

## CHAPTER 20

*Religion and Politics in Nigeria: A Constructive Interrogation*

### **RELIGION AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA: A CONSTRUCTIVE INTERROGATION**

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#### **Abstract**

This study is a constructive interrogation on mix religion and politics in Nigeria. It examined how religion has impacted on Nigeria politics. The study argues that the way Islam was introduced into Northern Nigeria and its domineering influence in the socio-political and economic lives of the people is the root cause of the present inters-religious tensions that threatens the peace and unity of the country. The paper argues forcefully that mix religion and politics has undermined the Nigeria's effort to build enduring multi-religious democratic society and sustain peace and unity of the country. The paper x-rayed the Mix religion and politics in the light of the growing phenomenon of religious extremism and religious motivated violence in the country. John Lock's theory of Religious **Toleration and Accommodation of Religious Belief and Practice**, was adopted as the intellectual framework of analysis. Secondary sources of data were used and data was contently and descriptively analyzed. The study finds that mix religion and politics in Nigeria have been a major source of political instability and violence and have polarized the country along religious lines. The study recommends among others that for Nigerians to live together amicable and for democracy to survive in the country, religion should be completely divorce from politics, that all the religious groups should practices religious tolerance and use the best virtues of their faith for the development of the country, that Nigeria government should evolve credible strategy to checkmate increasing religious intolerance in the country.

**Keywords:** Mix Religion and Politics, Religious Motivated Violence, Political Instability

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Ever since Nigeria independence religion has played a central role in political life of the people. Religion as a powerful political force, is reasoned to be a source of social instability and repression (Christopher, 2021).Although secularism is proceeding rapidly in many of the world's societies, and this trend seems connected in some way to the process of economic development, nevertheless religion continues to be an important political phenomenon throughout the world (Christopher, 2021).

Religion is closely related to politics in a number of ways. In the traditional society, religious leaders were both temporal and civil leaders, and today, in many parts of the world, religious leaders influence political leaders to come up with policies that are in line with the provisions of religious beliefs. (Ivy, 2022).

Karl Marx in his fundamentals of Marxist philosophy points to the fact that religion is the Opium of the masses, self-deception, soothing the individual living in a hostile environment and fearing for his existence. He notes that religious consciousness of individual compliments the world, that is, reconciles with the level of imagination, the more acute contradiction of life (Marx, 1985)

Elsewhere revolutionary ideologists' and governments have used religion for gaining, consolidating and excising political power. They employ religion as an instrument to gain political power, of spiritual intimidation, of political operation, of racial/ethnic discrimination and economic exploitations (Ihueze 2002).

Ever, since Nigeria independence in 1960, there have been conflicts between religious practices and political interactions in many parts of the country. And in the recent times, the role of religion in public affairs has increased with evidence influence of religion in the nation's political institutions. The impact of religion on politics in the contemporary Nigeria is both progressive and reactionary. In this two-pronged hold of religion on the Nigeria political system, the politicians can, and do use religion to build the political system, just as they can and do use it to destroy one another (Ihueze 2002). Accordingly, the relation between religion and politics in Nigeria has been time and again contentious, and sometimes in mutual interaction and mutual inclusive, as religion has always influenced policy process and decision-making in government in the country, hence, influenced its socio-economic and political development.

There are many religious affiliations in Nigeria which includes Christianity and Islam and Traditional beliefs. Christianity and Islam are the two prominent and influential religious groups in the country. The Christians live mostly in the South and the Middle Belt region, while the Muslims are dominant in the North, with a handful in the Southwest (Dike, 2001). Christians and Muslims differ in their understanding of human society and

demands of their faith. The Christians believe that Christ as the Son of God is above all living beings, while Muslims see Prophet Mohammed as a messenger of God. These conflicting views about the two prominent religious groups is at the heart of the conflicts between the two groups, which since the nation's independence have manifested itself in various ways in politics.

In spite of the emergent consensus on the right to freedom of conscience and on the political contextual role of religion in the Nigerian state, the strong claims on people's allegiance, and universal religions make these claims on all people (Christopher,2021), to inevitable led to religious related conflict in Nigeria politics. Though religious beliefs and practices have played important roles in Nigeria politics, the extent to which this have led to conflict in Nigeria have in the recent times polarized the country.

The decision of Babangida military administration in 1987 to drag Nigeria into the membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) brought mounting controversies between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria (West Africa, 1988:68). The decision of the government heightened the inter-religious tension in the country, as the long and open controversies over the issue Nigeria's membership of OIC have not served the developmental interests of the country (Rufai, 1987). Again, the bundling of Nigeria into the membership of D-8, the eight member international organization meant to safeguard the economic interests of all the Muslim States and nations have not helped matters (Anya, 199:28).According to Christopher (2021) the introduction of political power into religion moves the state closer to interferences which are clearly unjust, and creates perverse incentives for religious groups to seek more political power in order to get the upper hand over their rivals. This attest to Nigeria situation where in most of the successive government have used the modicum of political influence to undermine religious groups, by privileging Islam over other religious groups, and indirectly arrogating to it an official status To this end, the United States Energy Information Administration report of December 1997 on Nigeria Energy sector profile, asserts that with ethnic differences, opposing religious beliefs tend to have furthered polarized the Nigeria society (USEIA, 1997 report).

However, the British colonial administration has been blamed for the immense religious polarization of Nigeria during the colonial rule. The European missionaries who championed the spread of Christianity in the

Southern Nigeria deliberately excluded the North and prevented the influence of Christianity on the Muslim dominated North ,where as it did not pose any threat to the Indirect Rule system (Akinola ,1980)

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study adopts John Locke's theory of Religious **Toleration and Accommodation of Religious Belief and Practice**, as *the intellectual framework of analysis*. The theory was postulated in the early modern era, when European and American societies were facing the problem of the growing plurality of religious beliefs, hence the contending question of how they could be tolerated. Other scholars like Gutmann and Thompson (1996), Larmore (1987), Macedo (1990), and Nussbaum (2008) have also argued on the contentious issue of religious tolerance in Pluralistic societies.

John Locke was a great philosopher and a deeply religious man who lived from 1632-1704. He was one of the most influential thinkers of the Enlightenment and was a political exile at the time of his postulations of the theory of Religious **Toleration**. In his 1689 letter entitled "A Letter Concerning Toleration". He focused on the relations between state and religion, and maintained that the state should exercise religious tolerance because religion serves the law (Jon,2016).

Locke posits that it is futile to attempt to coerce belief because it does not fall to the will to accept or reject propositions, and notes that it is wrong to restrict religious practice so long as it does not interfere with the rights of others. Lock argues forcefully that allowing a wide range of religious groups to exist within a political system will likely prevent any one of them from becoming so powerful as to threaten the peace (Christopher, 2021). John Locke maintain that it is not the diversity of Opinions (which cannot be avoided) but the refusal of Toleration to those that are of different Opinions (which might have been granted) that has produced all the Bustles and Wars, that have been in the Christian World, upon account of Religion (Locke 1983, 155)

**Though Locks theory of religious toleration was** an important step forward toward a liberal, democratic, more tolerant, free and pluralistic world, it was contrasted by views of Thomas Hobbes who sees religion in its divisiveness nature, as a source of political instability, and argues that the state has the right to determine which opinions may be publicly espoused and disseminated, a power necessary for maintaining civil peace ( *Leviathan*

xviii, 9). **Mark(2003) consent that Political toleration of religious diversity is taken for granted in most democracies, but it is far from universal fact of life. Locks toleration can be fully appreciated if it is understood in the light of his theory of government. In the same vein,** Jonas Proast posits that the issue of the use of force to promote belief shows that Locke's theory of toleration is in fact logically sound and quite rigorous.

However, the issue of the right to decide which religion to believe and liberty of conscience is a constitutional reorganized right in Nigeria. The challenges emanating from religious toleration and accommodation pertaining to religious *practice in Northern Nigeria where Sharia law or Islamic legal code is been implemented has been a major threat to right to religious believe and liberty of conscience and Nigeria national co-existence.*

*In the light of the fact that Nigeria has records of religious violence, and religious motivated killings of Christians by Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists in Northern Nigeria. The case of Deborah Samuel a 200-level Home Economics student of Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto who was murdered on May 16, 2022 by fellow students in Sokoto who are Islamic fanatics, on the ground of religious blasphemy (Omotola, 2022) underscores the usefulness of John Locke's theory of Religious **Toleration and Accommodation of Religious Belief and Practice, as the intellectual framework of analysis.**in this study. The existing threats to religious minority in Northern Nigeria and the inability of the Nigerian state to stop violence against them is an indication of the challenges of peace and stability of Nigeria as a multi-religious society.*

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **RELIGION**

In every society, each group and community has a belief system that is established with the help of religious values. These beliefs influence the political standpoint of an individual in a political system (Ivy 2022), as people are often assessed on the basis of certain religious principles

According to Arinze (1980:8) as cited in Inyama (1997) religion can be defined subjectively and objectively. Objectively, it is a body of truth, Law and rites by which man is subordinated to transcendent being, and subjectively religion is the consciousness of one's dependence on transcendent being and the tendency to worship him. The scholar posits that religion is one of the

sociological institutions in the society which influences both other institutions and individuals within them. He notes that the history of religion is as old as man itself.

Political sociologist Johnstone Ronald enumerated the basic elements of religion as :

Religion implies a group of believers. Although people can practice a religion privately.

Religion is concerned with matters that are thought to be sacred and supernatural.

Religion involves a specific set of beliefs-creed

Religion also involved specific set of practices rituals.. To this end Johnstone (1975), and Smelser (1981) as cited in Dike (200:851) define religion as a system of beliefs and practices by which a group of people interprets and respond to what they feel is supernatural and sacred.

In the same vein, Mokuwugo (1991) argues that religion have sometime played a progressive role in history. He posits that we are living in an age when religious beliefs have become inextricably inter twined with political hatreds and religion is concerned not only with God worship but with the struggle for power here on earth. Agreeing with Mokuwugo, Eberle (2021) contends that citizens who are willing to coerce their compatriots for religious reasons will use their political power to advance their sectarian agenda, using the power of the state to persecute unbelievers will engender religious warfare and civil strife. Also, Audi (2000,:103) posits that if religious considerations interferes with the affairs of the state there is a likelihood that it can lead to political instability.

Agi (1978:86) posits that the world over, no issue evokes more heated and frustrating debate than the question of politics and religion. He states that all religious groups are continuously sharpening and moulding the personalities of their adherents who then as private individuals, staff the economic, political, educational and other institutional system of society. According to Dike (2001) since religion provides their members with a set of norms that guides their behavior, the multiplicity of religion in a multi-ethnic society (like Nigeria) is bound to impact people's political inclination, and ultimately voting behavior.

Conversely, Sayyid Qutb an Islamic theorist, intellectual and ant-liberal democratic scholar wrote an intelligent, informed, and morally serious commentary on the Koran, in which he laid the ills of modern society at the feet of Christianity and liberal democracy. He asserts that the only way to extricate the society from the problems spawned by liberal democracy is to implement Sharia or Islamic legal code, which implies that the state should not protect a robust right to religious freedom. Qutb argues for compelling theological rationale against any law that authorizes the state to protect a robust right to religious freedom (Qutb, 1964 as cited in Ivy, 2022).

Audi (2000:103) posits that if religious considerations interfere with the affairs of the state there is a likelihood that it can lead to political instability. Eberle (2021) further argues that it will thereby provoke determined resistance and civil conflict. Such a state of affairs, however, he notes threatens the very viability of a liberal democracy and, so, should be avoided at nearly all costs. He advised that religious believers should excise restraints on contentious religious issues.

Agi agree with Amadi (1982:2) that religion has always been a very powerful factor in African politics in general and Nigeria in particular. This he notes because politics and economies were integrated into their religion. Tracing the historical links between politics and religion in Nigeria, Agi further states that religion is generally important to Nigerians. However, the question of how religion influences politics in the Nigeria and its destabilizing consequences has made many scholars and political stakeholders to argue that politics must be kept separate from religion.

## **POLITICS**

The word politics come from the Greek word polis, meaning “City-State”. However, in the contemporary times, the sensitivity of the word politics made it to be used interchangeably with a process through which power and resources are gained and lost. Scholars of political science have given varied definition of politics that touches and covers all aspects of politics. David Easton defines politics as the authoritative allocation of values. Collin (2001:210) sees politics as the art and practice of running or governing a country. In the same vein, Hari and Choudhury (2001:1) see politics as the science and art of government. The term covers the entire field of political life and behavior. It takes into account the relationship between the State and the individual. However, the description of politics as the study of power has

broadened the definition of political science. Also Barbour and Wright (2001:5-6) define politics as a fundamental complex activity, a noble and even morally elevated activity which is related to other concepts such as power, government, rule, economics and citizenship, which can best be understood as a struggle over who gets power and resources in the society.

Harold Lasswell one of finest political scientist of the twenty–First Century, and a critical thinker has made a classical and functional definition of politics as who gets what, when and how. The moderating influence of politics in the society can be well appreciated in the light of its role in resolution or compromise between conflicting interests. Since the formal tool of politics are debate, compromise, cooperation and discussion, politics can aptly be described as the process through which we try to arrange our collective lives so that we can live without crushing into each other and to provide ourselves with goods and services we cannot obtain alone( Barbour and Wright ,2001:5). However, because politics is about the struggle for power and other scarce resources there will always be winners and losers in politics.( Barbour and Wright ,2001:5)

A society without authoritative political processes would become a state of nature, or a ceaseless war of all against all in which life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short (Hobbes as cited in Robert, 1996). In line of this thinking, a healthy political system requires a substantial amount of pre- or extra-political social cohesion (Christophe, 2021). More specifically, a certain amount of social cohesion is necessary both to ensure that citizens see themselves as sufficiently connected to each other (so that they will want to cooperate politically, and to ensure that they have a common framework within which they can make coherent collective political decisions. This cohesion in turn is dependent on a substantial amount of cultural homogeneity, especially with respect to adherence to certain religious values (Christophe, 2021). A stable political system is essential to sustaining the quality of their lives and times to ensuring their very existence (Robert, 1996).

The prevailing condition in Nigeria where political processes have failed and terrorism and senseless killings have been the order of the day attests Hobbes view and demonstrates the importance of political institutions. The lack of political means to protect lives and property in the country convey the importance of politics for the daily lives of ordinary people (Robert, 1996). Religious conflicts in Nigeria have led to the breakdown in accepted forms of political activity in Nigeria, as the nation have seen bloody confrontations



between religious groups, due to the failure of politics. Thus the absence of effective political leadership, effective political processes and functional governmental institutions has made Nigeria a lawless State where killing has become a way of live.

Sandel (1998) and MacIntyre, (1984) as cited in Ojinnaka (2001) consent that purposes of the *politics* is to ensure that citizens have the resources necessary for living a choice worthy, flourishing life. One such resource is a sense of belonging to a common culture that is rooted in a tradition, as opposed to a sense of rootlessness and social fragmentation. Thus, in order to ensure that citizens have this sense of cultural cohesion the state must not in any way privilege a religious institution or creed over others. Rawls (1971) posits that the liberal democracy has generally opposed establishment of privilege religious institution over other religious groups and liberal democracy typically appeal to the value of fairness. It is espouses, for example, that the state should remain neutral among religions because it is unfair, especially for a democratic government that is supposed to represent all of the people composing different groups in the country to intentionally disadvantage, or unequally favor any group of citizens in their pursuit of the good as they understand it, religious or otherwise.

Over the years, Christians and Muslims have had conflicting relations in Nigeria as they exist elements of aggressive manipulation of religion by individuals, groups and the ruling elites to achieve selfish political ends (Ihueze,2001).According to Yusuf (1989:7) the manipulation of religion in Nigeria date back to the decay and decline of Gowons regime in the early 1970s and the violent political campaigns built around religious differences in the country can only be fully understood when seen in larger contest of what has been happening in Nigeria and to Nigerians.

Because of the way Islam was imported into Northern Nigeria by the Fulani's who immigrated across the Sahara deserts into Hausa land and its domineering influence in the social political and economic life of the area, the Christians are suspicious of Muslim intentions and are vehemently opposed to Islamic expansionist tendencies and are locked in supremacy with the Muslims(Ojinnaka and Iwunna 2003).This struggle have over the years had divisive consequences on the policies and programmess of successive Nigeria government, as it affects socio-political and economic life of the people (Ojinnakka, 2000).

The Christians in the Northern Nigeria have complained that they were frequently denied approval for land to built their church, where as Muslims are allowed to construct Mosques even in public places (Ojinnaka and Iwunna, 2003:114). Anya (1999:240) as cited in Ojinnaka and Iwunna (2003) argues that the Nigeria nation has since her independence in 1960 remained a nation on trial, ever searching for true meaningful and enduring democracy, as religious violence had often threatened the much desired development of democracy, national peace and unity

### **METHOD OF THE STUDY**

Data for execution of this study was obtained from secondary sources such as books, Journals, articles, and academic papers. Secondary sources of data provided us with in-depth accounts of the issues of Religion and Politics in Nigeria Also, analytical and descriptive method is used. It helped in the analysis of contending issues of Religion and politics and its implications to peace, unity and stability of Nigeria as a multi-religious country.

### **POLITICS AND RELIGION IN NIGERIA**

Ever before the Nigeria independence in 1960, religion have had strong influence in the nation's politics. The Nigeria political class have used religious rhetoric and sentiments to gain political support in their areas of religious stronghold. Religion has been the major variable in Nigeria political process, as candidates that run for an election are either identified as a Christian or a Muslim. As an accepted national political norm, political parties in Nigeria are supposed to balance their tickets. If the presidential candidate of a party is a Christian, the Vice-Presidential candidate would be a Muslim, a tie to religion has been one of the many ways by which religious group's identities is expressed and maintained (Dike, 2001).

The controversy surrounding the All Progressive Congress (APC), Presidential ticket holder, Ahmed Bola Tinubu and his choice of Shatima as Vice-Presidential candidate, a fellow Muslims is a pointer to the sensitivity of religion in Nigeria politics. The APC Muslim-Muslim ticket for 2023 Presidential elections has been described by many Nigerians as dead on arrival (Ojinnaka,2022).The Muslims are predominantly in Northern part of the country, while the Christians are majority in the Southern and Middle part of the country. The religion of a candidate running for an election, particularly presidential candidates often determine the number of his/her followers in each of the geopolitical zones, as well as the number of votes he or she would

secure in an election. Though Nigeria is a multi-religious society, religion have remained a strong factor in the nation's politics, as the dangerous mix of religion and politics highlights the sensitivity of the nation's multi-religious background.

The secularity of the Nigerian state has been put into question by the Nigerian public in several occasions. Prominent was during the 1959 electioneering campaigns in which Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the defunct Action Group (AG) was prevented from campaigning in the Northern Nigeria. This was because the Muslim Northerners were brainwashed by Sir Ahmadu Bellow, the then Premier of Northern Nigeria, that Awolowo was contemptuous to Islam, to the effect that he would ban it if elected to office (Schwarz, 1967). Again, the case of Federal Sharia Court of Appeal which came up for debate in 1978 Constituent Assembly iss worthy to note. The proponents of Federal Sharia Court had intended that Sharia should be introduced in all parts of the country. Rather than Federal Status which Muslim proponents of Sharia demanded, the 1979 Constitution provided for State Sharia Court of Appeal (Akinola 1989). Again, in 1983, Alhaji Shehu Shagari (Nigeria President 1979-1983) attempted to establish Department of Islamic Affairs during his Presidency. It provoked reactions which polarized Nigeria, as Christian was opposed to the move (Dike,2001).

The Sharia politics further polarized Nigeria when the Governor of Zamfara State, Ahmed Sani Yerima in a move to score some cheap political point heightened the Sharia controversy by introducing full blown Sharia legal system in the Zamfara State. In spite of the fact that Nigeria is a Multi-religious State and Section 274-279 of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria forbids government at all levels from adopting or sponsoring a religion. The impacts of Shari Law restrict interaction, co-habitation and inter-religious marriage and social relations in the country among Muslims and other religious groups. Sharia is a divisive issue that has demonstrated it's the capacity to immobilize the country (Ojinnaka and Iwunna, 2003114-115)

The dangerous mix of religion and politics points to the fact that for Nigerians to live together amicable and for democracy to survive in the country, religion should be completely divorce from politics, and all the religious groups should practices religious tolerance and use the best virtues of their faith for the development of the country (Post Express, September, 30. 1988).

Ojinnaka (2021) in a Lead Academic paper on the marginalization of Christians in Nigeria under Buhari administration argues thus:

*“ever since 2015 President Muhammed Buhari came to power as the fifth Executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Christians in Nigeria have suffered deliberate policy of political exclusion and marginalization in government appointments, promotions in civil service and Armed forces. The Christians in the nation's security forces has been victims of deliberate premature retirements. The Buhari administration has also excluded Christian dominated communities in the location of key infrastructural projects of social and economic development”*

Ojinnaks further states that the issues of mix religion and politics in Nigeria have since the emergence of General Mohammed Buhari as the President of the Federal republic of Nigeria assumed dangerous dimension, due to his government mismanagement of Nigeria's rich religious diversity. The policies of the government have consciously made consideration of religious issues to be at the forefront of Nigeria politics. Buhari's politics of religious-group mobilization has played out in the accentuation of division tendencies in the country. This demonstrates an effort to ensure his Fulani/Muslim group dominates other religious groups in the country, as he introduced religious parochialism into Nigerian government institutions, military and paramilitary organizations (Ojinnaks. 2021)

General Buhari made religion a determinant factor in the questions of who gets what, when and how in the allocation of national values. His policy of religious chauvinism, is viewed by many Nigerian Christians as a strategy to divide country along religious lines and, which have made possible the monopolization of the socio-political and economic benefits of the Nigerian state by Hausa/Fulani Muslims, who are in control of state power and uses same to disproportionately allocate national resources to the detriment of other religious groups in the country (Ojinnaks.2021). Thus from 2015 and 2020, the appointments made by the Buhari administration into key political offices, heads of government agencies, military and paramilitary organizations has been an excise in religious considerations and disproportionately is favour of the Hausa/Fulani Muslims to the deliberate exclusion of the Christians (Ojinnaka, 2021)

According to Ojinnaka (2021) from 2015 and 2020, President Buhari made 77 strategic appointments, out of which 55 positions were given to the core Northern Muslims. Again in 2018, he appointed 15 persons into managerial positions in Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), ten of them from the Northern Muslims, Also, in 2019, the DSS commissioned 479 new officers out of which 331 were from the Muslim North, and in December 2015 there were controversial recruitments of only Muslim Northern indigenes into the Nigerian Police Force(Ojinnaks.2021) As it stands, over 80% of key government ministries, agencies and departments are disproportionately headed by Northern Muslims (Akogun, 2018). These appointments were made in violation of the principles of Federal Character, as enshrined in section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which states in part that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in the government or in any of its agencies {The Constitution of the FRN, 1999, section 14(3).

### **RELIGIOUS MOTIVATED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria has long history of religious rivalry. Religious violence in Nigeria is often associated with Islamic extremists who believe that justice should be sought through terrorism and violence (Ivy, 2022). Religious violence in Nigeria can be traced to Islam with both local and external influences. The origin of external motivated religious violence in Nigeria date back to 1979 following the successful Islamic revolution in Iran (West Africa, 1985).The Islamic revolution in Iran triggered a sense of religious zeal among the Northern Nigerian youths, as vocal Muslim students began to question public affairs and the immoral activities of the political class (Ojinnaka and Iwunna, 2003:113).

The Iranian revolution greatly influenced the behavior of many Muslims in the Northern Nigeria, as many of them changed their mode of dressing to reflect their new commitment to Islam (Ojinnaka and Iwunna,2003:113). Consequently, Nigerians has recorded a range of politically motivated religious strives. These includes the Maitatisine riots that took place in Kano December 1980, in Bulumankute in Borno State in 1984, in Jimeta in defunct Gongola state in 1980 led by Mohammed Marwa, in Gombe in 1985. This is in addition to the Kafanchan and Zangon Kataf bloody riots in the late 80s and early 90s, the anti-Christian riot in Kastina, in Borno inspired by Malam Yakubu Yahaya over a Newspaper article on Prophet Muhammed marital affairs (Okoye, 1991).

Also in 1987, Islamic fanatics went on rampage in Kaduna and burnt Churches and other Christian properties, As a result, General Ibrahim Babangida, the then military ruler, put together an Advisory Council on Religious Affairs (ACRA), to look into the issue of religion in Nigeria. The Council was made up of 12 Muslims and 12 Christians (Akinola, 1989). Again, on May 1992, religious uprising erupted in Kadunna, at least three Christian preachers were killed and several Churches burnt down. In retaliation, Christians ransacked the Jemaa Hasir Islam (Dike, 2001). According to Akama (2000:43) because of the inferno, over 1800 people were killed. A situation he noted threatened the much desired peace and security in the country.

Yaro (1988:12) deplore religion engendered violence in Nigeria, asserts that years ago, it was Islamic assaults on human life, months ago it was Islamic destruction of Christian churches, weeks ago it was Islamic seizure of Christian schools, Days ago it was Islam attempt to conjoin the nation to aggressive Arab world. Today it is testimonies of Islamic, this Islamic, that political jihad, scholarship, Islam, Islam, and Islam. On the unequal relations between the Christian and Muslims in Nigeria Yaro argue forcefully that the humiliation and persecution of Christians in Nigeria can better be viewed from the angle of resources allocation which evidently is lopsided in favour of the religion that produces the Head of State, a part of the issue of resource allocation.

In all these religious motivated violence, Christians were targeted, Churches destroyed,; hundreds of people were killed and Property worth millions of Naira destroyed. This gives insight into the deliberate demolition of Churches in Northern Nigeria and explains the reasons for denial of freedom of religious instructions in Public School in some Northern States like Kastina, Kano, Zamfara and Yobe states etc.

According to Dike (2001) the February 2000 religious riot between Muslims and Christians in Kaduna, in which many lives were lost shows how dangerous and divisive the Sharia issue could be. Many people mostly those from South Eastern Nigeria were killed and the riots had spillover effects in the South East cities of Aba, Enugu, Owerri, Umuahia and the South South cities of : Port Harcourt, Calaba, Uyo, Eket, and Warri,, as the people killed Hausa/Fulani Muslims living in their area in retaliation.

Religious violence has often threatened the much desired development of democracy, national peace and unity of Nigeria (Ojinnaka and Iwunna,2003:113). The unhealthy polarization of Nigeria state along religious lines by the Nigeria government, particularly, under Buhari administration fueled the suspicion of many Nigerians that the Muslims with their earlier concept of Jihadism have the agenda to Islamize the country. This suspicion was heightened by several religious motivated killings across the country and the government pretentious incapacity to stop the killings of hundreds of people in Christian villages and communities in the North East, North West and North central Nigeria. Consequently as it were, the growing religious intolerance and conflict in the country undermines the objectives of mutual and peaceful co-existence.

## **CONCLUSION**

The paper have constructively interrogated mix religion and politics in Nigeria and notes that ever since Nigeria independence in 1960, religion has had strong influence in the nation's politics. The strong religious differences that existed in Nigeria in the immediate post independent era has continue, as political construction of religious fanaticism have gain ground in the country. The Nigeria political class have used religion to gain political support. Religion has been the major variable in Nigeria political process, as a tie to religion has been one of the many ways by which religious group's identities is expressed and maintained. Though Nigeria is a multi-religious society and constitutionally a secular state, religion has remained a strong factor in the nation's politics, as the dangerous mix of religion and politics highlights the sensitivity of the nation's multi-religious background.

Over the years, Christians and Muslims have had conflicting relations in Nigeria as they exist elements of aggressive manipulation of religion by individuals, groups and the ruling elites to achieve selfish political ends The manipulation of religion and the resultant violent political campaigns built around religious differences in the country has brought devastating consequences' to the unity and continued corporate existence of the country, as political construction of religious fanaticism have gain ground in the country. This has led to range of politically motivated religious strives, created divisions and disharmony and engendered all sorts of crisis that have affected almost all segments of Nigeria society, and polarized the country along religious lines The government has consciously made religion to be at the forefront of Nigeria politics, and politics of religious-group mobilization

has played out in the accentuation of division tendencies and struggle for power

No nation can progress in the face of religious motivated conflicts and contestation which undermines inter-religious harmony and peaceful co-existence in the Nigerian State. Christian are subjected to discrimination and threat of violence in the Northern Nigeria. As a result of the domineering influence of Islam in the social political and economic lives of the people the Christians are vehemently opposed to Islamic expansionist tendencies. A dangerous twist that have over the years had divisive consequences on the peace, unity, stability and continued existence of the country..

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The studies make the following recommendations:

- That for Nigerians to live together amicable and for democracy to survive in the country, religion should be completely divorce from politics,
- That all the religious groups should practices religious tolerance and use the best virtues of their faith for the development of the country
- That Nigerian government should evolve credible strategy to checkmate increasing religious intolerance in the country.
- That the Nigeria political leadership should stop using religion as a lethal weapon of vengeance against political opponents and sections of the country that did not support them during the elections
- That Nigerian government should rather use strive to use religion to build a united and progressive Society,
- That the positive influence of religion in Nigeria politics should be deployed to bring meaningful political, economic and technological development to the country,



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