

EXAMINATION OF RELIGIOPHOBIA AND POLITICIZATION OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN POSTCOLONIAL NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Nigeria, like some other African countries since independence, has been plugged into a series of religious and political uprisings resulting in mayhem, the deaths of thousands of people, and damage to properties. For example, Boko Haram's recent militarization has harmed Nigeria's stability and put the nation under continual danger. As a result, the paper investigates religious conflicts in postcolonial Nigeria in connection to religiophobia and religious politicization as causative variables. Historical and phenomenological approaches are used to achieve the stated goal. Findings reveal that the lack of social control mechanisms that characterized traditional Nigerian societies in the precolonial era, such as kinship, religious inclusiveness, non-religious sentimental political systems, and community wellbeing, led to the escalation of religious conflicts in postcolonial Nigeria. The paper proposes that religious and political ideologists and religious groups should pursue genuine political and religious supremacy devoid of violence.*

Keywords: *Religiophobia, Politicization, Religious Conflicts, Postcolonial, Nigeria.*

Introduction

The postcolonial world of Sub-Saharan Africa is confronted with several obstacles, including ethnic conflicts, religious and linguistic intolerance, and postcolonial wars. In Nigeria, the link between religion and politics has been defined as symbiotic, with religion serving as the ideological preference for national identity over any cultural or historical

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configuration. For example, religion was inextricably related to the political structure in primitive, homogeneous Nigerian communities. Since independence, there have been a number of uprisings and other violent events that have killed thousands of people and caused a lot of damage to property. Boko Haram's increased militarization, for example, has undermined Nigeria's stability and placed the country at constant risk. So, the research looks at postcolonial Nigerian religious conflicts in terms of how religiophobia and the politicization of religion are factors that cause them.

It also looks at the terms "religiophobia" and "politicization" to see how religious conflicts have impacted postcolonial Nigeria's overall development. The lack of social control mechanisms that characterized traditional Nigerian societies in the precolonial era, such as kinship, religious inclusivism, non-religious sentimental political systems, and community wellbeing, led to the escalation of religious conflicts in postcolonial Nigeria, according to the paper, which employs historical and phenomenological approaches. So, the article says that religious and political ideologues, as well as religious groups in the country, should work for real political and religious dominance without using violence.

Describing the Problem

There are violent religious conflicts between the tri-religions in Nigeria. Religious contact among practitioners of African traditional religions was generally calm prior to the emergence of Islam. Nigeria's socio-political upheavals were the fruits of imperialist Britain's divisive and discordant seeds. Mistrust and distrust rose to the fore, poisoning inter-ethnic ties within and between Nigeria's regions. Ethnic and religious differences got worse as the native political class fought to take power from the colonialists. Nigeria's political past is littered with British and self-inflicted blunders. The escalation of ethnic and regional symbolism can also be linked to patronage of sectarian, ethnic, and religious organizations. This scenario is conceived and carried out in an atmosphere of grave state silence and non-intervention. During the 1970s and 1980s, Muslims in Nigeria sought a new Islamic identity for the country to improve its standing in the Muslim world. Developments enraged the polity, instilling among Christians a dread of Muslim dominance. The Second Republic (1979–1983) had its origins in alignments forged during independence.

Religious disputes in Nigeria are frequently the result of political maneuvering and serve as proxies for other conflicts. Doforoh agrees that decades-old and new conflict, as well as deep-seated societal grievances, a diminishing democratic space, and the advent of terrorism and new forms

of violent extremism are undermining peace, sustainable development, and human rights.¹ As a result of the inter-marriage of religion and politics, Nigeria, which was once home to one of history's greatest flowerings of culture and coexistence, is now tormented by many fault-lines at work, ancient and new, overlapping and producing considerable volatility.

Among these are religious upheavals, revived cold war-style rivalry between the country's three religions, ethnic schisms, and various political conflicts. For example, between 1980 and 1993, over twenty-six religious conflicts have been recorded with a death toll of over 6,775, according to official estimates.² Economic and social opportunities in modern Nigeria have plainly become insufficient. As a result, problems arise, such as a decrease in faith in reliable institutions. Nigerian society is currently splintered along ethnic and religious lines, which are being used for political gain. Nigeria's territorial integrity, like that of other African countries and the rest of the world, is under jeopardy. Hundreds of millions of people have been forced to flee their homes. The effects of this unrest have spread to neighbouring countries and beyond.

Conceptualizing Religiophobia and Politicization

The term "religiophobia" refers to an unreasonable or obsessive dread or anxiety about religion or religious institutions. In order to transform his or her character into conformity with the perfect God, a religious human being is connected to a perfect universe in terms of morality, power, and education so that humans can conform to the perfection of God. Politics is the process of humans creating, maintaining, and altering the general rules that govern their lives.³ The politicization of religion is one of the Nigerian nation's blind spots. Religion's substance defines an individual's life in society, governs his interactions with other people, and is at the heart of political order because it legitimizes civil law and forms of sovereignty. Ikechukwu and Clara say that politics and religion seem to be two of the most important cultural factors that shape the way people around the world act.⁴

¹ P.W. Doforo, personal interview, Religious Leader, Lagos, Lagos State, May 23, 2022.

² A. Damilola, "Religious Crisis in Nigeria and Way Forward," *Vanguard Newspaper*, available at <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/12/religious-crisis-in-nigeria-and-way-forward/>

³ P. Iroegbu, *Spirituality and Metaphysics*, Owerri: Enwisdomization Eustel Pub., 2003, p.7.

⁴ A. Ikechukwu, and O. Clara, "Religion and Politics in Nigerian Society: Problems and Prospects (a Philosophic Probe)", *Open Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 5, 2015, pp. 193-204.

There is little doubt that the Nigerian polity has issues with religion and politics, such as cosmological exclusivism, epistemic prejudice, myopia, leadership issues, failing governance, and a lack of political culture.⁵ Separating religion from politics is difficult, if not impossible, from a pragmatic standpoint. Theoretically, it is different. Because of this, people in our society who want to avoid violence and 'bad' blood need to be careful in their everyday lives.

Theoretical Consideration

This paper is anchored on the theory of social change. Social change can relate to the concept of social progress, or socio-cultural revolution. Evolutionary, functionalist, and conflict theories are the three main theories of social change.⁶ Darwin's theory of evolution was adopted by sociologists and applied to society. According to the functionalist view of social transformation, society is similar to a human body.⁷ Many argue that this theory overlooks the fact that society's elite frequently creates a false sense of harmony and stability. According to conflict theory, society is inherently unequal and competitive.⁸ The wealthy and powerful frequently use vulnerable groups to exert control over the rest of society. According to Momoh, this creates conflict and motivates individuals to act, as a result of which social change occurs.⁹ Social change is defined by sociologists as a shift in culture, institutions, and functions.

Sociologists have grappled with various ideas and models throughout history. Successful growth, according to Haferkamp and Smelser, necessitates a fundamental level of social mobilization.¹⁰ Combining systematic with more distinctive, random, or coincidental aspects is the best way to understand social, political, and economic development.¹¹ Population shifts, war-induced dislocation, or stresses and contradictions are structural factors of societal change. Religion in every human society is an agent of social change. Although Karl Marx and Max Weber anticipated the end of religion and the rise of secularism, occurrences in the twenty-

⁵ A. Adogame, "Politicization of Religion and Religionization of Politics in Nigeria," *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria*, edited by C.J. Korieh and G.U. Nwokeji, Oxford: University Press of America, 2006, p. 228.

⁶ C. Kaufman, *Ideas for Action: Relevant Theory for Radical Change* (2nd ed.), Oakland, California: PM Press, 2016, p. 251.

⁷ A. Giddens, *Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006, p. 191.

⁸ M. Haralambos and M. Holborn, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*, London: Harper Collins, 2008, p. 156.

⁹ K. Momoh, personal interview, Politician, Benin City, Edo State, May 28, 2022.

¹⁰ H. Haferkamp and J.S. Neil (eds.), *Social Change and Modernity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, p. 25.

¹¹ M. Haralambos and M. Holborn, *cited works*, p. 156.

first century demonstrate religion's continuous dominance, perpetuity, and tenacity. In addition to promoting social harmony, religion could be used to attain specific political and other recognized demands and objectives.

Religious and Political Interactions in Precolonial Nigeria

In Nigeria, there are over 350 ethnic groups, with the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa/Fulani being the most populous and politically influential. They all have their own customs, traditions, and dialects, yet in pre-colonial periods, they all accepted traditional religious beliefs and practices. Traditional religion in Hausa land was organized around clans, with a hereditary chief priest overseeing each shrine on behalf of the community. There was a strong belief in ancestral worship, animal sacrifices, and grove rituals in Igbo territory. Yorubas believe in the existence of a Supreme Being known as *Olodumare* or *Olorun*.¹² Every social and political event was consulted with *Ifa* (the oracle of palm nuts). Traditional belief systems revered natural phenomena such as rivers, trees, mountains, hills, iron, thunder, and lightning, but Islam and Christianity did not. People believed in an afterlife, which they saw as a continuation of life itself.¹³ In West Africa, notably in Nigeria, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to introduce Christianity. Islam had extended southward to Yorubaland by the middle of the nineteenth century, but it did not have the same political clout as it did in northern Nigeria. During the Ilorin War, between 1830 and 1835, a coalition of Yoruba and Borgu armies fought the jihadists. At the battle of Osogbo in 1840, Oyo-Yoruba armies were able to stop the spread of Islam.

In the early nineteenth century, Christian missionaries followed explorers such as Mungo Park, Hugh Clapperton, and the Lander brothers into the interior of Nigeria. The Niger Expedition in 1845 carried Christianity into the interior, led by Yoruba clergyman Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1807–1891) and European missionaries.¹⁴ The missionaries were welcomed in Yorubaland because they acted as mediators and peacemakers throughout the region's civil conflict. Traditional religion was extensively incorporated into the political structures of all Nigerian civilizations before and until colonization. Institutions including kings, age-grades, guilds, associations, secret societies, and open societies were both religious and political groups that helped to keep the peace. Religious sanctions aid in the prevention of criminal behaviour and the promotion of

¹² A.A. Oladiti, "Religion and Politics in Pre-Colonial Nigeria", *Cogito: Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2013, pp. 72-84.

¹³ I. Umaru, *Personal interview*, Social Scientist, Kano, Kano State, May 27, 2022.

¹⁴ A.A. Oladiti, *cited works*, p. 84.

law-abiding citizens. The role of Muslim *mallams* and the *parakoyi* in political matters was the first manifestation of Islam in politics.¹⁵ Mallams in Oyo and Hausa land originally sought permission from the ruler to live in the town, pray for the people, and preach. By the end of the 1800s, Christianity had not only been brought to Nigeria, but it had also become a part of colonial politics.

In pre-Islamic Nigeria, Muslim academics and clerics were permitted access to kings' courts, and they began to play a major part in policymaking.¹⁶ The emirs viewed the Muslim scholar as a mystic who could use his special skills to solve problems, such as causing rain to fall during a drought or winning wars. It makes little difference whether or not the Muslim scholar possessed the mystic power claimed for him. It's important to note that he believed he had the skills. The Sokoto Caliphate, which functioned as the seat of authority for the newly constituted system of governance, was founded as a result of Dan Fodio's campaign.¹⁷ For administrative convenience and regional peace, the British colonialists embraced the entirely Islamic type of governance they discovered in Northern Nigeria. Traditional religions were marginalized by British colonial rulers, who recognized and protected Islam's interests.

Religious Conflicts in Postcolonial Nigeria

Since the 1980s, both intra-and inter-religious conflict have increased, with the latter becoming more violent in recent years. The most famous episode of intra-religious violence happened in Kano in 1980, following the sermons of Alhaji Muhammad Marwa, a Cameroonian preacher known to his followers as Maitatsine. At least 5,000 people are said to have died in conflicts with the police and army.¹⁸ Following a speech by Christian preacher Abubakar Bako to students at the Advanced Teachers' College in Kaduna state in March 1987, the first significant outburst of inter-religious violence occurred. Following the release of a cartoon depicting the Prophet Mohammed and Jesus Christ, riots erupted once more in 1991. Mallam Yakubu Yahaya, a key figure in Nigeria's "fundamentalist" Islamic movement, and several of his supporters trashed the offices of the government-owned Daily Times. According to reports, one police officer was killed and six others were injured. Further riots broke out in Tafawa

¹⁵ S. Shakar, "Religion, State, and Society in Hausaland: History and the Politics of Incorporation in the Kano Chronicle," *Precolonial Nigeria Essays in Honour of Toyin*, edited by Akin Ogundiran, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005, pp. 281-283.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 282.

¹⁷ B. Mordi, personal interview, Academic, Asaba, Delta State, May 26, 2022.

¹⁸ P.O.O. Ottuh, and F. Erhabor, "Radical Islamism: Trajectories of Human Rights Violations and Abuses in Africa," *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2022, pp. 243-263.

Balewa, a mostly Christian enclave of Bauchi, a predominantly Muslim province. The violence was prompted by Muslims and Christians who disagreed over the usage of an abattoir. After 160 people were reportedly killed, the federal government called in the military to restore peace on April 23, 1991.

At the end of the riots, 80 people were reported dead. Other sources, on the other hand, claim that persons who died were over 1000.¹⁹ A political dispute for control of a neighbourhood populated by ethnic rivals may have prompted the 1991 riots. The Sayawa, one of two mostly Christian tribal groups in Bauchi state, may have reasoned that by electing a Christian as chairman, they would be able to get rid of the Muslims. At least in the case of the Hausa-Fulani, the riot was clearly intended to nearly completely obliterate this dominance.²⁰ The Nigerian government imposed a curfew on the first day of rioting, but the army did not arrive until the second day. Muslims attacked the Sabom Gari neighborhood, which is predominantly Ibo Christian, destroying cars, markets, homes, and a church. At least one report claims that well-organized Christian vigilante groups were "waiting" for the attack and surprised Muslims. It is unclear how many Muslims versus Christians were killed.²¹ The deadliest "religious" fighting occurred in the northern state of Kaduna during the month of May 1992. In the town of Zango-Kataf, a long-running land dispute between the predominantly Christian Kataf and Muslim Hausa ethnic groups culminated in widespread bloodshed. Up to 400 people may have been killed, and 247 people may have been detained.²² The worst religious violence since the Zango-Kataf incident in May 1992 occurred in the northern town of Funtua, Katsina State, in February 1993. Clashes erupted after a dispute between Maitatsine followers known as the Kalakato and Muslim street vendors known as the Almajiri, lasting two days. Up to 100 individuals were murdered in the fighting, including two police officers, and many more were injured.

Boko Haram is a derogatory term that implies "western education is forbidden." Jama'atu ahlis Sunnah Lidda-awati Wal Jihad is its chosen name, which approximately translates as "Movement for Sunnah and Jihad." Boko Haram established an Islamic caliphate in Gwoza, near the

¹⁹ J. Paden, "Religion and Conflict in Nigeria: Countdown to the 2015 Elections," Special Report 359, United States Institute of Peace, 2015 available at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/01/religion-and-conflict-nigeria> (Accessed March 21, 2021).

²⁰ A.E. Zakari, personal interview, Academic, Abuja, Nigeria's FCT, May 25, 2022.

²¹ I.M. Enwerem, *The Politicization of Christianity in Nigeria. A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria*. Ibadan: IFRA-Nigeria, 1995, p. 44.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 46.

Cameroon border, in August 2014.²³ They also took Bama, Borno's second largest city, and issued signs in September that they were planning an attack on Maiduguri, the state capital, forcing thousands of inhabitants to flee. The organization has wreaked devastation in the northeast and across the northern states. Boko Haram violence surged in the far north and spread to the Middle Belt in the second quarter of 2014.²⁴ So many atrocities were committed by this group only between April and July 2014. They include the following:

1. Between April 15th and May 5th, more than 120 people were killed in bombings at a motor park in Abuja. A British-born man who is thought to have planned the first attack was caught in Sudan and sent back to Nigeria.
2. On May 21st there was a car bombings in a Christian area of Jos killed over a hundred people.
3. On June 2nd, more than sixty soldiers and civilians were killed in a bombing at a bar and brothel in Mubi, Adamawa State.
4. On June 9th, one soldier and a female bomber were reportedly killed in a suicide bombing at a military barracks in Gombe.
5. On June 25th, twenty people were killed in a bombing at an upscale mall in Abuja just as the Nigeria-Argentina World Cup match was about to begin.
6. On June 26th, an attempted bombing at a police station in a popular market in Mubi, Adamawa State, was foiled.
7. On June 28th, a brothel in Bauchi State was bombed, killing eleven people.
8. On July 12th, the Nigeria police discovered a plot to bomb Abuja's public transportation system with suicide bombers and explosives hidden in luggage.
9. On July 12th, the Nigerian authorities detected a conspiracy to use suicide bombers and explosives hidden in luggage to attack Abuja's public transit system. After a Ramadan sermon by a prominent sheikh, Dahiru Bauchi,
10. On July 23rd, a bomb exploded in Murtala Square in Kaduna, killing more than thirty people. A second device nearly killed former President Muhammadu Buhari.

The Nigerian military has begun to build up its deadly force capabilities, including a bid for forty assault helicopters. It went on to assassinate three sons of the founder, Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, of a Shiite

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

²⁴ J. Paden, *cited works*.

group in Zaria, the Islamic Movement of Nigeria.²⁵ Meanwhile, Boko Haram had gained control of areas of Borno, kidnapped hundreds of secondary school girls in Chibok, and carried out Eid attacks in Kano. In mid-October, Nigeria's government announced a surprise cease-fire with Boko Haram. Boko Haram retaliated by increasing the number of girls abducted in the northeast and attacking additional villages. Boko Haram had gained control of Mubi, Adamawa State's second largest city, by late October. According to some estimates, Boko Haram controlled over 20% of Nigerian territory by December 2014.²⁶ Not all of the violence blamed on Boko Haram in recent years has been perpetrated by the Abubakar Shekau network.²⁷ Many of the coups and attempted coups have a regional or ethno-religious tint to them.

Politicization of Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

The Nigerian political elite use ethnicity, religion, and region as potent instruments to further their political objectives and hide difficulties arising from their failure to provide progress. Somehow, Nigerians enjoy complete freedom to engage in all types of religious activities, including political and public affairs.²⁸ The stipulation that no state in the federation should choose a state religion implies secularity, but it is not explicitly stated in the Nigerian constitution. Nigeria's ruling class has utilized public funds to build religious edifices and symbols in order to buy public support and bureaucratize religions Nigeria.²⁹ Mixing state and religion has caused a slew of issues and confusion, as well as anarchy, rioting, property damage, and bloodshed.³⁰ In contrast to Emile Durkheim's concept of a puritanical state, this is not the case. Nigeria's political elite frequently uses religious discourses and dogmas to organize and divide the populace, as well as to legitimize their rule over society.³¹ The use and abuse of religion in politics is determined by the stakes for power and the stakeholders' egocentric orientation.³² People also say that religions have the potential to create a

²⁵ G.C. Nche, A.O., O. Akanu, M.I. Ugwueze, G.U.C. Okechukwu, E.N. Ejem, and O. Ononogbu, "Knowledge and Support for Political Restructuring among Youths in Nigeria: Are there Ethnic and Religious Differences?" *Cogent Social Sciences*, 5, 2020, pp. 68.

²⁶ I. Enwerem, *cited works*, p. 44.

²⁷ M.B. Salau, "Religion and Politics in Africa: Three Studies on Nigeria", *Journal of Law and Religion*, 5, 2020, p. 35.

²⁸ P. Duru, personal interview, Political Scientist, Auchi, Edo State, May 28, 2022.

²⁹ Nche, *et al.*, *cited works*, p.66.

³⁰ International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance), *Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing Dialogue for Nation-Building*, Lagos: International IDEA.

³¹ P. Ottuh and F. Erhabor, *cited works*, p. 263.

³² A. Adogame, *cited works*, p. 228.

theocratic class, as seen in Obasanjo's Pentecostal supporters and the political allies of Islamic fundamentalists. In recent years, Christian and Islamic religious extremism, or revivalism, has exploded in Nigeria.³³ Instead of secularization, there is a rise in puritanical religious practices, which is bringing in new political players. The best thing to do is to accept religion as a part of society and come up with new ways to counteract its bad and intrusive effects.

The current religious issue in Nigeria has been related to a number of factors, many of which are complicated and intertwined. The increase of religious extremism, notably in Islam, as well as political and economic elite exploitation of religious feelings, have all led to the intensification of violence.³⁴ The government's slow response time in the aftermath of violent outbursts, as well as subsequent crackdowns on religious leaders, have only served to exacerbate the situation. At least for now, the future of the country does not look good, and a big question will be how much control the ruling elite and religious fundamentalists are allowed to have over people.

Some of the high-profile terrorist incidents documented in 1996 were carried out by terrorist groups motivated in part or entirely by religious or political ideology. When attempting to provide a broader perspective on the Boko Haram problem, the religious factor, particularly its politicization, is worth investigating. Usman Dan Fodio began a jihad in 1802, in an attempt to alter what he saw as sinful customs among Hausa kings and nobility, whom he considered anti-Islamic.³⁵ He deposed them and founded the Sokoto Caliphate, which included the states of Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, Adamawa, Niger, Kwara, and parts of Plateau.³⁶ By establishing an Anglo-Hausa/Fulani hegemony throughout the colonial occupation of Nigeria, British colonialists maintained a mutually beneficial alliance with local Muslim rulers. The Muslim aristocracy was given political power under the Indirect Rule regime, which was essentially a colonial administration in Northern Nigeria.³⁷ The precolonial Sharia Courts were also included in the new colonial administration by the British. In a legal system that was so religiously based, it was impossible to settle arguments or decide on crimes without following some Sharia law teachings.

Christian religious leaders may have been dissatisfied with the arrangement, but they lacked the political clout to try to change it. The

³³ International IDEA, *cited works*.

³⁴ M.B. Salau, *cited works*, p. 35.

³⁵ M. Nche, *et al.*, *cited works*, p. 6.

³⁶ M.B. Salau, *cited works*, p. 35.

³⁷ I.C. Ejenavi, personal interview, Lawyer, Warri, Delta State, May 22, 2022.

Nigerian military staged a coup on January 15, 1966, to intervene in the country's political crisis; their targets included the country's dominant northern political elites. Except for a few people, the majority of the coup plotters were of Igbo descent, and the victims were all Muslim northerners. This incident sparked the Igbo movement for secession, which eventually turned into the Nigerian civil war between 1967 and 1970.³⁸ Because the postcolonial reconciliation process wasn't handled well, there was a time when groups, parties, and individuals who were unhappy tried to restructure the country along religious and ethnic lines.

During the Sharia debate, northern Muslims addressed the topic of increasing the status of Sharia courts from state level in the northern area to federal courts across the country. The issue of establishing a federal court of appeal for Sharia cases was eventually dropped; instead, a constitutional assembly reached an agreement, despite the objections of the northern delegates, under which three Islamic law judges could hear cases referred from Sharia courts while still serving on the Federal Court of Appeal.³⁹ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Iranian revolution provided radical Muslims in Nigeria with a platform to launch attacks on incumbent Muslim elites who were suspected of corruption.⁴⁰ This type of militancy in the Muslim world is primarily motivated by a religious need to build a universal Islamic order as well as a perception that the West is at war with Islam. The Middle East's struggle against Israel, as well as the United States' war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, was other major foreign events that sparked radical Islamic reactions in Nigeria during this time, leading to religious conflicts.

The Maitatsine uprisings of 1980 in Kano, 1982 in Kaduna and Bulumkutu, 1984 in Yola, and 1985 in Bauchi were the first violent attempts in a pluralistic, independent Nigeria to impose a stringent form of religious dogma. Many of the variables that contributed to the genesis of the Boko Haram issue are still present in Nigeria, including socioeconomic discontent, pervasive elite corruption, and religious politicization.⁴¹ Some Nigerians worry that Nigeria's admission to the OIC will surely result in the country's Islamization, rendering them irrelevant in the Nigerian public sphere. Religious violence between Christian and Muslim students at the College of Education in Kafanchan in 1987 was a prime example.⁴²

³⁸ M.B. Salau, *cited works*, p. 38.

³⁹ I.C. Ejenavi, *cited works*.

⁴⁰ M. Nche, *et al.*, *cited works*, p. 7.

⁴¹ O.P. Enume, personal interview, Religious Reader, Ondo, Ondo State, May 28, 2022.

⁴² A.B. Mahmud, "On the Adoption and Implementation of the Sharia Legal System in Zamfara State," *Sharia Implementation in Northern Nigeria 1999–2006: A Source*

From the 1990s forward, these events planted the seeds of fierce rivalry, suspicion, and discord between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. After independence from British colonial control, Zamfara State was one of twelve religiously mixed northern states to accept Sharia. Given the emergence of democracy, constitutionalism, and a federal system of government, the adoption of Sharia by any state that professes the real Islamic faith is not a question of choice; it is a requirement.⁴³ But what happened in the northern states before Sharia was put in place showed the dangers and effects of imposing Islamic rules in a country like Nigeria with a diverse population.

Nigeria has a long history of religious politicization, fundamentalism, and revivalism, all of which have contributed to Boko Haram's emergence and radicalization.⁴⁴ The use of religion for political objectives, as well as the resulting violence and intolerance, provided the groundwork for Nigeria's religious conflicts, which have recently erupted forcefully in the Boko Haram crisis.⁴⁵ The Boko Haram crisis is not a completely new occurrence; rather, it is part of a long history of political and religious agitation in northern Nigeria. Boko Haram's emergence and radicalization are less mysterious when seen through this lens. In the end, you need to know how easy it is for some people to use religion to justify their own goals if you want to understand Boko Haram in a nuanced way.

The consolidation of the military, the sense of government discrimination against Christians, and the Muslim goal of an Islamic theocratic order for the country all contributed to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)'s birth as a political party. After the civil war ended, the government removed missionaries from Biafra, the country's most Christian region, whose people had supported evangelism in the north. Nigeria severed diplomatic ties with Israel in 1973 due to political differences.⁴⁶ Most Nigerians have affection for either Israel or the Arab countries. Depending on their faith, most Nigerians have a tendency to oppose or support any stance regarding Israel. The Islamic North's leadership had always been critical of Nigeria's relationship with Israel and would have ended it long before Gowon, a Christian, ended it. For as long as it lasted, the severance of diplomatic relations with Israel worked against Nigerians because they were unable to travel to Israel and trade,

Book, 2000, http://www.sharia-in-africa.net/media/publications/sharia-implementation-in-northern-nigeria/vol_2_4_chapter_2_part_III.pdf

⁴³ A.B. Mahmud, *cited works*.

⁴⁴ P.O.O. Ottuh and F. Erhabor, *cited works*, p. 255.

⁴⁵ Afrobarometer, "Popular Perceptions of Sharia Law in Nigeria," *Afrobarometer Briefing Paper*, 58, 2009, pp. 1-12.

⁴⁶ B. Maiangwa, "Soldiers of God or Allah: Religious Politicization and the Boko Haram Crisis in Nigeria," *Journal of Terrorism Research*, Vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, pp. 29-42.

whereas Israelis were able to do so. Christians claimed the policy toward Israel as proof of prejudice against them because the State's political power has been predominantly dominated by members of the Islamic religion.⁴⁷ Nigeria's formal relationship with the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) began during the 'Christian dictatorship' of Yakubu Gowon. However, the affiliation was strictly limited to that of a bystander. Until 1986, successive governments considered this to be the best option for a religiously pluralistic state. The decision to join the OIC as a full member sparked a popular outcry that went across ethnic, ideological, and religious lines.⁴⁸ For religious reasons, Christian members of the 1977–78 Constituent Assembly opposed this vision for Nigeria, asserting their democratic and human rights. During the debates, Christians became aware of deep-seated anti-Christian attitudes among Muslims, particularly those from the north. Some Muslims have tried to separate Maitatsine and his supporters from real Islam by saying that the upheavals were caused more by the country's social and economic conditions than by religion.

The Way Forward

As a result of the inter-marriage of religion and politics, Nigeria is troubled by multiple fault lines at work, old and new, overlapping and producing great volatility. Among these are religious upheavals; a revived cold war-style rivalry between the country's three religions; ethnic schisms; and various political conflicts. According to government figures, there were approximately twenty-six religious clashes between 1980 and 1993, with a total death toll of over 6,775.⁴⁹ These issues must be addressed as soon as possible. In order to solve these issues, it is important to remember the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) series of reports that began in 2002. This research discovered severe gaps in education, basic liberties, and empowerment, particularly among women and young people in that country. According to UNDP reports, political engagement in vulnerable nations has remained low, as evidenced by a lack of genuine representative democracy and restrictions on civil liberties (including religious and political freedoms).⁵⁰ At the same time, rising wages, education, and information flows have fueled people's desires for more independence and participation in decision-making. A mismatch between

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p.30

⁴⁸ J.L. Jefferis, *Religion and Political Violence: Sacred Protest in the Modern World*, New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 83.

⁴⁹ A. Damilola, *cited works*.

⁵⁰ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Religious Conflicts Normally Product of Political or Geostrategic Manipulation, Proxies for Other Antagonisms," <https://www.un.org/press/en/20198/sgsm19104.doc.htm>.

ambitions and their realization has resulted in alienation and its progeny in some circumstances (apathy and discontent). As a result, national leaders should make correcting this situation a top priority.

Recognizing the role of religious leaders, religious organizations, and religiously inspired lay people in conflict resolution is a critical step toward solving these issues. Without a doubt, religion plays an important role in human connections, particularly in disputes. As a result, it is necessary to recognize that religious claims are frequently used to conceal other objectives and interests, particularly political and economic ones. There is a propensity in much of the non-Western world, especially in very religious cultures, to overemphasize the role of religion in causing disputes. As a result, it is critical to recognize the involvement of religious leaders, religious institutions, and spiritually inspired laypeople in conflict resolution. Usually, rather than attempting to build a fictitious theocracy, people's hearts and minds, hopes and dreams are shaped. People's faiths and beliefs, according to Marshal, shape their perspectives on history, justice, law, mercy, power, human nature, and evil.⁵¹ As a result, it's impossible to approach politics without considering their perspectives on history, justice, law, mercy, power, human nature, and evil. It is important to note that religion can only be used to affect politics if it is both existent and significant enough. For example, a politician can only cynically pander to religious sentiment in order to win re-election or demonize an opponent if religious sentiment exists in the first place. For this kind of political use of religion to happen, religion must be present, and it must be both political and religious at the same time.

In addition, the government at all levels should make education more affordable for all people and make efforts to employ more people. Religious conflict will not abate unless the Nigerian economy improves in the foreseeable future, and it may even worsen. A scenario like this could result in a considerable number of people being displaced, especially in the north, where most of the violence has occurred so far. The government should refrain from interfering in religious matters, as this might lead to social strife, instability, and division. Furthermore, human rights should be respected, and religious tolerance should be tolerated. Finally, people should remember that God is not someone who can be fought for or against, and they should cease inciting turmoil in the name of defending God. In order for the different religions and tribes in Nigeria to be able to live together peacefully, everyone should have the same right to practice their religion without fear of being killed or forced to change religions. Furthermore, Nigeria should return to the kinfolk system, communalism,

⁵¹ P. Marshal, "Politicizing Religion. Hudson Institute," 2021
<https://www.hudson.org/research/14598-politicizing-religion>

religious inclusivity, non-religious sentimental political systems, and other communal wellbeing in the postcolonial age. Religious and political extremists, especially religious groups in Nigeria, should fight for true political and religious dominance without using violence.⁵²

Nigeria's political elite and population should demonstrate an unwavering determination to put ethnic and religious differences aside in order to freely debate, compromise, negotiate, and create the structure of their society. To strive toward the development of a national political philosophy, political parties in the country should be able to communicate their policies using patriotism as a language. The country may avoid the mistakes of colonial and postcolonial leaders who played crucial roles in entrenching identity politics if political parties, lawmakers, and other stakeholders become nonpartisan and disassociated from identity politics. Understanding Nigeria's religious background can help anyone working to promote religious freedom and tolerance in the country.⁵³ The country will be rid of its current religious and political problems in this way.

Conclusion

So far, the paper has shown that religious conflicts in postcolonial Nigeria are worsened by the lack of social and political control mechanisms that typified traditional Nigerian cultures in the precolonial era. Politics without a theological or ethical grounding is unstable, impotent, and ineffective. Before colonialism, Islam and traditional religion coexisted and impacted one another. The major religions all preached peace and stability and believed in a single Supreme Being. Religious penalties aided in the control of bad behaviour and the promotion of a law-abiding citizenry. All of these contributed to the community's purpose and cohesion, as well as the political system's strength. Somehow, Nigerians enjoy complete religious liberty as well as the right to participate in politics and public affairs. However, instability, unrest, property destruction, and bloodshed have occurred as a result of the mixing of state affairs with religion. Since the 1980s, there has been an increase in both intra-and inter-religious conflicts in the country. Therefore, for postcolonial Nigeria to enjoy total tranquility, the restoration of social control mechanisms that characterized traditional Nigerian societies in the precolonial era, such as kinship, religious inclusiveness, non-religious sentimental political systems, and community

⁵² H. Onapajo, "Politics for God: Religion, Politics and Conflict in Democratic Nigeria," *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. no. 49, 2012, pp. 42-66.

⁵³ Y.B. Usman, "The Federation of Nigeria and the lesson of the People of Nigeria," *Federation and Nation-building in Nigeria*, edited by V. Eliagwu, U. et al., Abuja: National Council on Inter-Governmental Relation, 1994, p. 88.

wellbeing, is a *sine-qua-non*. In addition, religious and political ideologists, including religious groups in Nigeria, should compete and struggle nonviolently for genuine political and religious supremacy. In this way, the country will be free from its present religious and political dilemmas.

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