun*- god of Iron, *anyelala*- goddess of social justice among others.

Furthermore, gods were regarded as the chief security agents of these communities, in times of war and inter-community conflicts, the gods were called upon for backups and strength. To individuals, the gods are agents of protection of both their lives and properties with various charms and amulets used to protect themselves and even placed on their properties. Libations were poured on the gods in regards to protections and individuals who were threats to peace and security of the community are dealt with mercilessly by the gods. In spite of all, the

processes too have their limitations as they could sometimes be manipulated. For instance, *ti ifa ba f'ore bi are ba fo ibi nko?* If the oracle says Yes and the Diviner says no?

The introduction of major foreign religions to these communities led to a great reduction in the number of adherents of indigenous religions. Colonization which took place afterwards, did no better, as the place of the gods in melting out justice was erased and replaced with colonial police and western judicial system. The situation all together turned to put indigenous religion behind the scene. Christianity, Islam and even the western justice system were not as apt and quick as indigenous in terms of melting out justice to perpetrators of crimes and therefore, social vices, crimes, violence and insecurity could be said to gradually increase and took over the scene. The God of Islam and Christianity would not want the death of a sinner but rather to repent.

Oshunagboye (2013) in citing Adekoya (1999), Idowu (2000) and Reelvat (2006) submits that religion is the totality of human believes, organized in written or unwritten forms to guide the community in terms of norms, deeds, values and acts, all of which later combined together to make community's culture. Religion overtime had had significant effect on the morals, norms and values of human society. In Africa, gods are believed to interfere in the affairs of man and therefore, certain dictates are made which are religious with which the society must abide.

Many of the cultural tenets are dictated by religion either directly or indirectly (Grill, 2016). Taboos, do and don'ts of different societies are generated from religion. Most of these dictates are in relation to interpersonal relationship, health, welfare and all things pertaining to the society. Religion educates and train man in various aspects of life.

### **Concept of Politics**

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2005:1266) defines politics as "ideas and activities relating to gaining and winning power in a country, city etc". Man from inception is a political animal, he seeks to draw power to himself and dominate other species created. Politics is not just an affair of the state or a community, it practically originate from man's mind and his nuclear family down to his immediate environment. The quest to place all things in order and control evolves the concept of politics.

Pre-colonial Nigeria comprised of independent communities with highly organized political settings which are peculiar to each of the communities. Instances of these organized political settings are evident in the Old Oyo Empire, Benin Empire, and other prominent kingdoms. These empires are vast; therefore, systems of governments adopted are peculiar to them and ones which were capable of harnessing and uniting the kingdoms.

The political hierarchies of these pre-colonial communities are occupied by the gods at the apex; the gods are believed to be involved in the affairs of the state. Closely followed by the gods are the kings who are called *Alase ikeji orisa*- the commander, second to the gods. The king is regarded as the supreme authority and has all things under his command. Though powerful and wealthy, these highly organized states had put in place institutions to checkmate

the excesses of the king and prevent autocracy and tyranny; an instance is the *Oyomesi* in the Old Oyo Empire, the makers who could request the king to join his ancestor (commit suicide).

Political exercises are not alien to pre-colonial Nigeria and this feature in election and selection of kings and chiefs, making decisions that affects the states as well as negotiation with neighboring communities on ownership of boundaries and properties. The gods and the community are fully involved in these processes. Manipulations and insincerity are usually scarce in these communities due to the fear of punishments by the gods.

Post-colonial political scene had been filled with various political vices and instability; a free and fair election, void of party clashes, killings, loss of properties and lives has been the dream of all Nigerian citizens. Politics in Nigeria is regarded as a 'dirty game'; this depicts the state of insincerity and untruthfulness of individuals occupying political posts in Nigeria. These individuals are adherents of one religion or the other which preached justice and love to human race and one's community, yet, the corridors of power is filled with individuals who are void of the nation's love but filled with the love of their pockets and stomachs.

The political scene of the nation itself is unsecured with political exercises graced with manipulations, rigging, killings, and unfaithfulness to the nation's clarion call. A multi-ethnic state, each ruling government adopts a position that tilts in favour of its tribe; therefore, fairness to all has not been attained by the nation.

### **Concept of Insecurity**

Right to life is one of the essential fundamental human rights. The state of national security and stability is a core responsibility of every government. Security has a huge part to take in the success and failure of every country's government, as well as, progress of the nation. Insecurity can be regarded as lack of assurance or confidence in one's safety or stability. An unsecured state is a state prone to degradation and total loss, both in terms of human and material. Human life being irreplaceable therefore needs to be guaranteed for continuous existence. Absence of security in a country is a damage to all spheres of the country as human is the major factor that mobilizes all other force; insecurity, therefore, depicts a damage to social, religious, political and economic lifestyle of a state.

Nigeria in recent time has been experiencing huge deterioration in terms of security. Ewetan and Urhie (2014) while quoting Ali (2013) described that, the fear of insecurity in Nigeria is on the increase and this has been compounded by the rising waves of terrorism since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999. In recent times, the state of insecurity had increased in an alarming rate as kidnapping, ritual killings, herdsmen incursion, and so on had been added to terrorism.

The current insecurity began with 'Boko Haram', formerly and formally known as Jamā'at Al as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l Jihad, or "Group of the people for preaching and Jihad". Although it began as a confrontation with the police and the Military, it is the Civilian that are primarily receiving the brunt.

Boko Haram has spread to the North-Central and North-Western parts of Nigeria. Some other radical groups- sometimes called 'bandits' have become more notorious. A similar group or another branch have spread to the South- West and South-South, kidnapping for ransom, maiming and raping their victims, destroying farmlands. Individuals inhabiting farmlands and rural areas where food are been produced have been displaced by various incursion of herdsmen and their inhuman acts toward these rural farmers; this, has created fear in the hearts of rural inhabitants and had displaced them to cities which in itself are not safe. The rate of food production had dropped rapidly and led to discomfort of citizens. While the most notorious problems in the Southeast is the conflict of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) with the security agencies through her Eastern Security Network (ESN), a paramilitary wing of IPOB and has led to serious confrontation in 2021.

Urban dwellers on the other hand are not left out of these unsecured situations as kidnapping had been the order of the day. Kidnappers request huge ransoms from the victims' families and also inflicts both physical and psychological trauma on victims. Travelling day and night has become a nightmare for citizens.

The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria specifically identify the security and welfare of the people as the primary purpose of government but this has not been fulfilled in reality. Inter-ethnic relation and living has been a dreadful issue for the fear of ethnic/tribal conflicts; citizens are mindful of dwelling in the country's part which did not belong to their ethnic as little ethnic misunderstanding could claim thousands of lives.

Insecurity in Nigeria does not just damage lives, but economic, social, political and religious lives are also halted. A part of the nation experiencing turbulence would definitely be incapable of operating its economic activities, religious activities and even social activities, as individual will seek their safety first above all things. The situation of the country made the only Nobel Laureate in Nigeria to say that: Nigeria is " teetering on the verge of collapse." Hence, a secured nation is a progressing nation; damage to security is damage to the sum total life of the state.

### **Influence of Religion on Nigerian Politics**

Religion and politics in Nigeria had not existed independently right from pre-colonial era. The pre-colonial Nigeria communities had the gods of the land included in the political exercises and religion had always dictated the occupants of political positions. The Yoruba kingdoms for instance, do consult the oracle before a king could be enthroned, names of various aspirants were presented before the oracle and one way or the other, and the priest reveals who the gods had chosen. Failure to yield the gods choice, depicts doom for the community.

At independence, Nigeria was declared a secular state and the constitution gave preference to no religion, yet, the political scene of Nigeria had not claimed its independence from religion. Though democracy had taken over the political scene, and it is being described as the 'government of the people, by the people and for the people', a situation where the people get elected into power individuals whom they believe to be capable of leading the nation and

who will yield the complains of the people; it is expected that religion will have no effect in such situation.

Conversely, Islam and Christianity became dominant religions and have great number of adherents with unhealthy rivalry in Nigeria and almost all over pluralistic countries in the world. It is not unheard that the Northern majority are Muslims while the Southern Majority are Christians in Nigeria. This has already created a religious divide in the country. In other words, religion has manifested itself as a potent force in the political development of the Nigerian State from time immemorial and it is hardly possible to separate the State from religion- voting behaviour and oftentimes, ascension to political offices is circulated on the basis of religious affiliation (Aleyomi, 2012).

In Nigeria, religion has often been instrumentalised for political and other established interest; hence, religiously motivated political struggles provided the foundation for religious terrorism to develop to the detriment of peace and social harmony (Ogunewu, 2018). Religion has been a strong tool in the hands of Nigeria's politicians over a long period of time and it is even till date, religion has been a podium and medium through which various political organizations pull crowd to themselves and also a means of advertising their interests. Citizens live in the euphoria that if their religion adherent could win a political position, then, it could bring a better life to others who are also adherents of the religion, while the politicians on the other hand sees the religious institution as fertile ground for pulling crowd in favour of them being voted into power.

Aspirants of various political posts before and after elections had been recorded by the media over time to have openly visited leaders of religious institution and this act of theirs has been interpreted to these politicians as acknowledging the important status and positions occupied by religious leaders. At various times, Nigerian citizens had pleasures in voting into power individuals who were of the same religions in expectation that their religion adherents would perform better in power than the others, ignoring the place of the individual's ability and passion. Religion therefore, had been a criterion for voting leaders into power by Nigerian voters.

Islam, for instance, had always been attached to politics especially in the Northern Nigeria for a long period of time. In Muslim dominated states of the North, more often than not, political positions are held by Islam adherents; on rare occasions would a Christian or other religion adherents be allowed to hold a political position. Religion and culture in these states had been completely mixed. Shariah law is more prominent in these states, overriding the Nigerian law. In place of voting, Islam having a congregation in this region therefore, has been a means of campaigning for the adherents.

Nations and states around the world are known to spend their revenue on crucial issues that benefits the state; among the issues that attract government spending is religion. The place of religion in Nigerian politics cannot be overlooked; enough funds are pumped yearly into the holy pilgrimage. The government of Nigeria at various levels had attached so much

importance to religion that its citizens' religious pilgrimage is subsidized by the government. This depicts the importance Nigerian government had attached to religion and its adherents.

Furthermore, the government houses and houses around the nation have religious worship centers built within its confinement. Though a secular state that is expected to have no attachment to any religion whatsoever, Nigeria finds itself still strongly connected to religion with each government houses having its own Christian chapel and/or Islamic mosque depending on the prevailing religion in the state while some states have both. The country's center of authority- *Aso Rock* is not left out of this, it houses both Federal chapel and Federal mosque. These religious centers located at the centers of authority, have their own leader who man and see to the smooth running of these centers. These religious leaders are not just confined to see to the affairs of the worship centers alone, they one way or the other have influences on pressing matters affecting the state. They are key factors that determine the smooth running of the state though they act behind the scene.

Religious diversity should have been a viable force to unite and enhanced economic development in a multi-religious setting like Nigeria. Unfortunately, religious intolerance, tension and conflicts between the two major religions have negative impacts on both the National building and security (Abe, 2019).

Nigerian politics can therefore be regarded as one yet to claim its total independence from religious influence. These religious influences has in one way or the other been the undertone for various crisis and social instabilities that occurs in the country over time. Politicians had hidden behind the curtain of religion to create uproar and social instability in fighting for their interest risking lives and properties of numerous citizens. An instance is the Boko Haram insurgency which the country had been battling with, at the inception of the insurgency, it was toned with religion where numerous Christians were been attacked and various churches were burnt to ashes until later on, where Muslims were also attacked and was interpreted to have political undertone.

To effectively tackle the problem of insecurity in Nigeria, there must be a distinct line between religion and politics with each standing independently. Continuous intertwine between both concepts will hinder the country's progress and true identity of each citizen.

### **Insecurity and its Impact on Nigeria.**

'Everyman for himself, God for us all' could be said to be the best expression for the state of Nigeria security, with the rate at which citizens are rapidly giving up on the nation's security system. The country for a long time now has been faced with security problems and these problems tend to be growing bigger by the day. Nigeria had not been free from problem of insecurity since the inception of Democratic era, pattern of insecurity and violence in Nigeria has been peculiar to each region. The North has always been characterized by insurgences, militia groups who claim to fight for the right of their communities had graced the south, kidnapping for ransom had been rampant in the east and the south, while ritual killings has

not been left out in the east and west; the whole nation had battled with Fulani incursion, assassinations and robbery of various kinds.

Nigerian citizens each day wake up to a media disclosure of various insecurity acts and violence. Protection of lives and properties which is a fundamental human right has been neglected. Travelling on Nigerian roads had been dreadful in recent times; the fear of being kidnapped by Fulani and other kidnapping groups had gripped the citizens. Keeping children in boarding schools has been the fear of parents, as militant groups dressed in Nigeria military uniforms and others not dressed had been reported to have eloped with hundreds of students to undisclosed destination.

These situations had made various groups and individuals to rise up to self-protection such as revival of indigenous protection groups like, Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), Amotekun in the West, Oduduwa People's Congress (OPC) and so on. The inability of the federal government to effectively take care of its citizen's security had made various groups to rise to take over this obligation.

Faith of citizens in the government that runs country is a huge criterion in determining the success of a political regime. Nigerians had since lost faith in democratic government, individuals had to fend for themselves in terms of protection, and this has therefore increased the rate of illegal possession of arms as well as, one of the blind reasons why Nigerian youths venture into secret cults.

Impact of unsecured state of the nation has been strongly felt in the economy of the nation. The Fulani incursion and random kidnapping as well as, killings in rural areas have greatly affected food production. Not just killings and kidnappings, various reports have the acts of Fulani invading farm lands and their cows turning out to destroy farm crops; this singular act has in turn led to discouragement on the path of farmers. Farmers which were caught on farm were either brutally beaten or death or both, farming has therefore, become a nightmare for rural dwellers. Farming in urban centers is on a minute scale, few individuals in urban centers engage in farming and this is usually done on domestic level. The result of situation is inflation on prices of food items which in turn affect or goods and makes life difficult for low income earners.

Not only did Nigeria experience loss in terms of food production but also in terms of human resources. The percentage of brain drain recorded in Nigeria yearly has been on the increase. The independent populations which are the youths keep immigrating to other countries either legally or illegally. Reports of youths trying to leave the country through illegal means, going through the Sahara deserts and other deadly media is no longer strange to the nation. Individuals, who are intellectually gifted and are supposed to build the nation, do seek for every opportunity such as scholarships and grants to leave the country for greener pasture. One of the popular reasons behind this act is unsecured state of the country; loss of the independent population has greatly affected the country.

A multi-ethnic state, each government in Nigeria has always clamored and devised policies to implement and encourage the popular term 'One Nigeria' where the whole nation will be

seen as one, irrespective of the ethnic or religious difference. The state of the nation's security has made this seemingly impossible as various state of recent had reignited their passion for secession. The East has not seized to pursue their dream of having the State of Biafra, while the South-West occupied by the Yoruba had been clamoring for Oduduwa state. Each ethnic group seeks for their own independence as peaceful co-existence could not be actualized. A Yoruba man residing in the North for instance, live daily in fear; each day watching out for inter-tribal or inter-religious crisis which had happened over time, while an Hausa/Fulani man could not sleep with all eyes closed in the East for the fear of losing his life and even property. Insecurity has deprived the nation Nigeria of its true sovereignty and oneness as an inter-ethnic state.

### **Roles of Religion in Ensuring Security**

Religion, so far in Nigeria holds an important place in the state's politics. A highly religious state with political leaders belonging to one religious group or the other, religion in Nigeria has a huge role to play. As described earlier, religions in Nigeria are referenced as being peaceful; therefore, the peaceful light of these religions should shine through its adherents to the country and revive its peace and security.

Moreover, Ordu, G (2015), explained that the beauty of a Nation is the freedom to live wherever one chooses without the Imposition of religious ideological principles. He further states that, Nigeria is a nation with a constitution not uniquely designed exclusively with Christianity or Islamic ideologies, but with preamble that expresses:

We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, having firmly and solemnly resolved, to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign Nation under God, dedicated to the promotion of inter-African solidarity, world peace, international cooperation and understanding, and to provide for a constitution for the purpose of promoting good government and welfare of all persons in our country, on the principle of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people do hereby make, enact and give to ourselves the constitution.

Against this back drop, it is a clear witness that the evils perpetrated by Boko-Haram on the basis of making Nigeria an Islamic state or force it to disintegrate contradicts the Constitution of Nigeria. Hence, their action should be treated as treason and coerced to cease.

Religious worship centers rather than serving as a mean of political popularity should serve as a means of peace communication. Peace should be the major message of every religion. Religious institutions can further make out awareness programmes for its adherents where security and matters of self defense are being taught. Focus of religious institutions should be placed on God and rightful human living not on prosperity which might have been a push for criminal acts on the side of the adherents in search of wealth. Religious institutions in Nigeria are being operated as a family, inter-ethnic co-existence and love should be emphasized in these institutions which will in turn shine to the community.

Political leaders who are adherents of these religions should not just use the institution as a means of acquiring power and success but should abide by the peaceful teachings of these institutions. Religion should no longer be used as a tool for political manipulation but a means of promoting peace and security in Nigeria.

The registered and recognized councils of diverse religions in Nigerian should equally serve as watch dogs. They are not only to be auspices for but, to follow-up on extreme activities of each member, likewise to check extremist with volatile dogma, with quick action or sanction.

## **Conclusion**

No doubt, the role of religion in Nigerian politics and security cannot be overemphasized. Religion has been a tool for molding the nation and the cultural values of the people and therefore could be used to revitalize national love and peaceful co-existence which will in turn security by eliminating criminal acts in the hearts of adherents. The government should not allow religious interference in the politics, while decisive measures should be taken against criminality and insurgency. Justice must be maintained in government execution of policies to ensure trust, stability and prosperity.

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