


Religion and Election in Nigeria

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Dates:

Received: 12 May, 2023

Accepted: 06 Aug., 2023

Published: 27 Oct., 2023

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Competing interests:

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Abstract

Nigeria is socio-culturally multi-ethnic and religiously pluralistic. Religion has been a very singular but very strong factor that is affecting negatively the electoral system in Nigeria. The following key terms were used in this study: religion, election, politics, political party, electoral system, and franchise/suffrage. Political aspirants would always make use of their religious affiliations to achieve cheap political popularity. The electorates tend to vote for a given political aspirants based on religious sentiments and not on verifiable objective good human attributes. The aim of this paper among others is to attempt to find out whether religious affiliations of the political spirants enhance or hinder their successes during general election in Nigeria. The study is qualitative in character. It interviewed a cross-section of Nigerians and also made use of secondary sources of information such as library books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, etc. The study is very significant in a good number of ways including that it makes the electorates to cast their votes based on good quality political aspirants rather than on sentiments. The findings of the paper, among others, include the fact that the electorates in Nigeria generally cast their votes in line with their religious affiliations. It is recommended, among others, that the electorates should not cast their votes during general election on the basis of religious affiliations but rather on verifiable and objective good quality human behaviour.

Key Words: Religion, Election, Politics, Political Party, Electoral System and Franchise/Suffrage.

Introduction

Nigeria is a nation with a multiplicity of religions. In Nigeria, we have three major religions namely, African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity. The second and the third religions are classified as being foreign to Africa while the first one is properly indigenous. Other religions of the world include “Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Humanism, Marxism” (Obaje, 2018:35). The two foreign religions in Nigeria i.e. Islam and Christianity appear to have been mutually antagonistic since they set their feet on the Nigerian soil. Each of them had been struggling to increase its area of influence. Each of them had been, and continues to be, suspicious of the activities of the other. When the Portuguese missionaries and the early 18th century European missionaries were attempting to introduce Christianity into West Africa, Nigeria inclusive, they had at the back of their minds that they would do that so as to checkmate the spread of Islam that was moving down across Sahara Desert like a wild fire (Udekwe, 2017). The Muslims from North Africa were also aware that the Christians were attempting to obstruct them from the South. This kind of situation was one of the beginning of the antagonistic attitude that existed and continued to exist between the Muslims and the Christians in West Africa, and hence, Nigeria. A look at the short history of Christianity and Islam in the area called Nigeria today shows that Islam was introduced into some parts of the present-day Northern Nigeria at about eleventh century (Ugwu, 2011).

The Portuguese attempted to introduce Christianity in the Southern part of the present-day Nigeria in about early part of the fifteenth century (Udekwe, 2017). The brand of Christianity that the Portuguese introduced into the present-day Southern Nigeria appears to be inherently feeble and could not develop very strong root. The reason for this apparently feeble root was obvious and included among others lack of dedication on the part of the missionaries. A more stable and effective Christian missionary activity in Southern part of Nigeria took off at the end of eighteenth century following the evangelical revival in Europe (Udekwe, 2017).

By some implications, Islamic religion set its foot in Nigeria far earlier than Christian religion. An important issue is that both of them appear to be mutually antagonistic and suspicious of each other. It is on records that in African soil, the two religions (Islam and Christianity) started with some high sense of antagonism.

The Portuguese missionaries who first brought Christianity to a geo-political entity named Nigeria, had as one of their aims to check-mate the spread of Islam which was already spreading like a wild fire. For instance, various parts of the present-day Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Sudan which were former popular Christian centres were being overrun by Islam. It appears that the antagonism that characterized the introduction of Islam and Christianity in Africa soil was transmitted to the ever-increasing adherents of the two religions with each of them not being at peace with the other and with each of them not trusting the other.

Both religions preach peace or one can be correct to say that each of them appear to preach peace but seem to turn around to act otherwise. It is on the basis of the apparent mutual antagonism between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria that Uka (2008:6) rightly posits that “religious crises in Nigeria both in the pre-independence period and between 1960 and 1966 were for the most part at the level of a cold war, characterised by ... between Muslims and Christians”. He goes ahead to highlight a good number of religious crises in Nigeria which include sharia crises of 1976-1979, the Kano riot of 18th-19th December 1980, burning of churches in Kano in October 1982, the Buhari regime religious crises of 1983-1985, the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) crises in January 1986, Ahmadu Bello University Religious Crises in June 1988 and Kano Riot ii in October 1991 (Uka, 2008). He further submits that “the Kano religious riot, 1991, was a case of an inter-religious conflict. A group of Muslim youths attacked people in Sabongari and Fagge area of the metropolis. The attack was a protest against the religious crusade organised by the state chapter of CAN with a German Christian preacher, Reinhard Bonke, in attendance” (Uka, 2008:10)

The spate of violence that Christianity and Islam in Nigeria emit call to question the peace they appear to preach. A pertinent question one may ask is whether the various ethnic groups in Nigeria are inherently violent, so violent that each of them refuses to internalise the ethics and teachings/doctrines of their various religious organisations. To be fair to Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, it appears as if their adherents are taught to be violent and conflict-laden in their efforts to defend their religions. It appears that such adherents have the attitude of fighting for their God/Allah at any seeming slightest provocation whether real or assumed.

This study was necessitated by the ugly situation whereby political aspirants in Nigeria would always take recourse to showcasing their religious affiliations as means of securing cheap political popularity and consequently winning elections. It is objectionable that the political aspirants in Nigeria would always take recourse to their religions (Christianity or Islam) as a way of attracting socio-religious sentiments to themselves. It has been observed that each time there is a general election in Nigeria, these political aspirants would go underground and appeal to the electorates to vote for them because of the fact that they belong to the same religion. It is very appalling and unfortunate. It is a strong pointer that Nigeria as a nation is not

yet ripe for the political system she is attempting to operate. This ugly situation can be attributed to the fact that a large number of the electorates are either stark illiterates or what can be described as ‘educated illiterate’. This sorry-situation of the present-day Nigeria calls for a very urgent attention. During general elections, the electorates should not cast their votes based on religious sentiments but based on outstanding observable good qualities of the political aspirants.

The aim of this paper is to attempt to find out whether religious affiliations of the political aspirants enhance or hinder their successes during general election in Nigeria. The paper also tries to determine the role religion plays during general election in Nigeria. The paper, furthermore, tries to pry into the activities of the Christians and Muslims in Nigeria with regard to determining their voting patterns during general election in Nigeria. Again, this paper aims at finding out whether the Christians and Muslims in Nigeria vote according to their religious affiliations during general election in Nigeria.

This study is qualitative in character and gathered pieces of information from both primary and secondary sources. The researcher interviewed a cross-section of Nigerians. Thirty purposely selected persons were interviewed. Their views were interpreted, analysed and incorporated in the research findings. In the secondary sources of information, the researcher made use of library books, journal articles, magazines, newspapers, internet materials, etc.

Conceptualisation Religion

Religion is one of the concepts that pose a very difficult problem when it comes to the issue of definition. To this effect, Okwueze (2003: 2) posits that “one of the most difficult concepts in terms of definition is the word religion”. He further explains that “this is essentially because no one definition by any scholar has successfully and adequately taken care of the various aspects of this ‘enigma’ called religion.” This problematic situation notwithstanding, an attempt is made to highlight on the expressions, feelings and definitions of some scholars. For instance, the word religion, according to, Obaje (2018:27) is derived from “the Latin noun *religio* which denotes both earnest observance of ritual obligations, and an inward spirit of reverence.” James cited in Okwueze (2003), defines religion as “the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider the divine.”

Also, a classical sociologist, Durkheim also cited in Okwueze (2003) is of the view that “religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relatives to sacred things, that is to say, to things set apart and forbidden...” There are other definitions of religion from Aquinas and Kant as cited in Okwueze (2003). Also, Yinger cited in Obaje (2018) defines religion as a “system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problem of human life.” However, Robertson cited in Obaje (2018:30) states that “religion refers to the existence of supernatural beings that have governing effect on life.” All these definitions

cited above are from scholars of various scholarly stand points. None of them should be regarded as being better than the other or more relevant.

Furthermore, a classical sociologist, Vernon cited in Onah (2009:89), states that religion is

That part of culture composed of shared beliefs and practices which not only identify or define the supernatural and the sacred and man's relationship thereto but which also relate them to the known world in such a way that the group is provided with moral definition as to what is good (in harmony with or approved by the supernatural) and what is bad (contrary to or out of harmony with the supernatural).

In the light of the various definitions of religion cited above, the researcher, therefore, defines religion as the sum-total of what one does in relation to whatever one accepts as the ultimate being and a strong dependence on the ultimate. It is on record that various scholars of various disciplines and orientations have defined religion from their various scholarly stand points. Some of the scholars are sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, philosophers, moral theologians, religionists, psychologists, etc.

Election

The concept election appears to be a very simple and common but in an academic situation of this nature, there is need to highlight on its meaning. It is in line with this proposition that Anifowose Remi and Enemou (1999: 211) state that "elections are processes through which people choose their leaders and indicate their preferred public policies and programmes by voting." They also add that election serve as a means through which citizens of a give society reject those they do not want to be governed by or leaders who have not governed well. In his own contribution, Nwolise cited in Okeke-James (2021: 72) states that "election is a process of selecting the officers or representatives of an organisation or group by the vote of its qualified members." Furthermore, Okeke-James (2021: 72) defines election as "the act of selecting a person or group of persons for position especially a political position by voting."

In its own contribution, Collins English Dictionary is of the view that "an election is a process in which people vote to choose a person or a group of people to...." In direct agreement with other contributions, Ushie and Ekanem in Uka, (2008:149), state that "election could be seen as an institutionalized procedure for the choosing of office holders by some or all the recognized members of a society." This definition by Ushie and Ekanem brings in the idea that in this institutionalised procedure, those who vote must be from the recognized members of the society not just anybody from anywhere and not anyhow.

In direct harmony with the earlier cited definitions above, Scruton (1983) cited in Ushie and Ekanem, observe that "election is the process whereby an electorate chooses, by voting, either to act on its behalf or represent it in an assembly with a view to governing or administering". The researcher

defines election as a systematic process of picking by voting an individual or individuals to occupy a given position/positions and act on behalf of the persons who picked him/her/them for the position(s). Such a position(s) can be political, social, religious, administrative, etc, in character.

Politics

The term politics etymologically is from the Greek word polis which means city. Politics then came to mean the method of power control in the Greek City States of ancient times. Also, Chambers Dictionary defines politics as "the art or science of government; the management of a political party, political affairs or opinions". Politics is defined by BBC English Dictionary as "the action or activities which people use to achieve power in a country, society or organisation". For the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary politics is defined as "the activities involved in getting and using power in public life., and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society". In its own contribution, Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary states that "politics is the art or science of government; the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing government policy; the art or science concerned with winning and holding control over a government." The researcher, therefore, defines politics as the sum-total of activities geared toward securing power in a country or community or society.

Political Party

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica is of the view that "political party is a group of persons organised to acquire and exercise political power through election or revolution." In their own contribution, Anifowose R. and Enemou F. C. (1999: 195) are of the view that "a political party is a group of persons bonded in a policy and opinion in support of a general political cause, which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its offices". Going further, they state that in other words, a political party is a group that seeks to elect candidates to public offices by supplying them with a label, a 'party identification' by which they are known to the electorates. Furthermore, Wilson (1994: 185) also states that "a political party is a group that seeks to elect candidates to public office by supplying them with labels - a party identification - by which they are known to the electorates. For the researcher, a political party is a group of people who have decided to come together under one umbrella, for the purposes of securing political power through election or any other means approved in a given country.

Electoral System

Electoral system, according to Anifowose and Enemou (1999: 217), "entails the mode or methods of elections and voting. It determines whether elections should be direct or indirect and whether voting should be open ballot method or secret-open-ballot method, and how to count the votes and determine the winner(s)." They further posit that electoral system defines the modes of coming to power and/or changing the government in power. Nnoli (2003: 230) cited in Anifowose and Enemou

(1999) states that electoral system refers to a “complex of rules and regulations that govern the selection of office holders.” Furthermore, Anifowose R. & Enemou F. C. opine that it is a method used to calculate the number of elected positions that can be awarded to candidates and parties after election. In his own contribution, Okeke-James, N. (2021: 75) defines electoral system as “the method or arrangement by which citizens of a sovereign state elect some of their members into different political offices. The researcher, therefore, explains that electoral system refers to all the processes, rules and regulations that guide the election of persons into governmental office.

Franchise/Suffrage

The word franchise/Suffrage has been defined by Okeke-James (2021: 72) as “the political right to vote at elections to elect those who would represent them (the people) in government.” He further posits that franchise is the political right of a qualified citizen of a country to vote and be voted for in any political election, adding that it is the right or privilege to vote in an election to choose government officials or to decide specific issues in government. In their own contributions, Oyediran, O. et al (1991: 88) are of the view that franchise/suffrage is “right to vote”. They further state that a privilege that ensures from an individual’s membership of a political community is the extension of suffrage to that individual through the process of enfranchisement. They add that by this process of extension of the franchise, the state or political community recognises the individual as a citizen and grants him full membership of the community. Also, Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary explains that suffrage is the right to vote in political election. In the light of the above-stated definitions of franchise/suffrage, it can be defined as the right and privilege to vote and be voted for during a given political election. Having highlighted on the definitions or meanings of some key expressions, this write-up now focuses interest on election vis-à-vis religion in Nigeria.

Politics/ Election and Religion in Nigeria: A Brief Historical Survey

The entity called Nigeria is an amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by Lord Frederick Lugard. It is on record that when the early political parties and associations were formed in the present-day Nigeria, in the early years of 1920’s, they were not formed along religious/ethnic lines (Oyediran et al, 1991). According to them, such political parties and associations such as Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), West African Students Union (WASU), etc, were formed within this period. At the inception of modern nationalism, the nationalist leaders were not basing their activities on religious sentiment, rather they based their activities on nationalistic interest.

However, as the activities of the nationalists continued to add more weight, the nationalists tended to form new political parties along religious lines so as to gain cheap political popularity with the view to either deceive or manipulate the unsuspecting mammoth of illiterate electorates. Each of the

nationalistic leaders wanted to create his own separate ‘kingdom’ without knowing that they were polarising the nation along religious lines. For instance, that frontline nationalists from the northern part of Nigeria formed their own political party and named it Northern People’s Congress, goes with the implication that the political party was for the northerners and, by implication, majority of the indigenes of northern Nigeria were and still are Muslims. From 1900 to 1959 during which Nigeria was ruled effectively by the colonial masters, the nation had a good number of constitutional developments and the nationalistic activities by the frontline nationalists were not based on religious line but rather on national interest. Nigeria as a nation was granted independence from her former colonial master, Great Britain, on 1st October 1960 (Okonkwo and Okeke, 2020; Oyediran et al, 1991) after a lot of constitutional reforms and conferences, and became a republic on 1st October 1963. At the inception of her independence in 1960, three political parties that anchored much more in each of the three regions of Nigeria emerged and contested the election.

These three political parties were Action Group (AG), National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) (Okonkwo and Okeke, 2020). Unfortunately, these political parties, so formed, were in the main, along religious lines. These three political parties had their various strongholds among the various major ethnic groups in Nigeria. For instance, the Action Group (AG) was based in Western Region among the Yoruba people, the National Convention for Nigerian Citizen (NCNC) was based in the Eastern Region among the Igbo people and some few other minority tribes, and the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) was based in the Northern Region among the Hausa/Fulani people and numerous other minority tribes. This was the beginning of polarising political activities in Nigeria along religious cum ethnic lines.

These three political parties were not nationalistic in character. For instance, every person belonging to the former Northern Protectorate and Northern Nigeria, was expected to belong to Northern People’s Congress (NPC) and larger percentage of all the indigenes of the Northern Nigeria were and still are of Hausa/Fulani stalk and consequently, Muslims. There are other minority tribes indigenous in the Northern Nigeria but the Hausa/Fulani tribes are in the majority (Okonkwo and Okeke, 2020).

It was in 1963 that Nigeria as a nation adopted a republican constitution and became a republic (Oyediran et al, 1991). During the 1964 general election, various political parties decided to form various alliances. The election was contested by two major coalitions: Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). While the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) had the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) and Akintola’s Nigerian National Democracy party (NNDP), UPGA was made up of Action Group (AG) and

the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) (Okonkwo and Okeke, 2020). They further observe that:

In the electioneering campaign that ensued, each party was bent on emerging victorious. Therefore, the country was set for a 'real war'. The election was horrible. Unimaginable things happened. The level of mal-practise was unprecedented. The main causes of the trouble that eventually flared up were the nature of the electioneering campaign and the allegedly irregular method of nominating candidates for the election.

The political activities of the two political alliances (NNA and UPGA) further exacerbated and widened more the antagonism between the Christians and the Muslims. To buttress this point further, Oyediran et al, (1991: 79), posit that "in most countries especially in Africa, people regard their political opponents as enemies". They cited an example that "in Ondo State (Nigeria) in 1983, some members of the opposing party were killed by the supporters of the other party and their properties destroyed" (Oyediran et al, 1991:79). The political parties and their activities were polarised mainly between the people of Northern Nigeria (Muslims) and Southern Nigeria (Christians). The two political parties, AG and NCNC, which entered into a political alliance and became UPGA, were Yoruba and Igbo-based and, consequently, Christians.

The NPC that was a Hausa/Fulani-based political party was the major group in the alliance between NPC and NNPC which was a breakaway political party from Action Group (AG). The analysis was that the political fight in 1964 general election between Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) and United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) was, in the main, a political battle between the people of former Northern Region/Northern Protectorate (Muslims) and the people of Southern Nigeria/Southern Protectorate (Christians). In agreement with the above statement, Okwueze (2003: 150) states that "since the first republic, religion has been part and parcel of politics in a largely negative sense.

The Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) was formed to represent the interest of the Muslim north. The National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) as well as Action Group (AG) represented the interest of Christians". Going further, he states that for the NPC, the religious factor was so deeply entrenched that one of the foundation members of the NPC ... who ordinarily would have emerged the leader, was dumped because he was a non-Muslim" (Okwueze, 2003: 150). Having seen how religion has been manipulated by some people as a divisive agent, Onah (2009:95) lamented that "religion, which should be used for achieving spiritual excellence, is now used as a source of chaos and disunity in the nation". Continuing, she states that the money that should have been used to build and maintain infrastructural facilities and good governance policies, are now wasted in other irrelevancies.

According to Okonkwo and Okeke (2020), and Oyediran, et al (1991), the second republic took off from the last quarter of 1979. Many political associations were formed but finally only five political parties were registered: The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), United Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), People Redemption Party (PRP) and Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP). These political parties were not in the main nationalistic in character. In addition, Okonkwo and Okeke (2020:87), further submitted that "contrary to the expectations of the drafters of the constitution and the military rulers, most of these regional parties resembled the ethno-regional ones of the pre-1966 period". The implication of this situation was that if these political parties formed during the second republic were in the main ethno-centric, they were invariably *religio*-centric.

The two expressions, ethnicity and religion may not be easily separated from each other in any political discussion in Nigeria. That membership of the northern-based political parties was, in the main, from the northern Nigeria and Muslims, gave some insights that the political parties were *religio*-centric. That the political parties in the Southern Nigeria could not penetrate deeply into Northern Nigeria could be explained by the fact that they were, in the main, Christians. Whether or not one can succeed in one's human endeavours in Nigeria is majorly predicated on one's religious affiliation. The division between the Christians and Muslims in the Nigerian polity has gone so wide and deep that once someone's name is mentioned for any political and/or administrative position(s), the first question that Nigerians usually ask is what is his/her religion. Such a person is hated immediately by those who are not of the same religious affiliation with him/her but hailed and admired by those who are of the same religious affiliation with him/her.

The second republic was terminated in 1983 and the military took over. The military tried to put in place transition government to civilian regime. Okonkwo and Okeke (2020) regard this period as the third republic. Some transition programmes were put in place by Major General Muhammed Ibrahim Babangida, Major General Sani Abacha, Abdulsalami Abubakar (Oyediran, et al 1991). During the Babangida military administration, the military created two political parties: National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP), and directed Nigerians to register their membership of these two political parties. This action of the military administration was an honest effort to make the political parties a non-tribal issue in Nigerian polity and to ensure that no individual(s) or organisation(s) astride any giving political party as his/her personal and private property. By this arrangement, the military wanted a situation where membership of each of the political parties should cut across various ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. Even though the military tried all they could to erase religious bigotry in our polity, they could not do that completely.

The forth republic took off in 1999 with Major General Olusegun Obasanjo winning the presidential election. He was

succeeded by major General Umaru Musa Yar' Adua who was later succeeded by Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. All the three of them were from a political party named People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the main opposition political party was All Nigerian people's party (ANPP), and later Major General Muhammed Buhari won the election in 2015 under All Progressive Congress Party (APC). At each political struggle in Nigeria, it has almost always been the struggle between the Muslims and the Christians whether stated clearly or implied.

By mere mention of someone's name in political/administrative circle, one's religion is known and that sets in the beginning of hatred or admiration. Those who are of the same religious affiliation with the person so mentioned admire and hail him or her. No sensible politician comes out openly to mention his/her religious affiliation during political campaigns but his/her name shows who he/she is.

In Nigerian situation, it is alleged that the Muslims are taught to believe that Christians are infidels and unbelievers and that they cannot manage the affairs of the nation. With this kind of belief system, the Christians are always being discriminated against either within a political party or on national issues.

Religion and Election in Nigeria: Contemporary Perspectives

The researcher interviewed a cross section of the populace on whether or not religion influences significantly the voting patterns of Nigerians during general election. In this regard, interviews were conducted as indicated in the method of data collection. Each of the interviewees expressed his/her views on the role of religion during general elections in Nigeria. For instance, Okwor (2023 oral interview) holds tenaciously that religion influences the voting patterns of the electorates in Nigeria during general election. He opines that the adherents of the various religious groups cast their votes according to their various religious affiliations. Ohaeri, Onyedimma, Ezea, and Eze (2023 oral interview) hold the view that it appears that Nigeria is not yet ripe for voting objectively during general elections in Nigeria. It is their strong belief that a lot of Nigerians are sentimental in their voting patterns and vote according to their respective religious affiliations.

In the same vein, Uwakwe, Uwadileke and Ugwoke (2023 oral interview) are of the opinion that Nigerians lack objectivity when voting in an election. They hold the view that the populace would rather take recourse to their religious affiliations and undue favouritism. For Ezigbo, Agbo, Opara and Agbo (2023 oral interview) are very vehement in their belief that religion plays a very significant role during voting in a general election in Nigeria. They are of the view that the populace in Nigeria vote according to their religious affiliations. Among their submissions is that the Muslims are taught by their Imams to vote for their Muslim brothers during general elections in Nigeria whether the Muslim brother can deliver or not. In their opinions, what matters for the Muslims is not the quality of the leadership, but that a Muslim brother is in the helm of affairs. All the persons interviewed were of

the view that religion plays a very strong role in determining who wins or loses presidential election.

In their opinions, the political parties have to be very careful in picking their presidential aspirants and their respective running mates. For instance, during the second republic, 1979-1983, Shehu Shagari of National Party of Nigeria (NPN), a Muslim, has to come all the way from Shagari village in Sokoto state and chose Alex. Ekwueme, a Christian, as his running mate. Also during the fourth republic, Major General Umaru Musa Yar' Adua, a Muslim, has to choose GoodLuck Ebele Jonathan, a Christian as his running mate. Striking this kind of a balance allays the fear of the Muslims and the Christians that one of the religions is given the opportunity to over-ride and dominate the other. The adherents of the two religions are very much alert to avoid being dominated by the other. This could be one of the reasons why religion is at the focal point of every general election in Nigeria.

In the present-day political dispensation, the Muslim-Muslim ticket as chosen by All Progressive Congress Party (APC), raised a lot of tremendous dust. Many Nigerians objected to that for the fear that Islam might be given the opportunity to dominate Christianity in Nigeria. One of the interviewees, Okwor (2023 oral interview) is of the view that it is unnecessary to ask one to state his religion in any federal issue in Nigeria. In his view, this is the beginning of introducing a dichotomy between the two major foreign religions in Nigeria. He also alleged that the various Imams use the gathering of the Muslims together for Friday prayer to instruct them to vote for their Muslim brother in the election. Whether or not such a Muslim brother can deliver should not be their primary concern. Their primary concern, according to them, is that their Muslim brother is being voted into power. He is also of the opinion that voting out of share religious sentiment will only come to an end in Nigeria when the electorates had become so educated that they would be aware when they are being deceived by their religious leaders.

The religion of the presidential aspirant in Nigeria has to play a strong factor in determining whether or not he would win in the general election. It is a strong factor that cannot be swept under the carpet in the Nigerian national politics. To buttress the significant role religion plays in Nigerian political system, various political parties have to give a fair or equal opportunities to the two religions in Nigeria. When the presidential candidate is a Muslim, his running mate almost invariably is a Christian and vice versa. The masses are always happy when they are presented with presidential aspirants and their running mates who are men of God, who would rule and govern them with the fear of God.

This researcher made some findings which include that religious affiliations of the political aspirants enhance or hinder their successes during general election in Nigeria. Equally, the study found out that religion always plays very strong negative roles during general election in Nigeria with regard to winning national election; that the adherents of the

two foreign religions in Nigeria vote in line with their religious affiliations during general election in Nigeria. Also, among the findings include that political aspirants actually take recourse to their religious affiliations as means of winning election during general election in Nigeria. In a similar vein, the study found out that political aspirants showcase their religious affiliations as means of winning election during general election and that weeping up religious sentiments during general election as means of winning election is an evil wind that blows no one any good.

Recommendations

This paper is very topical and quite necessary in the present-day Nigeria. The paper, therefore, adduces the following suggestions for the smooth conduct of the election in Nigeria and possibly other African nations and for peaceful co-existence in Nigeria, especially when the nation is multi-religious. In the first instance, political aspirants and hence, the adherent of the two contending and mutually antagonistic religions (Christianity and Islam), should not use their religion as an advantageous vantage point for wooing electorates to their side. That one is a Christian or a Muslim does not invariably make one a good politician or one who would take good care of the electorates when voted into power. The elusive Nigerian politicians are only seeking for cheap political popularity by taking a recourse to one religion or the other or claiming that they belong to one religion or the other. It is true that Nigeria is a nation that is classified as being very religious but their individual religiosity may not be deep rooted.

Secondly, the electorates who are either Christians or Muslims should not be easily deceived by the mere fact that a political aspirant is a Christian or Muslim. Such a possible 'political messiah' can be a wolf clothed with a goat's skin. On the other hand, a political aspirant can be actually a 'political messiah' but his/her religion scares the electorates away from him/her. The electorates in particular, and Nigerians in general, are easily swayed and carried away when the person they are dealing with is of the same religion with them. On the contrary, they are most often scared when the person they are dealing with is not of the same religion with them. In the present dispensation in Nigeria, there has been an unending and heated argument and worries that All Progressive Congress Party (APC) did not do well because both the presidential candidate and his deputy are from the same religion. Nigeria as a nation should be fully a secular state and not a religious state.

Nigeria is a secular state and should be allowed to remain as such. No political aspirant should use his /her religious affiliation as means of winning election during general election. The masses should be so educated that they overgrow easy deception by the political aspirants who are ever-present to deceive the unsuspecting masses.

A very important recommendation is that Nigerians and hence, various religious groups should eschew mutual hatred of each other. Members of various religious groups in Nigeria should

see each other and relate with each other as brothers and sisters. Nigerians should be made to realise that both the Christians and Muslims are worshipping the same Almighty God in various forms and methods. The 1960 National Anthem reads in part "though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand." We should not hate whatever and whoever comes from another religious group outside ours.

A record has it that there are six geo-political zones in Nigeria namely, North Central, North East, North West, South East, South West and South-South. The posts of presidential and vice presidential candidates should be rotated among these six geo-political zones. The three geo-political zones in the northern Nigeria should take the numbers 1, 2 and 3 and so do the three geo-political zones in the southern Nigeria through simple balloting. The number 1 geo-political zone in the northern Nigeria should match with number 1 in the southern Nigeria and so should numbers 2 and 3. This principle should be enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. When the president comes from the North, the vice president should come from the South and vice versa. The various geo-political zones should take their turns for the post of the presidential and vice presidential candidates. During any general election, all the political parties in the country should be required to choose their aspiring presidential candidates from a given geo-political zone whose turn it is to present a presidential candidate. When this is done, the populace from various geo-political zones will be given a sense of belonging. There is no geo-political zone in Nigeria today that cannot produce a presidential candidate and vice presidential candidate during a general election. No religious/ethnic group should lay permanent claim on continuously presenting presidential candidates during general elections.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that religion plays very significant, negative and pervasive roles in the Nigeria polity. A lot of politicians take recourse to their religious affiliations during electioneering campaign so as to gain cheap political popularity. In the present political dispensation, it was alleged that one of the presidential aspirants for the 2023 presidential general election asked the populace to vote for him because he belongs to their religion. In this perspective, one's religion determines, to some extent, whether one can win or lose in an election. This paper is of the view that religious affiliations should not be a strong factor in determining who can win or lose in an election. The determinant factor for winning an election in a civilized nation should be essentially one's verifiable and objective good quality behaviour and not based on religious sentiments. In Nigeria, most of the political aspirants who quickly take recourse to showcasing their religious affiliations as means of gaining cheap political popularity for winning election are, in most cases, not good leaders. They are rather wolves in goat's skin and the electorates should beware of them and avoid being deceived by the politicians

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List of oral interviews

S/N	Name	Place of interview	Occupation	Date of interview
1.	Alphonsus Ohaeri	Elele	Teaching	01/02/23
2.	John Okwor	Elele	Teaching	01/02/23
3.	Isaac Omada	Elele	Teaching	02/02/23
4.	Sunday Agu	Elele	Teaching	02/02/23
5.	Hillary Ugwu	Elele	Admin. officer	03/02/23
6.	Chibuike Chineke	Elele	Admin. officer	03/02/23
7.	Christopher Ezigbo	Elele	Teaching	04/02/23
8.	Michael Ezennorom	Elele	Teaching	04/02/23
9.	Celestine Ezea	Elele	Teaching	04/02/23
10.	Joseph Aligwekwe	Elele	Teaching	05/02/23
11.	Victoria Opara	Elele	Nursing	05/02/23
12.	James Onyedima	Elele	Admin. officer	06/02/23
13.	Anthony Uwakwe	Elele	Lab. Technologist	07/02/23
14.	Joel Uwadileke	Elele	Lab. Technologist	07/02/23
15.	Vivian Mgboh	Elele	Teaching	08/02/23

16.	Fidelis Anioke	Elele	Lab. Technologist	10/02/23
17.	Paschal Ugwoke	Elele	Lab. Technologist	10/02/23
18.	Bibian Uzor	Elele	Teaching	11/02/23
19.	Michael Eze	Mbu	Civil Servant	12/02/23
20.	Rita Okere	Elele	Teaching	12/02/23
21.	Alexander Ape	Obukpa	Teaching	14/02/23
22.	Fellistus Onyishi	Mbu	Teaching	14/02/23
23.	Stella Uchendu	Elele	Admin. officer	01/03/23
24.	Ignatius Okafor	Obukpa	Teaching	02/03/23
25.	Peter Eze	Obukpa	Admin. officer	04/03/23
26.	Christian Onyekwere	Elele	Lab. Technologist	05/03/23
27.	Denis Agbo	Mbu	Teaching	06/03/23
28.	Clement Ukanwa	Elele	Teaching	08/03/23
29.	Vincent Eze	Mbu	Civil Servant	10/03/23
30.	Zeletus Agbo	Mbu	Teaching	10/03/23

Author Biography

Dr. Eric Aneke C. holds doctorate degree from the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies University of Nigeria Nsukka and lectures at Madonna University Elele, Rivers State.