

Evaluation of the Effects of Religion and Politics on National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the effects of religion and politics on national development in Nigeria. Religion and politics remain inseparable and their understanding as concepts has a different interpretation. Nigerian plurality has not only given rise to ethnic rivalry in the country, but it has also divided the country into Islam and Christianity especially during power distribution. These two major religions also strive for control of power and distribution of appointment in the present democratic dispensation. However, there has been a rise in both religious crises and political crises since independence and these challenges have posed a serious threat to Nigerian national development. The activities of the Boko Haram Islamic sect have resulted in economic, social and environmental backwardness of the North-Eastern region and other parts of the country. The study relied on secondary data for analysis as it adopted the content analysis of secondary data. The study adopted the classical model theory and deprivation theory as a theoretical framework for the study. The study concludes that religion and politics have affected national development negatively in Nigeria. This is a result of ethnic politics, religious crisis, insurgency and ethnic consciousness in Nigeria. However, the study recommended among other things those ethnic loyalties should be shifted to that of national loyalty by emphasizing nationality rather than ethnicity. This will imbibe the spirit of nationalism rather than ethnicity in Nigerians.

Background to the Study

Religion and politics are among the strong factors that influence Nigerian national development. Though, the role that religion play in politics has generated debate in the literature of political sciences but the connection between the two concepts has long been established (Falana, 2010). Religion has always been a determining factor in Nigeria just like ethnicity, this is why special attention is usually given to religion even in terms of sharing political positions. There have been reported cases of using religion by politicians for their selfish interest to turn citizens against one another. More often than not, the mere mentioning of religion usually raises concern among many Nigerians since the country is a plural society. The need to have political stability in Nigeria is now a major concern of many stakeholders to ensure the sustainability of the country. The level of destruction, insecurity and increase in crime rate in Nigeria is antithetical to Nigeria being among the most religious country in the world. Afolabi (2015) raised a concern as to why the rate of crimes and destruction are so high in the country even with the claim of religious uprightness. It can be stressed that there is a relationship between religion and politics as many have considered the two concepts as inseparable but, the point of departure is that there is a presence of corruption in politics which cannot be said to be applicable in religious teaching (Afolabi, 2015). This was supported by Egbewole and Etudaiye (2011), who stressed that politics is dirty and the only people that engage in politics are those that are deceitful and manipulative.

For over six decades of Nigerian independence, the need to have a well-established political order is very important. The achievement of the country's objective has been impossible owing to the dominating power of religions and politics. These factors do not only affect national development but also undermine democracy in Nigeria. Federalism is considered suitable for plural societies to address ethnicity and promote religious tolerance in the country (Emoghene and Okolie, 2020). The Nigerian constitution is not considered as a reflection of the people as the constitution is seen to contain laws that are anti-people and such does not ensure national integration (Ilesanmi, 2014). This is why Emoghene and Okolie (2020), noted that the Nigerian government is far from protecting the interest of the people which is applicable from local levels up to the federal government.

The Nigerian fourth republic that commenced in 1999 has been recording high cases of political disturbances which have led to the destruction of lives and properties. The religious and political dimension poses a serious threat to the unity of Nigeria and national security. It is instructive to note that such disturbance is not conducive to democracy and national development. Nigeria has in recent times recorded a high level of violence and general insecurity challenges which have posed threat across the federation. Among this security threat is the emergence of Boko Haram Islamic sect which many people have blamed on the political rivalry among North and the South towards political power struggle in the country (Emoghene and Okolie, 2020). The emergence of Boko Haram sect was to destabilize the Jonathan-led Administration (Ogoloma, 2012). However, this Boko Haram sect is not the only security threat the

country is presently facing as kidnapping, banditry and all forms of militia groups exist in virtually all the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. These security challenges have posed a serious threat to the national development of the country as evidenced in continuous wanton killings, destruction of property and high incidence of poverty and unemployment in the country.

Religion plays an important role in the daily lives of Nigerians; this include interaction as the country's population is divided nearly equally between Christians and Muslims. Most Nigerians identified themselves with their religion rather than nationality. This is why religion and politics have become inseparable especially when it is time to choose leaders of the country through an election. Though, sectarian politics is usually challenging (Tar and Shettima, 2010). Thus, there is a need to look at the effects of religion and politics on national development in Nigeria. In the meantime, the study assessed how religion and politics influence national development in Nigeria.

Religion

In defining the concept of religion, the background of the person defining the concept is equally important as that will shape their understanding. To the sociologist, religion is social rather than political but to an anthropologist, religion is an aspect of culture (Barrett, 2003). Theologians view religion as the “essence and centre of civilization and the sublime aesthetic expression and root of all decisions, actions and ultimate explanation of civilization with its invention and artefacts; its social, political and economic system, its past and future, promises and history” (Muazam, 2006 cited in Cinjel and Chujor, 2017, 6). Durkheim view of religion is sacredness as Durkheim (1965) sees religion to mean a collective representation that made things sacred. Religion simply means the degree of purity and impurity (Shabi and Awe, 2001). Service and worship of God or gods is a way of religion (Yesufu, 2016). Mbat (1999) cited in Ilesanmi (2014) stressed that religion is a strong factor that influences the thinking and feelings of the people. Ogugua and Ogugua (2015) stressed that when religion can be a cog in the wheel of development and dehumanization when found in the wrong hands but the hands of a saint, it becomes an instrument for humanization (Ogugua and Ogugua, 2015). In Nigeria, the two major religions that are openly practised are Islam and Christianity. The Muslims believe in Allah while the Christians believe in the death and resurrection of Christ as the son of God, though we also have African Traditional Religion (Emoghene and Okoli 2020). The world has seen a surge in religious intolerance because of differences in faith (Ilesanmi, 2014). Looking at the increasing religious violence in Nigeria, one may not be wrong to suggest that religion is not relevant to the development of society and therefore calls for extrication from human social life (Gbadegesin and Adeyemi- Adejolu, 2016). Religion in itself is good and rewarding as there is nothing wrong with being close to God but religious fanaticism is the cause of violence arising from the religion-related crisis in Nigeria.

Politics

Ogugua and Ogugua (2015), see politics as control and exercising of power. Though, the very old definition of politics was seen as a process of deciding who gets what, when and how. The definition remains relevant even in the literature. Marxist view sees politics as a class struggle arising as a result of class striving for control of power in the society (Oluwatusin and Daisi, 2018). Politics involves a human relationship that involves control and influence. Though the opinion expressed by various scholars may exhibit divergence in all the definitions, there is a commonality in respect to the fact that politics involves the exercise of power. Thus, politics revolves around the state, its agencies, its activities and the impact it has on society and also the responsibilities of government (Appadorai, 2003). It is important to note that the leadership that emerges from the political process of Nigeria does not ensure national development and the promotion of political stability. Rather than making efforts, leaders in Nigeria are preoccupied with their desires to enslave the country (Ake, 1995; Sklar, Onwudiwe and Kew, 2006). The implication is that development will be stagnant while political instability pervades the polity because attention is usually on instability in the internal arrangement. Nigerian democratic process has recorded poor party politics arising from the absence of internal democracy, lack of discipline, absence of ideologies by parties and poor political leadership.

National Development

Development as a concept means different things to different people depending on the background of the author. The process of economic and social transformation is premised on complex cultural and environmental interactions (Ajaebu, 2012). Willis (2005) equates development with modernity and progress. It covers different aspects, physical development include man-made goods that are produced by the adoption of technology, the cultural aspect of development to include the tradition, norms and societal values and the personal aspect of development contains psychological directions of individuals (Walter Rodney as cited in Ajaegbu (2012). Martinussen (1997) conceptualizes development to include dependence elimination, growth in the economy, improvement of welfare and human development and promotions of capacity building. Seers (1979) averred that the purpose of development in any is to raise a fundamental question as to what has been happening to poverty reduction, inequality and unemployment. He further stressed that the three aspects of the questions must be answered satisfactorily to know that there is absence of poverty. The rate at which a country's per capita income compared to those other countries can be used to describe its level of national development (Lucas, 1988).

National development simply means the ability of countries to improve the social welfare of the people by “providing security and social amenities which include quality education, potable water, transportation infrastructure, medical care, employment among others” (Ajaegbu, 2012). In Nigeria, the type of development that the country relies on has not yielded any positive result as the independence of the country has left the people decimated. Therefore, these are manifested in poor medical care, poor housing facilities, lack of potable water, poverty increase, unemployment, epileptic power supply,

lack of access to power and resources by minority groups and their exclusion from policymaking (Ighodalo, 2012). The challenges of national development in Nigeria include intolerance, misconceptions, inadequate grasp of religious matters, fanaticism, extremism, violence, bloodshed, suicide, insecurity, injustice, corruption, immoral acts, ignorance and bad leadership and governance, which are inimical to the progress of a country.

Religion and national development in Nigeria

There is no doubt that sound morality ensures peace and stable political dispensation as this will promote national development. Sound morality can be achieved through preaching against corruption which will eventually help in managing resources and ensure equitable distribution of resources (Gbadegesin and Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016). On the contrary, the religious crisis in Nigeria is usually fuelled by ethnic consciousness, perpetration of violence and destruction of lives of those from different religions. The destruction is usually traced to religious intolerance between the two dominant religions which is Islam and Christianity as these two dominant religions strive to struggle for political power (Ngele, 2008). Some religious activities undermine political and national development in Nigeria. Ajaegbu (2012) is of the view that religious terrorism in Nigeria is a big threat to development at the national level. His assertion was based on evidence in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria such as Yobe and Borno where economic and social activities are grounded because of wanton killings by the dreaded Boko Haram sect. Since the emergence of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria, the economic, political and social lives of the people in the region and Nigeria have been affected negatively. In the last decade, precisely since 2011, Nigeria has recorded high cases of terrorist attacks even in the country's capital. "These cases include the UN bombing in Abuja, Edet House (Police Force Headquarters) in Abuja, Madala attacks, Gwagwalada Park bombing, abduction of the Chibok girls, among other numerous attacks especially in North-Eastern Nigeria" (Iwuoha, 2014, 25). Therefore, the religion that is supposed to be an instrument of ensuring peaceful co-existence has posed a serious threat to national development especially in creating insecurity which has also affected our economic development as a nation.

Politics and national development in Nigeria

Politics cannot ensure effective service delivery when there are weak institutions to tackle governance (Achebe, 1981; Ijere, 2015). Democratic prosperity is promoted when a political party has strong mass support and leaders with the interest of the nation and citizens at heart. Political parties in Nigeria are built along with religion. The politics of 'godfathers have taken over politics of the rule of law, party involvement and credible electoral system (Oluwatusin and Daisi, 2018). In Nigeria, party politics impede development at the national level and political stability. The government of Nigeria is said to be far away from providing services to the people. The leadership problem in Nigeria has been blamed on long military intervention. Since independence, electoral violence has been increased right from the fourth republic in 1999 up to the current Buhari-led administration that will end in 2023. In addition to using violence, the absence

of a free and fair electoral body is also another factor. It is instructive to say that the electoral umpire has not been able to conduct a free and fair election. One of the factors responsible for the lack of credible election is the appointment of electoral commission chairman by the president and secondly, ethnicity is another cog in the wheel of progress in achieving free and fair election (Ngele, 2008). Multi-party democracy raises the hope of Nigerians on the issue of good governance because of competitiveness and the choice it gives citizens to choose leaders of their choice. From the fourth republic to date, the rule of law and institutional weakness are still major factors that impede good governance. Looking at the resource endowment of the country and democratic institutions, the dividend of democracy is achievable in the country. Politics is the instrument that ensures the maintenance of institutions for development (Leftwich, 1996). Nigeria since independence lacks the necessary focus that can ensure national development and political stability of the country. The problem of leadership, weak institutions, corruption and electoral manipulations are usually strategies employed by politicians to clinch power. Absence of political will and pressure from the global community, electoral rigging, politics of intolerance, mobilization of religious sentiments, political assassination and youth restiveness, corruption, political unrest and the spate of insecurity and the attendant intense struggle for political power are the major impediments to national development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the classical model theory propounded by Clifford Gertz 1975. The study tends to explain the challenges of nation-building in the emerging nation of the world and the remedy to the problem of nation-building in those new states. Gertz gave two classifications –primordial ties and civil ties. He affirmed that 'primordial ties' is natural which flow from natural cause (blood, tribe, region, religion and kinship) while the 'civil ties' are on socio-economic grouping (professional group, class and status). Primordial ties tend to resist civil order because of nature while civil ties, on the other hand, are usually cross-cutting cleavages with difficulties in changing membership so they are amenable to civil order. In application to Nigeria, the Nigerian crises for secession and national ethnicity are explained by the presence of primordial sentiments. Increasing modernization has heightened the importance of these sentiments in the country.

The deprivation theory was also considered in this study. This study was propounded by Ted Gurr in 1969. Analysis has shown that there is a relationship between religion and violent conflicts in Nigeria. The opinion that religion is instrumental to protest the forms of deprivation and exclusion has been used to advance religious interest. The Muslims believe in the Sharia to obey the dictate of their faith. The Christians demand a secular constitution amounting to a deprivation of their religious right. The Christians argued that the implementation of Sharia law within any legal instrument can lead to the violation of the rights of non-Muslims (Usman, 1987). The contest between the secular and the religious alternatives is a situation that can lead to an increase in violence. The disagreements among the two major religions usually lead to political violence (Cinjel

and Chujor, 2017). Finding common ground between Muslims and Christians will help the country to achieve meaningful development. Therefore, the cooperation of the two major religions is going to go along way to ensure development in Africa and Nigeria. The two theories are to help explain the underlying causes or influences of religion and politics on national development in Nigeria. However, events in recent time have proved that no economy is self-regulating thereby challenging the fundamental belief of the Classical Theory. The escalation of religious crisis in the nation has also questioned the principles of deprivation theory which relies on the fact that crises are basically as a result of people being deprived of things. The above notwithstanding, the theories are to help understand better the effects of ethnicity, religion and politics on national development.

Factors that Hinder National Development in Nigeria

Poor Formulation and Implementation of Policies

There is usually a lack of executive capacity for the formulation and implementation of the plan. Aside from the physical presence of the officials, there is usually no meaningful executive authority. In addition to this, the absence of consultation of the general public can also be a factor. Planning is not only done by the executive to the bottom but the expected beneficiaries include peasants in the villages are expected to be involved in policy formulation and execution. More often than not, the local people in the communities are not usually consulted or carried along.

Corruption

Nigerian Corruption Perception Index is considered to be very high which makes the country to be among the highly corrupt countries in the world. The high level of corruption and indiscipline is another barrier to development in Nigeria. The country is said to be corrupt and also managed by corrupt leaders who have seen the state as a way of accumulating public resources rather than calling for humanity and sacrifice. A very good plan needs people that are committed to service and not corrupt leaders. Development cannot take place in a highly corrupt society to make development achievable. This militates against national development. Where there is no good governance, development becomes a mirage. This is a result of bad leadership in the country. Most of our leaders have no sense of commitment to development.

Religious Intolerance

Since independence, the country has been recording a high level of religious disturbance. In a recent time, that religious disturbance has degenerated into an uncontrollable menace of wanton killing in the hands of Boko Haram killers. Though, from independence to present Nigeria, these religious disturbances have threatened the unity of the country as a nation. The persistence of inter-religious crises has become a source of worry for most Nigerians.

Implications of Religious Influences on Nigerian Politics for National Development

Every religion whether Islam, Christianity, African Traditional Religion etc, have guiding principles that regulate them. Christian Bible outlines the Ten Commandments which guide the behaviours of Christians. Islam has rules which must be adhered to also.

It should be stressed that no religion condones an act of immorality. In Recognition of religion as a provider of moral values, Mbiti in Nmah (2004) says, "It is the religion which tells what is right, and what is wrong... religion enriches people's morale for the welfare of the individual and society at large" (177). Therefore, adhering to religious ethical values is important for all religious practitioners especially because Nigeria is among the most religious people in the world. Therefore, there is a need to live a moral life because it is commanded by God (Omoregbe, 1998). One should expect a credible electoral process in a country like Nigeria if the rules are obeyed. The religion which is an instrument of social control ensures that society keeps with the norms of the society. In addition, the oath of office is also another expected positive input of religion in politics. In this case, political leaders, who usually invoke God during the oath is expected to have fear of God and rule by the oath or with the fear of God. We must be ready to accept that every content of the oath is a sure guarantee for good governance. In practice, the positive implication is that religious moral values have not impacted governance in Nigeria since independence.

Lastly, a free, fair and credible election means freedom of electorates. When leaders emerged through a democratic process, such leaders will sustain the process which is the benchmark of any true democracy in a civilized society. Unfortunately, many of our leaders are only there for their selfish interests. The implication of choosing leaders on religious sentiments is that mediocre would most likely emerge. Every political process in Nigeria has a religious undertone from civil service appointments to important positions in the government.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that ethnicity and politics in Nigeria have contributed as a challenge to national development. The country has faced numerous challenges such as resource control, secession movement and religious cleavages that have posed a serious threat to national development in Nigeria from religion and politics. The dynamism of this nature has weakened the development of institutions necessary for nation-building. The study revealed that religion and politics have affected national development negatively in Nigeria. This is a result of ethnic politics, religious crisis and insurgency and ethnic consciousness in Nigeria. However, the study recommended among other things that ethnic loyalties must be shifted to that of national loyalty. This will imbibe the spirit of nationalism rather than ethnicity in Nigeria. This will not undermine the ethnic roots of Nigerians, but it will take Nigerian diversity as a strength rather than a weakness.

The plurality of Nigeria must reflect in the principles of true federalism. Political powers should be shared equitably among the component and ethnocultural communities in Nigeria while also ensuring that visionary leaders that will put the interest of the citizens first are needed for effective service delivery to serve the collective welfare of its people regardless of their ethnic origin. Lastly, the security threat posed to the country and also the issue of secessionist movement and self-determination have necessitated the need for dialogue with the government in power to ensure sustainable development, Therefore,

leaders of groups are should embrace dialogue for peaceful co-existence and sustainable development. This will go a long way to strengthen and empower the potency of government in the act of governance in Nigeria.

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